

Interviewee: Mickey White

Interviewer: Norie Guthrie

Date of Interview: 2018-06-19

Identifier: wrc09181

Interview Transcript

Norie Guthrie: My name is Norie Guthrie from the Woodson Research Center, Fondren Library, Rice University. I am interviewing Mickey White. Today is June 19, 2018. This is part of the Houston Folk Music Archive Oral History project. Can you tell me about your early life?

Mickey White: Uh, well, and, uh, I was an Air Force brat. Okay, my family is from Southeast Texas the Golden Triangle. And my dad, he entered the, uh, the Air Force, the Army Air Corp at the time and, uh, you know, right when, right before the war broke out and stayed mainly in Texas. And then after the war, uh, the family moved around. So I popped out in Detroit, Michigan in 1951. And then we moved to England, uh, where most of my earliest memories are, you know, from England living in, uh, kind of, a suburban village called Pinner. And I was there for about 3 years and then we, he was transferred to Texas. So we came back and, you know, I got to meet my family in the Golden Triangle, and got to know them fairly well, and moved to San Angelo for 4 years, and then Okinawa for 3 years. Uh, and then Albuquerque, New Mexico where I graduated from high school in '69, Sandia High School.

Norie Guthrie: Um, what first drew you to music?

Mickey White: Um, the, we had a musical house for one thing, but my mom was real, she, she had lines on a singing career at one point and time. And she was a professional dancer. She did, you know, like these chorus line, you know, high-kick chorus line things and toured the Midwest. Uh, poor-, but she was probably 20, 19 years old. Um, and she toured for about 3 or 4 months. So she, kind of, had this showbiz thing. And both my mom and dad really liked music. And they would perform in, you know, the officer's club shows and things like that, you know, so there was music always in the house. We had, you know, record players, you know, I had one of those little that, you know, where you get those little yellow 78s, right? One of those little bitty kitty record players from, uh, as early as I can remember. So, um, and, you know, we liked the musicals and, you know, the things like that, you know, Rogers and Hammerstein was always big. Uh, but when the 60s came along my brother, he was 3 years older than me, um, he started listening to rock and roll probably in the late 50s, uh, in San Angelo. Um, you think it would have been country music but, you know, all the kids like rock and roll, and he was listening to that, so I started, kinda, gettin' into to, you know, Elvis, and Ricky Nelson, and, uh, Roy Orbison, the Everly Brothers we really liked. And that, kinda, carried over to Okinawa, and then when the Beatles broke, you know, that was just like a sea change, you know, for, for me musically, and I, by that time I was taking piano lessons, um, and learning. Uh, one of my piano teachers, uh, we worked through the *West Side Story* book. You know, so I was, kinda, doin' that,

but when the Beatles came in it was just, you know, uh, everything changed, I mean significantly, musically, socially. It was, uh, a pretty dramatic moment for us.

Norie Guthrie: So you graduated in, from, it was, um, Albuquerque?

Mickey White: Mm hmm.

Norie Guthrie: Yes, and then, um, why did you decide to go to the University of Texas?

Mickey White: Well I didn't really decide. My parents decided. Um, and my, my dad retired from the Air Force, and he wasn't really excited. He was a very patriotic guy, and he was, did some important stuff and, um, they basically booted him out after 30 years. And mom and dad were not really gettin' along that well and they, mainly mom decided that she wanted to move back to the Golden Triangle. So, you know, they're story was, you know, I was a bit of a train wreck at the time but, you know, their, their rationale, rationale, rationale was that, uh, they couldn't afford for me to stay in New Mexico, you know, out-of-state tuition, because they were now Texas residents. So my choices were U of H, uh, Lamar or UT. And I chose UT. Fortunately, I had just enough, you know, on my ACT scores to get in but, uh, so I went to, uh, enroll in UT in the Fall of 1969 and by that time I was already, uh, my brother was really into, uh, in, into the folk singers. And I, kind of, you know, I did the, you know, rock and roll garage band, and I was actually a drummer for a while, and, you know, we did "Louie Louie" and "Gloria" and all those, you know, garage-band staples. Um, but the band broke up, and I ended up, kinda, through a set of circumstances with an acoustic guitar. And I started, kinda, strummin' these, you know, Beatles' songs and everything and I was pretty adept at it, right, and I had some musical background. Um, but Bob, my brother, really got into the, uh, the folk music thing, a huge Dylan fan, but he turned me on to Donovan and Simon and Garfunkel. And Pete Seeger was a, a big influence. So by the time I got to Austin, I was already, kinda, wantin' to learn how to fingerpick and, um, you know, was doin' some, you know, some of the more political songs and things like that when I, when I arrived here. And there was a very, very active folk sing in Austin. It was hummin' at the time. It was very, very cool. And it was centered around the Checkered Flag, which was, um, on the corner of Guadalupe or Lavaca, Lavaca and 15th in Austin. Um, the building is still there. It was owned by Rod Kennedy who would of course on to found and do the Kerrville Folk Festival. So there were a lot of guys comin' through there. You know, a couple of 'em like Frummox, which was, uh, Steve Fromholz's band with his partner. Dan McCrimmon had a record out, which is pretty cool, you know, now everybody, you know, burns a CD. Back then, havin' a vinyl record out was a, a big deal. And it was like this, you know, double foldout thing and, you know, really well produced and it all of Fromholz's classics on it and, uh, some really good stuff by McCrimmon. Uh, Mike Murphy, at the time, was playing at the Checkered Flag. Um, there was a, uh, trio called Three Faces West one of, one of who, one member was Ray Wylie Hubbard. So all that, kinda, stuff that would lead to, you know, kinda, that outlaw country folk stuff in the 70s was already pretty much in place at the Checkered Flag. So, you know, I spent less time in class, less time at the fraternity house, and more time at the Checkered Flag, you know, as time went on and by, you know, the end of that year, you know, I, I switched into the music school at UT. Um, but, you know, that's, they couldn't teach me how to fingerpick. So that was pretty short-lived. So by the—about—I remember actually the, the date that I decided I was gonna go back to Albuquerque, right, so, um, why I would choose to go to

Albuquerque to pursue the music business, I'm still, kinda, curious about, but I had hitchhiked up to, uh, Dallas. And I had enough money to take a, a plane from Lovefield to, uh, to Albuquerque. And it was there, kinda, waitin' for that flight that I heard about Kent State. So whatever day that was in May of 1970 was, kinda, my first official day as being a professional musician.

Norie Guthrie: Okay, so then how did you make it to Houston in, in 1970?

Mickey White: Well, um, that's a curious series of events. Um, I was actually, uh, takin' the bus from, uh, well I think it was on spring break maybe in the spring of 1970. And I already had, by that time, I had a, uh, steel string Yamaha guitar with a big peace sign on it, and I was sittin' on it in the Greyhound stations which was down on, uh, oh maybe Rusk, about where Rusk is. Um, and I was sittin' on it and this old wino guy came up with this little beanie, you know, and it, um, had a trench coat and these, kinda, horn-rimmed glasses like they use in, and he walked up to me, and he, he talked, he, he lost his voice box, right, his larynx. So he talked like this. He would force the air. And he came up, and he said, uh, can you play that thing? And I said well, yeah, yeah, you know, I do all right. You should check out the Old Quarter. Uh, what's that old timer? The Old Quarter. And he pointed the direction, it was a couple of blocks up the street and, um, low and behold, um, you know, my parents came and fetched me from Albuquerque, and I went back to, to Beaumont in the summer of 70. And, you know, I was gettin' itchy-footed. There wasn't anything in Beaumont for, really for me to do, and my dad has this, uh, you know, what do you want to do son? You know, uh, he wasn't really, you know, uh, you know, totally against me doin' this, right, but he asked me what I wanted to do, and I, well I wannna be a folk singer. So he gave me 50 bucks, and I took the bus to the Greyhound station in Houston, and I hopped off, and I walked up the street to the Old Quarter, and I auditioned for Dale Shofar. And he pulled out his calendar after I played him a couple of songs and gave me a couple of dates. And it, kinda, went from there.

Norie Guthrie: What, what sounds were you playing at that time?

Mickey White: I was doin', uh, I was still doin' some Beatles' stuff, um, the, my opener, and I remember this pretty clear, and my opener was "Everybody's Talkin'" by Nilsson, everybody's talkin' at me.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Mickey White: You know, I was still, kinda, brushin' my guitar, you know, that kind of thing and not really, uh, playin' with pics too much. But, uh, that, uh, Stephen Stills, um, definitely Paul Simon, "April Come She Will," you know, I like the fingerpickin' part on that. I never could sing, still can't. But, uh, Paul Simon, Donovan, Donovan songs and some other, you know, uh, a little bit of Dylan here and there. I wasn't as high on him. I really liked Donovan, 'cause I, I liked Donovan's guitar playin'. I thought it was real good, nice, and clean and, you know, precise and, you know, but emotive, too, you know, I mean, he was a very expressive singer and guitar player.

Norie Guthrie: What was the Old Quarter like at that time? Can you describe it?

Mickey White: Well, it was kind of at the tail end of the, the Market Square scene. Uh, there were, uh, Market Square was, kind of, in the northwest quadrant of downtown. Um, I forget the exact street names but there was some other, there's the Cellar was, kind of, the rock and roll, but, uh, club down there right on the Square itself. And then there was Love Street, which is, kind of, the hippy hangout, which was actually, kind of, right down on Buffalo Bayou. And the Old Quarter was about four or five blocks away, away from Market Square. But it, kinda, caught up, you know, like, somethin' that, you know, the suburban people would come in, you know, to the city, you know, that kind of thing. So it was part of that scene. Um, it was fairly, it, it was a small venue. It was like an old warehouse, so you'd walk through the door and, um, there was, you know, about, oh, maybe five or six tables. And then it, it had this old piano bar that went at an angle right out into the middle of the club. So if you're lookin' longways, uh, the bar was on the, the right and the stage was on the left. And between the bar and the stage there was only room for about one set of tables. So they could stuff, I mean stuff a hundred in there. But, you know, a good crowd would, would have been 50 or 60 people. Um, it had a small stage, you know, generally there were just solo acts were playin'. Um, and, kind of, you know, a very rudimentary PA. I remember it had, you know, the, the vocal mic was the Elvis mic, you know, the square, you know –

Norie Guthrie: Oh.

Mickey White: - mics. So the sound wasn't real great, you know, they just had, you know, enough to, kinda, get it, but, but it would eventually get, you know, uh, a little better PA system. But it was pretty rudimentary, but, you know, the, the thing was it, it, the people who played there, I mean, it was just, you know, uh, a parade of future stars and, you know, just really, really great musicians. What, what I really thought was cool about it is the variety of stuff that came through and when I was growin' up, you know, we had, as I mentioned a little while ago, you know, of a, kind of, variety of musical influences and, you know, I liked a lot of different stuff. So for somebody that was comin' in, you know, just in the process that of defining what they wanted to do, um, I had a lot to pick and choose from, you know, from the more seasoned folk singers like Don Sanders, who by the time I came to Houston was, you know, uh, a drawing act so to speak, seasoned professional, you know, um, Guy Clark had already started his songwriting. Um, some of the songs that he did then, only one, kind of, remained in his, you know, repertoire down the line, but he was a stalwart. All the young up and comers had different things. You know, there was a guy named, uh, Fred McClain that would come into play jazz stuff, you know, so we'd learn different, kind of, diminished and augmented chords and stuff like that from Fred McClain. You know, some guys were real good at fingerpickin', you know, I started gettin' to be one of those. Eric Taylor comes to mind, um, but of course it, and, you know, Lightnin' was, uh, Lightnin' Hopkins was Lightnin'. I mean, when he came in it was, kind of, a special deal but, um, his influence definitely pervaded the Old Quarter, you know, that blues, you know, blues in E. Everybody at the Old Quarter could play in blues in E, no doubt that. But I think, you know, ultimately Townes was, kind of, the, you know, the, the godfather, the figure head, um, of what was goin' on there. Most of the people, you know, there the young guys would, kinda, either emulate Guy or Townes but, you know, Townes seem to get and, kinda, have the, uh, you know, the, a simple thing like sitting down, um, you know, most folk singers at the time, you know, would play standing up. And at the Old Quarter it was a little more intimate, and they had these little stools and, you know, Townes, Guy would stand, right, but Townes

would sit down on the stool and, um, um, you know, once he started doin' that, that's what everybody did, except me, I stood.

Norie Guthrie: Okay. Um, so you were playing there. Did you play any other venues, um, while you were in Houston –

Mickey White: S –

Norie Guthrie: – that, during that period of time?

Mickey White: Sand Mountain was the other one. So, um, the kind of the, the, the history of the, the folk music clubs went from the Jester Lounge where Townes started, and that was owned by a guy named, uh, Mac Webster who was one of, he really was, uh, sweet guy, you know. Just a lover of folk music and, um, he wanted to be a folk singer, and he just, you know, he just wasn't gonna be. You know, everybody kinda knew that. Um, but, you know, he, he loved it, and he promoted a lot of, you know, gave a lot of people, Guy Clark included, uh, their first opening shots at the Jester Lounge, and from then the Jester kinda fizzled out and everything shifted to Sand Mountain, which was kind of right where, you know, Richmond, uh, you know, dumps into downtown, um, and Jerry Jeff played Sand Mountain, so that kind of put it on the map, and Townes, of course, that was his regular gig. Uh, John Carrick was a folk singer. His mom kind of, you know, they, they collaborated. They went in on the club, and, but everybody started gravitating towards the Old Quarter. You know, Townes was friends with Rex, you know, from way back and, you know, it was just kind of, it was, yeah, they served beer, you know, for one thing, so, you know, that, that was, uh, an advantage for a lot of people over Sand Mountain, but, um, you know it was much more of a Bohemian-type scene.

Norie Guthrie: Were they ev-, able to, just to make sure that I understand, feel like 1972 was about the time that liquor by the drink became legal.

Mickey White: Yes.

Norie Guthrie: And so ha, would that ju, just been hard liquor or were you a, how, how were they able to serve beer at that time?

Mickey White: You could have a beer and wine license.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Mickey White: Yeah.

Norie Guthrie: All right.

Mickey White: Yeah, Rex had one. Um, and then it, the, the Old Quarter kinda had t-, two, three phases really. The, the first phase he was in partnership with a, a guy named Benge [sp.] Bell, uh, no relation, um, and Rex opened it up, and, uh, it did real well but they had this chalkboard, a graffiti chalkboard where you could write, you know, basically anything you wanted. The LCD,

the Liquor Control Board, came in and told him to take it down and he refused, and they shut the club down. They shuttered it, and took his license away, but he ended up kind of, uh, he and Dale started hanging around and they were driving by the Old Quarter one day, and there was a for rent sign on it, and he called, uh, John Toomey was the lawyer that was the, uh, that managed the DeGeorge estate, which was the quadrant of, uh, of downtown Houston, and, um, you know, so they set him up with a beer and wine license, you know, put it in another guy's name, and got him back into business, and that was the heyday, so you could serve beer and wine, and then you could also serve set ups, right, where, you know, a person can bring in their bottle and you'd pay a \$1.00 for a 7 UP, right, and then you mix your own drink, so, but it was mainly yo-, not too many people did that really. It was mainly, you know, kind of a beer and wine, but it was liquor and it, but, you know, Sand Mountain, of course, did not so.

Norie Guthrie: I, no, I, I'm glad to hear that distinction so it –

Mickey White: I just –

Norie Guthrie: – was, something was a little fu-, fuzzy for me.

Mickey White: It, it, to add up, you know, just kind of a broad perspective of the Houston and the Texas club scene, um, a lot of those little mom and pop, you know, get a \$300.00 beer and wine license and, you know, \$200.00 PA and open your doors, um, those places they disappeared after liquor by the drink came in, 'cause they just couldn't compete, you know, and then the liquor by the, there was a higher profit margin and that raised the rents, and it just made it harder for, you know, people like Dale and, uh, later on with the Old Quarter, to stay in business.

Norie Guthrie: Um, a couple years later you ended up moving to Nashville.

Mickey White: Mm hmm.

Norie Guthrie: Why, how did that come about?

Mickey White: Mainly through Townes. Um, you know, we might as well get to this, but, you know, a lot of us were getting involved in drugs and, you know, I was, you know, dealing with, with a heroin habit, and, you know, there's a reference in Townes's song, "White Freightliner," bad news from Houston, half my friends are dying. It was, that, it was reference to, you know, a lot of us were really getting dragged down by that. Um, and, you know, Townes recognized that. He would, you know, he would have his own issues with it, but he'd come into town and then leave, and he'd, you know, go out on the road, living on the road. My friend, s'posed to keep your free and clean, which, you know, didn't account for the alcohol, right, but, you know, as far as the, the heroin and the hard drugs went, you know, he would be able to kinda get out and kinda make, and, and be able to look at what was happening to us, and he, you know, told me, look, man, you need to get outta here. Nashville's, you know, a good, good place to go. There's a lot happening there. A lotta songwriters. I was still at the time kind of wanting to be a songwriter, and you know of course I ended up being mainly a guitar player. Um, so that was an attraction, and mainly just, you know, kinda getting outta town, you know, I knew, I knew that, you know, the drug thing was kinda draggin' me down, so. Um, I sold my car to a friend of mine for a 150

bucks which was enough for a plane ticket and a half a paper of junk, and 50 bucks left over in my pocket when I got to Nashville. So Townes was supposed to have been staying at Guy's, so he gave me Guy Clark's number. Guy, of course, had already moved there from L.A. So, you know, I arrive at the airport, you know, get on the blower, "Hey, Guy, it's Mickey, uh, I'm, I'm here." He said, "Well, you're not comin' here," and so many, so many words. You know, "Well, where's Townes?" "Well, you know, he left the other day, you know. I don't know where he is. He's supposed to be back in a week or so. Hey, let me get, uh, Rocky Hill's staying at Jack Clement's house. Let me give you that number." So I called Rocky Hill. Of course, he was, uh, you know, one of the great blues, electric blues players from Houston who was up there doing a record with Jack Clements, and say what you will about Rocky, um, you know, I owe him a debt of gratitude because, you know, I had, you know, enough money for a cab to get there, but, yeah, come on, you know, we can, you know, it has to be a low profile, but I can put you up. Right, so I went over to, he was staying at Jack Clement's house on Belmont, and, uh, so, uh, oh, about a week or so later, um, a room became available on, this little house on Acklen Street out near, uh, Hillsboro Village, and, um, Skinny Dennis Sanchez, who had come, kinda followed Guy from L.A. and Richard Dobson who had kinda migrated up there as one of the Houston ex patriots, um, they had just lost a roommate who happened to be Rodney Crowell who had moved in with his girlfriend, right, so they needed a third, and, you know, I had, I think, you know, the 20 bucks for my share of the rent left over, and so, uh, I moved in with them, and it became, you know, that was action central as far as pickin' and singin' and people droppin' in, you know, playin' guitar and introducing new songs, and sharing ideas, and, of course, you know, it was always characterized by the coffee table with the big half gallon of Jack Daniels in the middle of it, right. So there was, but we did, I mean it was very, very productive. There was a lot of songwriting going on, a lot of exchange. Uh, one observer referred to it as a liquid network, you know, where all these things were kinda intersecting and going. And, um, you know, I, I had gone up there, you know, as, as I mentioned, still with a mind of being a songwriter, and I had a couple of songs, and Rodney, Rodney Crowell, actually, uh, took me down to his publisher, and, you know, the publisher liked, publisher liked these two songs that I had, and demoed 'em and wrote the contract up, and I said, "Man, it can't be this easy," you know. Then of course, you know, like most of 'em, they all get buried away. But, you know, I, I continued to try to write songs, but, you know, I could not keep up with Rodney, and Richard, and Guy, and what Townes was doing. You know, Townes was still kind of in his heyday. Um, and some of the other writers like David Olney, uh, that would play at this place called Bishop's Pub where all the songwriters kinda kept congregating. But, um, I was already starting to kind of get better on guitar, so we'd be sitting around in these circles, and people would have songs, you know. We'd play Hank Williams' songs and just, you know, we'd sit around and pick for fun. And it would come to the break and they'd say, "Pick it, Mick." So I became kind of the default lead guitar player in that little circle, and that's where I kinda made the transition from, you know, I didn't totally give up aspiring to be a songwriter and I continued to write some stuff after that, but, you know, that was the, the shift, the quantum shift, you know, of focus to, you know, acoustic guitar, playing lead acoustic guitar and flat pickin' and finger pickin', you know, that's what I do best. You know, that, that's what kinda separates me from, from the pack a little bit. Comin' into, uh, when I first went to, to, uh, you know, the Checkered Flag and everything, I, I was, uh, you know, [begins playing guitar] I was kinda playing like this, you know, kinda just with an open finger, kinda brushin' and strumming.' "Everybody's talkin' at me." That kinda thing, right, so, um, what kinda became evident, um, the one thing is, uh, when I auditioned for, uh, Allen Damron at the

Checkered Flag, you know, I had a gut-string guitar and, you know, and I played him that song, and, um, he said, Well, that's good, you know, I'll give you a shot. I'll give you an opening, uh, you know, opening act coming up here. Uh, but if you're gonna play clubs, you gotta learn how to use picks. So I started, you know, it would kinda morph into this [plays guitar], you know, but still just kinda strumming. So the, the big change came, and that's what I was kind of eluding to Townes' influence, um, you know, and, you know, Bob Dylan drew from Woody Guthrie, [plays guitar] but the idea, you know, instead of even, you know strumming a song like this. You know and start and adding a little syncopation, dah, adding some more individual string kinda things. So that was kinda the stepping stone, and then it would come, you know, from there, you know, which Townes was beautifully proficient at, um, I just started [plays guitar] kinda going up the neck a little bit. Right? And kinda, just kinda moving up the neck and kinda expanding on that. And, um, you know, Townes, that, that's something that he wanted to do, and he just, he, you know, kinda like with my songwriting, there was a certain plateau that I got to, um, and I think that he really appreciated, you know, that I was kinda stemming from some of the stuff that he was doing and kind of expanding, and, and just, you know, adding to it, embellishing it, you know, to a degree, and I think that that's the reason that, you know, he chose me as his lead guitar player eventually, you know, because it was a lot of the stuff that I was doing was based on what he was playing in the first place, you know, so I wasn't gonna do anything to get in the way of that. You know, my job as a lead guitar player was to make his guitar sound better. Right? That was the whole intended purpose. So that's kind of, [plays guitar] um, you know, the more, the more, the more flat pickin' kinda stuff. And then, uh, the finger pickin' of course, um, I was used, when I came to the Old Quarter, um, Rex is actually the, the one who, uh, who turned me on to, uh, to Townes, and one of the very first things that, that I heard, the first Townes Van Zandt song that I heard was from Rex, right, and, uh, you know, I was using plastic finger picks at the time, and, uh, you know, I noticed that Townes had these steel finger picks. "Hey, Townes, how come you use those steel finger picks?" "They sound better." Of course the next day I was down to the music store buying steel finger picks. [plays guitar] That, that's the, uh, finger pickin' for "Columbine," and, um, you know, after I, I'd come to the Old Quarter, and, uh, Rex had actually been out of town, and I played a couple a gigs and, uh, Rex had come back from Colorado, and, you know, he was there, and, um, he heard my set, and, Hey, you're a pretty good finger picker, and if you like finger pickin', you gotta hear this guy. So it was actually, he played me that song, "Columbine." [plays guitar] So that's where, you know, and I was doing some, you know, Paul Simon type finger pickin' and everything before that, but, uh, you know, a lot of the finger pickin' that I ended up doing was, you know, kinda based on Townes's style. [plays guitar] As such.

Norie Guthrie: No, that, thank you.

Mickey White: Yeah.

Norie Guthrie: No, it's, it's nice to have you be able to kind of give a little bit more detail.

Mickey White: Yeah.

Norie Guthrie: Yeah. How did you join Mickey Clark's band?

Mickey White: Uh, Mickey Clark was, he had recently moved to Nashville, maybe just a few months before we all kinda converged up there. Um, he was from Louisville, Kentucky and was already a veteran. He was an older guy. He was I, I think 30. You know, I would've been 21 or 2, so he was more like Guy's age, one of, you know, one of the vets, and he had actually, uh, had a group that played in Greenwich Village, you know, during the heyday, so, um, you know, he had moved to Nashville to pursue songwriting, uh, which he was very good at. But the songwriter scene, of course, was Bishop's Pub, and he came down. I think by that time, um, Bronco Newcomb had been kinda the, the hiree by the club to kinda MC the shows and do the sign-up sheet, and, you know, I, I think I had, by that time, I'd kinda taken over that role, uh, from Bronco. But regardless of what it was, Mickey came down to Bishop's Pub and he played, and, um, by that time, I was living around the corner from the Acklen house on, uh, I think Hillsboro Road, and the address was 1929. So I told Mickey, I said, Hey, you know, we have this pickin' hparties all, you know, all the time. You know, you need to drop by, you know. And he asked me where it was, it's stock market crash on Hillsboro Road, and 1929, so, I mean, literally the next day he showed up, and, uh, it might've even been, it might a been that first time that he came by, and we played some Hank Williams stuff, and I was pickin' along with him and singing some harmonies, and, you know, it was kinda jivin' and movin' and sounding real good, and Mickey, uh, was on the national – I have to kinda backtrack a little bit. He was on, uh, the Bitter End, uh, national coffeehouse circuit that, you know, set up with college campuses. It was a, oh, a godsend for folk singers. Townes really went a long way to establishing his following on that circuit, you know, where he would create, like, pockets of, you know, diehard followers, like in the Carolinas, you know, in different parts of the country. So Townes had taken Rex out to kinda get him out of town, you know, due to the aforementioned situations that were going on, and, uh, so I knew that, how easy it was for somebody that was on that circuit to add somebody on. You know, you just get another meal ticket and another dorm room, you know, there's really no expense. It's no problem for the circuit or the colleges at all. So I told Mickey Clark. He says it was \$15.00. I think it was 25. Regardless, I had added up what it would cost to, I knew I'd get free food, so I added up, okay, how much is a pack of cigarettes and a half pint of Jack Daniels a day, and kinda tabbed that up, and offered that as a figure that I would work for out on the road. So I think it was \$25.00. And he said, yeah, well, I've got like this 4-week tour up the Susquehanna River in Pennsylvania, and we'll try it out and see how it works. So we took off on the road, you know, and, uh, God, I was just, I mean, this was it, you know, what I wanted to be a ramblin', gamblin', you know, guitar player, right. We were on the road, and, uh, fixin' to do these gigs, and it worked out really well. You know, Mickey and I just had a synergy and, you know, we were still very good friends, and, um, you know, it was fun playing, you know. That's, there's so much about what was going on then, you know, you know, the band was your friends and the friends were your band, you know. I mean that was kinda part of the dynamic, and so all that was working. So Mickey, at the end of that tour, um, went ahead, he, he offered me \$100.00 a week, uh, and he said he had gigs in Toronto, uh, a month-long gig in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, which I love the mountains, and, uh, you know, that was very, very appealing, and, uh, a week-long gig at the Earl of Old Town in Chicago, and, man, Mickey, you're on. The Earl of Old Town was like, you know, that was the Old Quarter. It was extremely prestigious club. You know, big, that was a big-time gig. You know, maybe not quite as important as Folk City in, in New York, right, but right on the, uh, probably the second most important folk club in the United States. So, um, yeah, Mickey, you got it. So we did these, this tour for about a year, and, you know, we played Jackson Hole a couple of times, and, uh, the Earl of Old Town several times,

and, you know, I got to meet some really, really great people up there, and we got to play with some, you know, probably most notably Gamble Rogers, um, that we were, at least one time, maybe twice, that we were paired with for 5 nights, and, uh, you know, he's just one of the great storytellers in Americana, one of the great finger pickers really in American folk music. Um, and so that was a real treat. We, uh, became good friends with Steve Goodman, and, um, you know, met Bob Gibson, of course, who was, you, he, the guy that wrote "Abilene," and he was kind of, you know, a major player during the folk movement in the early '60s who was kind of in the middle of a comeback. Um, it was at the Earl of Old Town where Mickey and I were playing one night, and it was the night before Bob Dylan was gonna launch his tour with The Band, kind of his comeback tour, with The Band, and we didn't really expect it or anything, but we were like into our second song, and here comes this cluster of hippie-looking, you know, all with sunshades on, right, that sat back in the corner, you know, and sure enough, there's Bob Dylan sitting there in the Earl of Old Town catching our gig, right. So, uh, you know, we did, uh, neither one of us were the least bit intimidated. You know, I, I was too, you know, brash to even think about it, you know, I was pretty confident in what I was doing guitar-wise. And so we played a good set, there was a good crowd there. Um, you know, they paid up and left, and it was, uh, several months later when an interview in *Rolling Stone*, the Ben Fong-Torres interview, came out and Dylan was talking, uh, talking about starting a label, you know, uh, like the Beatles had tried Apple, you know, it was kind of a thing that some musicians were doing, and, um, the, Ben Fong-Torres asked him about, you know, who's gonna be on this label, and he talked about Leon Redbone and some other guys chatting along, and, uh, Torres said, anybody else that you seen that you liked? And he said, yeah, a couple a guys in Chicago were good, Mickey Clark and another Mickey. So if I ever meet Bob Dylan, I'm gonna introdu, Bob, I'm another Mickey. But it was nice to have a little affirmation. We, we didn't, obviously we didn't get the record deal, but, yeah.

Norie Guthrie: But it's still special, nonetheless.

Mickey White: Yeah.

Norie Guthrie: Um, how did that come to an end?

Mickey White: Well, you know, I wanted to do, you know, I always kinda, you know, I started off as a solo performer, you know, and even in, back in the old garage band days I was a drummer, but I was basically the front man. I was the singer in the band, you know, called the shots, and that kinda thing. So, you know, I felt like that I had, you know, got my experience and, you know, I had some connections in Houston, and, um, you know, I wanted to go back to Houston and give it a try as Mickey White, you know, try to get this thing going again, and, you know, it was very, you know, Mickey was disappointed. I mean, we had a good, good duo. I mean, we did really well, and, you know, he, he would've preferred that I keep playing with him, but it was amicable, you know, he understood, you know, where I was coming from. So I came back to Houston in the spring, late spring of, uh, '74, and I called Mike Condray at Liberty Hall, and he gave me an opening shot at Liberty Hall, and I really pulled it off. I'm opening for Freda and the Firedogs which was Marcia Ball's band back then, and, you know, did good. You know, I played it like a week-long gig at the Old Quarter, and, you know, had good crowds, you know, as a headliner, um, you know, and everything was rockin'-and-rollin' pretty good. And, uh,

Townes had been outta town kinda, you know, still doing the, the, uh, coffeehouse circuit. He blows back into town, and we ran into each other on the front steps of the Truxillo house where Darryl Harris lived. That was kind of the place where we all, one or more of us, inhabited that little four-unit apartment, um, which is just about a mile and a half up the road. Um, and we were waiting on Darryl, right, or Dale, probably, one of the two. Anyway, you know, they were, we were locked out, so we were sitting on the front steps, and pulled out our guitars and Townes hadn't heard me play in a year, so he starts picking some of his new songs, and I start playing, hey, man, you know, you wanna, I'm playing at the basement coffeehouse at U, U of H. You wanna play with me tonight? And, you got it. Right? So I had come back and, you know, to do Mickey White, but within, you know, just a few weeks, you know, of being there, um, Townes, it was kinda like with Mickey Clark, you know, we played the one gig, and Townes said, well, I got for more. Uh, you wanna do those with me? Yeah, sure. So we played the Saxon Pub, we played the hoy, the opening for Hoyt Axton at Liberty Hall. It was, that was a, that was a great experience. It was, uh, it was kind of fun to watch Townes who had, you know, been so charming with everybody, you know, he was really, you know, a gr-, a great backstage presence, you know, 'cause people would come in just be in awe of the guy, right, you know, they'd just, you know, like, wow, I'm in the presence of greatness. You know, kinda fawning over him and stuff like that, and, uh, it was interesting to see that Townes with Hoyt Axton where the roles were reversed because Townes was just like in awe of, you know, Hoyt, and it was like one of his heroes, and it was kinda interesting to, to see that dynamic, you know, that Townes had those feelings and somebody that had really influenced was important to him, um, as well. But we played the Saxon Pub, and then Townes had been working on the record, which was supposed to be *Seven Come Eleven*, and it ended up coming out as *The Nashville Sessions*. Um, anyway, he had recorded most of the stuff, but they were gonna clean it up, and he wanted me to play lead on a couple of things, so, um, you know, he paid for my plane ticket and we flew up to Nashville, and that was, you know, I'd been in the studio a little bit before, but that was a real terrific experience for me because I got to go in, you know, working with Chuck Cochran and Garth Fundis on the, on the board, you know, one of the great Nashville engineers, and, uh, you know, working with the big boys, you know. Only one of my, only one of my performances ended up on the record, but it was a pretty definitive play. It still kinda holds up, so.

Norie Guthrie: Was, was that at Jack Clement's studio?

Mickey White: At Jack Clement's studio, yeah. That was the, actually the one that, it was called Jack's Tracks at the time. He had the two studios that were kinda out on Belmont, uh, towards his house, and then Jack's Tracks was one of those old houses right there on Music Row.

Norie Guthrie: And was this about, this is about coming to the time where John Lomax III, started to become a manager for Townes. I think –

Mickey White: That's the –

Norie Guthrie: – maybe it's like a little bit later.

Mickey White: – that's gonna come a little bit later.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Mickey White: So, um, basically what, what happened is, you know, Townes was, he was at his peak right then, and, um, you know, the shows were great, he was writing this brilliant stuff, you know, that's right when he wrote "Pancho and Lefty," and, you know, "Two Girls," and "If I Needed You," and, you know, some of his, you know, greatest stuff, and he was still, you know, in the game, and he knew it, and he was very proud of that record. Um, you know, I thought it was great. There, you know, some of the critics were sti-, you know, they always complained about Townes being overproduced, you know. Um, I can tell you this, if Townes complained about it, it wouldn't be on there. You know, he, he had total veto power on any, anything, and I saw that dynamic at the studio. He was very, very much involved in the recordings of his records. Um, but he was, you know, energized, so he and I were playing, and we went back down, and Rex had moved back down to Kemah, Texas and was trying to recover from his issues, and he was playing in this band with a guy named Ed Wrayton, and they just played, you know, country, honkytonk, dance floor stuff, and, um, so Townes and I went down there to kinda hang out, and, you know, we would all scatter to the mountains during the summer. I'm, you know, I'd been doing that for years, and that was one of the things that Townes and I kinda had in common, so we knew that we were both fixin' to go our separate ways, um, but I'll, you know, I'll never forget it, we were sitting there at one of the little round tables, you know, listening to Rex make his comeback playing bass, you know, that's how Rex kinda kept his, kept in touch with music. His, he became a really good bass player. So Townes said, "Well, look, man, we got this record coming out in the fall." He would always release his records in the fall and go on tour, you know, that, he'd done that with the previous five or six records, and, you know, let's get Rex as a bass player, uh, we'll get some touring support from the label, and we'll go out on tour in the fall, um, you know, in conjunction with release of the record. So we all, you know, regathered during the, during September, and unfortunately the record got shelved, but the tour went on, and the tour started off pretty good. We, you know, we played some good gigs, and we played the Earl of Old Town, you know, some of the connections that I made with Mickey Clark, uh, you know, I was able to call Earl and book us, you know, that kind of thing. And, um, so it was going pretty good, uh, and right about that time, uh, Johnny Guess, it was kind of a friend of ours, um, one of the, what I call the Milby Mafia. They were all kind of friends of Darryl Harris. There's kind of an extensive network there, but he drove up in front of Truxillo one day with this 30-foot blue mo-, motorhome, right, and Townes said, you know, "Johnny, here's what you're gonna do. You're gonna quit your job and you're gonna drive us around the country on this tour." And, um, it was right during the, the first oil crunch and the, you know, the price of motorhomes had just plummeted, right. He got this thing for a song. It was brand-spanking new. And Johnny said, yeah, fine. So it was already pretty crazy with the, you know, the four of us, and Johnny, you know, we'd, we'd go toe to toe, but after the first stretch of the tour, uh, we started adding people on. You know, the, Townes was the first to break no girls on the road rule and brought his new girlfriend Cindy along, and then it just kind of escalated from there. Richard Dobson joined because he wanted to, you know, tape our adventures, and of course that's documented in the, the *Gulf Coast Boys*. Um, but in my view what happened, and being, you know, like working with Townes and not just musically, and as friends and everything, but, you know, seeing his business strategies what he wanted to, to do, um, he had a game plan, you know, he wasn't just, you know, out there blithering along, you know, taking whatever would come his way, you know, he had things that he wanted to do. He knew he wouldn't be a big star, but, you know, he wanted to be

big enough, and I could just see his frustrating, frustration mounting, um, as each one of these gigs started kind of unraveling, and we never got the tour support. You know, Kevin Eggers, and I'm not gonna blame him at all, right, 'cause I think Kevin did some great work with Townes, and they were collaborators and partners, um, but I think Kevin's gift was moving money around, and there weren't any more to move, and we never got the tour support. Kevin was unable to pay Jack the studio time, so the record never came out, and the tour just got crazier and crazier and crazier, and I saw Townes, you know, just over this period of time just losing interest and being more inclined to blow the gigs, and, um, you know, it, it was basically just unraveling, you know. So, um, in the meantime, me and Rex were kinda stepping up to kinda fill, you know, uh, Townes more and more came to where he just turned the stage over to us, especially if we were playing, you know, the ski joints and things like that 'cause Rex and I had, just kinda off-color, you know, funny stuff, and, you know, things like that. So we would do more and more of that kind of stuff, and, um, you know, going back to, you know, my personally wanting to be the front, the singer in the band, um, you know, I told Townes after one of our gigs in Denver that, you know, when this tour's up, you know, I'm out. Me and Rex and gonna go do the Hemmer Ridge Mountain Boys, so we kinda parted ways. And at that point in time, you know, Townes would've, within a year or two, moved back to, uh, to Nashville, but, you know, that was certainly the low point of his career, and, you know, you can just, you know, he wouldn't tell anybody, you know, because that wasn't part of the persona of being, you know, the rambling, gamblin', you know, the crazed artist, you know, nobody's gonna buy my paintings until I'm dead, kinda thing, right. And, um, but, that wasn't his MO at the time, you know, when he was, you know, that was something that he adopted as a way or adapted as a way of dealing with his disappointment in all that stuff unraveling for him at the same time.

Norie Guthrie: Do you, um, you guys started to form the Hemmer Ridge Mountain Boys, can you talk more about that band?

Mickey White: Well, uh, you know, Rex and I eventually, um, you know, I, I'm the one that came up with the term aggressive folk. Okay? And like I played a little bit, you know, uh, uh, a, a lot of, a lot of my music was a little, a little bit more assertive. And, um, you know, that's, that's what I had in mind. And, you know, Rex and I were just a, a duo at the time but, but we added a drummer very quickly. It was a guy named David Apke who played for, uh, Kenneth Threadgill, uh, in Austin. And he started playing with us. So it was an amplified trio. You know, I would amp, you know, amp, amplify my guitar, Uh, but still acoustic, right. Uh, and we started playing, we, we were able to play a little bit bigger venues that way, like the Split Rail and you know, so we got gigs. We were doing pretty good. Rex and I had a brief falling out, but, um, you know, we put things back together pretty quickly and, um, we went in to make a record, and David Apke, bless his heart, you know, I, I mean he was great for the gigs, but didn't do real well in the studio and we, we'd gone in with, uh, Charlie Bickley's studio up at the Heights and Bickley's idea was for us to just go in and do, you know, "What's Your Sign?" and all of our funny stuff, right, you know, just kind of Smother's Brothers. Well, no, you know, we, uh, I wanted to do an EP of our songs, right? And the takes just weren't going very well, and so we kind of, you know, we got one, we got one song recorded which as "86ed." That, that is, uh, David Apke playing, you know, the brushes on that kinda swing tune, uh, that Rex and Townes and I wrote. Um, but that was it, you know, so we kinda, you know, stepped back a little bit and, uh, Bickley recommended that we do Rex's version of "Up Against the Wall Redneck Mother" sung in Pig

Latin. Well we didn't really, you know, that wasn't the gate, you know, the idea to be a novelty act. You know, we, that was never our intention at all. Um, but Bickley's next door neighbor was a drummer and he had worked in his studio. Said yeah, this guy is, you know, he's great. His name is Mike Edwards. You know, he'd love to come in and do it. So we showed back up and it, you know, in 3 minutes and 20 seconds or you know, whatever the time we had knocked that song out. Right? We overdubbed a couple of things, um, but you know, Mike was just right in there first cut, first take. And, uh, once again he was, you know, we got along, we were friends, you know, we, you know, we liked the interaction and Mike showed up at one of our gigs at Anderson Fair and it turns out, you know, I think Rex and I were doing that as a duo, 'cause we'd kind of dropped David, but we were looking for a drummer and hey, Mike we got like five gigs lined up. And he said man I got a van and a PA, let's do it. So that was, you know, really the core of the Hemmer Ridge Mountain Boys in my view and what our distinct sound was, was that amplified acoustic guitar, bass and drums with the two-part harmonies. And when I play now, that, that's what I do. I use a bass player and a drummer, you know, with an amplified acoustic guitar. And, you know, that's, it's really unique, you know, it, it's, it's a fairly, you know, distinctive sound. Not very many people do it. You know, there's probably a good reason for that, but you know, it, it is the thing that, that I, I think that was the thing that kind of defined our sound. Um, we did eventually add an electric guitar player, uh, Andre Mathews. Um, we weren't really looking for another guitar player. We wanted to add like a piano or a saxophone or something like that. We wanted to add a fourth piece. Um, he sat in with us on a couple of gigs and it sounded real good, so, hey, let's do it. So it remained, you know, for about the last 2 or 3 years a, you know, a four-piece band and it was pretty cool because we could take that four-piece band into Anderson Fair and play it like a folk gig or we could take the four-piece band to Papa Blakely's out in Alief and play as a dance band. You know, it was a very, pretty versatile lineup in that sense. But, you know, I think what the, the music business people and the reviewers and the press and that kind of thing, we were kind of pigeonholed into this novelty act thing because of "Redneck Mother." That was our, you know, our hit, a medley of our hit. So you know, I think business wise we had a difficult time overcoming that, you know, kind of, you know, that identified well they're just a novelty act. Um, our followers didn't look at it that way at all. You know, the, I think that they knew what we were doing and it was a pretty cool sound.

Norie Guthrie: No, I, I've heard it. It's very bam, bam, bam, bam, bam, bam.

Mickey White: Yeah.

Norie Guthrie: It's really. It's like kind of hard.

Mickey White: Yeah.

Norie Guthrie: Yeah. So, it's –

Mickey White: Yeah. It's, a, a –

Norie Guthrie: - like –

Mickey White: it's aggressive folk music –

Norie Guthrie: Yeah.

Mickey White: - is what it is. Yeah.

Norie Guthrie: It was fun. Um, so then the Hemmer Ridge Mountain Boys kind of started to tour with Townes during, so, it's like, you guys were kind of together as a unit in Houston for a while. Right?

Mickey White: A little bit. Yeah. We played –

Norie Guthrie: Yeah.

Mickey White: - we played gigs in Houston during that, the tour that lasted from the Fall of 74 to the Spring of 75.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Mickey White: We probably played two or three times in Houston.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Mickey White: You know The Sweetheart –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Mickey White: - of Texas. I think we did, we did one at the Old Quarter as well.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Mickey White: The Sweetheart was kinda, it was a bigger venue and more money, and we really liked Bruce Bryant. Um, so, you know, usually, in this r-, when I, went back with Townes –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Mickey White: You know, he was always pretty, you know, kind of the business deal was the, you know, you picked the club in that particular town and that's the one you play. You know? So, you don't try to, you know, play one club over or off against the other and you get loyalty. You need, you're pickin' dates that way. Like, you know, when they know, hey, we're gonna tour that area. Let's look at some dates and then you could kinda wrap it around, um, that particular venue at that particular time.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Mickey White: So, yeah, we played, you know, I mean, we, we, did, um, you know, the first Midwest tour to Chicago and, uh, Milwaukee, you know, places like that. And, then we did the West tour to Jackson Hole –

Norie Guthrie: Mm.

Mickey White: - and then we did various configurations, uh, all over Texas. You know, Dallas, Fort Worth.

Norie Guthrie: And, then, just to make sure I understand you write, then you kind of came back in, through, like, the mid to late eighties and you kind of more stationed with the Hemmer Ridge Mountain Boys in Houston.

Mickey White: We did, Rex and I, I'm –

Norie Guthrie: I mean mid, I'm not, mid, mid to late 1970s. Sorry, I didn't mean the eighties.

Mickey White: Yeah. The, the Hemmer Ridge Boys basically played in and around Texas. We did a few, a couple –

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Mickey White: - of tours. We did, we went back up to Jackson Hole and did that one. Uh, but mainly Texas. Maybe Southeast Texas.

Norie Guthrie: All right.

Mickey White: Um, you know, Houston, uh, Beaumont, Galveston, we had like a regular little club in Galveston that we'd play. Um, Austin of course.

Norie Guthrie: Why did that, that end up coming to an end?

Mickey White: Well, it just kind of ran out of gas. Mike ended up being less and less reliable. Um, you know, he was married and, you know, he, he just, you know, he, he left us at one time and then kind, kinda came back and, you know, he, he was becoming less, less reliable. I'll put it that way. Um, and it was kinda running, we, we, we just weren't going anywhere. We had kinda plateaued. We could fill all the clubs in Houston. Right? But, wh, you know, we just never could kind of break it into that next level. We did have a booking agent for a while. Um, you know, we had some patrons, you know, where, you know, we really upped our equipment. You know? We had publicity photos. We had a good demo tape that we did it at Bickley's. You know? We had some stuff going. Right? Um, but, it just got to a certain point and stopped. Right? We couldn't kind of break out of that regional. We couldn't get the record deal that we wanted. Um, so, I was kinda, you know, Rex and I were trying to keep it alive. We'd play as a duo on Tuesday night at Houlihan's as The Green Gang. So, we had these, uh, soda-jerk shirts, like, you know, the white and red striped soda-jerk shirts. That we'd play. That was The Green Gang to, kinda, differentiate between, you know, the full Hemmer Ridge Mountain Boys. Um, so we were, uh, it, you know,

trying to hang in there. Rex and I were still, you know, good friends and hanging out, and, you know, trying to collaborate, and come up with new stuff. But, wh, you know, w-, from a business perspective, we weren't, and I, I wanted to travel too. I mean, that's something always, you know, I loved touring with Mickey Clarke, and with Townes, and that kind of thing. So, it was the fall of 1980 and we had wrapped up that, of course, being, uh, Lucinda's band on her second record, uh, *Happy Woman Blues*.

Norie Guthrie: Can you talk more about that?

Mickey White: Yeah. I will. Um, Lucinda came, uh, you know, I, I knew her, the big 1929 house in Nashville?

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Mickey White: She was, uh, you know, a roommate there. Rodney Crowell was also a, a roommate in that house. We were all taken down to, uh, for, uh, the cops came in and busted an all-night picking party one night in Nashville and took us, so, we all spent a night in jail together so, that had some bonding. But, um, Lucinda, of course, was playing, you know, her twelve string and playing all this Robert Johnson stuff. You know, she, she had that distinctive voice, you know, that kind of moan, whine, Lucinda thing. You know? And, everybody loved her. You know? She just had, you know, terrific energy. Um, but, I hadn't seen her in several years. You know? I think she went back to Louisiana. She was hanging in Arkansas. You know? But, in the meantime, you know, unbeknownst to me, you know, her ambition was to become a songwriter. You know? Her father was a poet and so she shows up to Anderson Fair. We had this, I mean, literally, it was a big round table there in the main entrance of Anderson Fair and it was an Algonquin Round Table. Big time. You know? And, people would show up there at noon, and, uh, you know, kind of morph from the coffee to the beer, and eating the dollar bowls of spaghetti being served for lunch, and occasionally there was music goin' on in the, in the, the listening room. But, it was kind of a daytime, a daytime scene. And, uh, Lucinda shows up one day. And, she said, look, I've got all these songs, and, um, I want to demo them, and I was wondering if you guys would be interested in backing me up? You know? That was when, kind of, the Hemmer Ridge Boys were, you know, kind of at our peak and had a reputation going. And, I, yeah, sure, that sounds great. So, we started, um, you know, looking around for studios where we could do this demo. And, right about that time Folkways Records came up with some money. She had done a, a, a blues record with John Grimaudo of, you know, all those traditional blues things and from her earlier incarnation. So, um, Folkways came up with 500 bucks for her to do a record so we had heard that, uh, Mickey Moody down at Sugar Hill Records, you know, if you go in and, kind of, work on, during the off-hour time, you know, th, they'll cut you a deal. So, we went down and, and talked to him. And, we told him, you know, we have X amount of money, um, and we w-, we want to record these 12 songs. Um, can we do it for 500 bucks? And, he said, yeah, yeah, let's do it. That'll get it. So, we came back in and we set up, me and, and, J, Mike, in the meantime, in one of his flakey periods, didn't show up for one of the gigs. But, you know, what would, when that kind of semi collaboration started happening, Lucinda had gigs and we had gigs. So, for her gigs, the Hemmer Ridge Mountain Boys would back her up and, for our gigs, she would come up and play as a, you know, kind of a guest featured artist. And, um, anyway, for one of her gigs, Mike didn't show up. So, you know, that kinda eliminated the use of

the drummer, you know, in the studio. Well, you know, he didn't, he, you know, I don't want to have to rehearse it. So, we went in with just, uh, Lucinda, and me, and Rex, and we let the tapes roll and we cut the songs hot, and we, we cut four songs on the first day. And, we came back in the next day and Mickey Moody hits the play button and here comes the songs that we had recorded the night before with a drummer on 'em. And, it's we all looked at each other and, man, that sounds great. You know? Um, and, you know, you gotta give Rex props on that. You know? Uh, overdubbing drums is, you know, the, the hardest thing to do. Right? I mean, it, there's no, as far as overdubbing in a studio, it's a really, really difficult thing and you can't do it without a solid bass player. But, this black drummer named Ira Wilkes went in there and hammered it out and, he was like, playing right in the pocket. And, um, you know, I don't wanna create a controversy or anything. Lucinda had later on told the interviewer that, you know, th-, you know, it was kind of thrust on her, um, but my recollection does not coincide with that. That, um, that we all thought it was great and, you know, uh, to kind of support that argument by pointing out that, that he had also added a slap bass to the song, *Happy Woman Blues*. And, that was rejected. Okay, well, we didn't like that so we're not gonna use that but we like Ira Hayes and, Ira Wilkes, actually. And, um, so Mickey Moody said, well, he'll play the rest of the record at \$25.00 a cut. So, at that point in time, Lucinda had a, uh, kind of a patron, you know, a friend where she could, uh, borrow a little bit more money so we could come in and, and produce it up a little bit. So, Ira, uh, Ira Wilkes played the, the rest of the cuts with us and then we brought in Malcolm [Smith], uh, I forget his last name. He was kinda of the, you know, the fiddle player. Uh, we brought him in to play, uh, "Lafayette," and we brought Andre Mathews in to play slide guitar and other lead guitar parts on a couple of things. So, there were a few overdubs. We did a little bit of vocal harmony overdubbing, and produced it up a little bit, and that was the final product. It came out, the, the total tab was two grand. \$1,900.00 I think. And, uh, you know, we're still, we, you know, we're pretty proud of that. I, I, I was listening, just happened to be listening to one of the folk music shows on the radio and they were doing a Lucinda thing. And, you know, they were playing songs from her different records and one of 'em was one of the ones off *Happy Woman Blues*. In my view, you know, it didn't drop off at all. You know? And, it, you know, they cut, and a lot of people really, because it was kind of, like, fresh, and unadorned, and, you know, kind of, you know, cut live and hot, that a lot of people like that aspect of it. So, I think it's, I think it's held up. I'll put it that way.

Norie Guthrie: Did you do any other session work in town?

Mickey White: Um, y, I did with Richard Dobson. Yes. Um, recorded his, um, *In Texas Last December* his first record. That would have been in the Fall of 75. Um, Rex and I had kind of, we took a, about 2 or 3 months off in some kind of hissy fit of some sort. But, um, Richard had come to town and he had a little bit of a budget, and he had a, a old friend of his, Rock Romano that was an engineer and a producer. And, Richard didn't have a lot of experience playing with, uh, bands and there was this group called Medicine Wheel, uh, that Rock knew. So, I went in as kind of, kind of a, a go between, you know, kind of a, you know, to kind of, you know, interpret in band form, you know, Richard's stuff to the bank. You know, you know, doing some, you know, like starts and stops and kind of arrangements where the lead break goes here. And, you know, that kind of thing. So, um, and I played on virtually every, I think there's, all but a couple of tracks, I think, on that record I played on.

Norie Guthrie: So, let's see. Um, you were talking a little bit more about the, playing at Anderson Fair and being there for those, um, those, kind of, influential times where everybody was, kinda, coming around and sharing their work.

Mickey White: Yeah.

Norie Guthrie: Can you talk a little bit more about that?

Mickey White: Well, it was, you know, that was the, you know, the Bohemian scene had, you know, shifted from The Jester, and it, kind of, bounced off of Sand Mountain to the Old Quarter, and then, you know, moseyed to Anderson Fair by the mid-seventies. Um, we kind of, we were pretty snotty towards 'em, you know, I think, early on. It's was, you know, we were still kind of a hardcore urbanite, you know, Anderson Fair was the hippy-dippy place but the, I, I think the, you know, and I love Tim Leather-, Leatherwood and he's done a great job, and the place is still going. You gotta hand it to him. And, he's put a lot of his heart, and soul, and money into it. Um, but, in my view, uh, it really, kind of, hit its heyday when Roger Ruffcorn was, uh, in charge of the booking. You know? He was, kind of the figurehead of the club. It was kind of a consortium. You know? And, Roger c-, just kind of emerged out of the pack. He's the guy that, I think he heard us play with, uh, at Liberty Hall with Steve Fromholz, and he's the guy that, hey, I, I want you in my club. You know? He, he recognized the Hemmer Ridge Boys were, you know, what we were so I think Roger had a lot to do with drawing that crowd in and, kind of, legitimizing it. Um, one of the things that he did was to do Blue Wednesday, and that started with Rocky Hill actually playing every Wednesday and, you know, it, all of a sudden, you know, there was a place to go, and it was happening in the middle of the week. And, it was packed and so the Blue, the, the Blue Wednesdays tended to, kinda, start drawing in these other artist, you know, like artists, and photographers, and like this skating group called the Urban Animals, and the Ooze Brothers would eventually, you know, show up doing street theatre in front of, uh, in front of Anderson Fair. So, it just kind of attracted all that stuff and, of course, they were open during the day. You know? So, we would like to go down there, and hang out, and, you know, just you never could tell, you know who was gonna drop in, and have what to say or what new song to play. It was a really r-, uh, a very, very productive scene. One of the things that I, kind of, m-, that I think is, kind of, fallen out in the music business is that you don't see too many of those. You know? It's kind of, you know, most of the clubs are, are not just social hangouts. You know? They're kind of music venues, and you, you go there in time for sound check, and that's kind of it.

Norie Guthrie: Um, so what, then, led you to start, um, exclusively touring with Townes?

Mickey White: Well, um, as I was talking about it a little while ago, um, you know, the Hemmer Ridge Boys had, kind of, plateaued, and kind of half plateau, half running out of gas, and John Cheatham, who had cu, er, you, you ask about John Lomax a little bit, a little while ago –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Mickey White: - John Lomax was, uh, when Townes had, kind of, hit that low point -

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Mickey White: - uh, in the mid seventies, uh, Lomax took over his management and he put a, he started a Townes Van Zandt fan club, and advertised in *Rolling Stone*, and, you know, got this unbelievable response. You know? I think that made a lot of difference with Townes. You know? In kind of, you know perking up his spirits. Um, Lomax was not the greatest of business men. Uh, neither was John Cheatham for that matter but, you know, Townes knew him from Clarksdale and approached him about, um, managing him. So, Townes had actually done a record, um, in the late seventies, um, with Chips Moman producing and he was gonna go on tour, and do the whole shebang. You know? This time, this did have some promotional money, and a tour set up, and he had broken his arm. Right? And, that, kind of, scuttled that. But, he was, Townes was, kind of, moving back up a little bit. I mean, you know, he was doing some more touring and there was this promoter in Vermont that wanted to do, promote a tour for Townes up in the New England area who had contacted Cheatham. At that point in time, Townes' backup band, er, uh, mainly his guitar player, Rooster Roland had gone back to school I believe. So, he had this tour set up without a guitar player. So, Cheatham called me and asked if I wanted to do these dates and it was a, a no brainer. You know? I went to Rex and, you know, I'm sorry, you know, I hate to break up the band and everything, but, you know and he understood. I, I mean, we, it was never really a, a problem at all. But, um, that's when Townes and I reunited. So, we actually had, uh, during that tour, we had Jimmie Gray, um, still on bass. So, it was a trio. And, the tour itself was a bust. The promoter was well intended but he, kind of, put, you know, cashed all his chips with this one big show that he wanted to promote and nobody showed. And, you know, it was hot checks, and, you know, policemen visiting the door of this farm house that we were staying. You know? But, uh, you know, well, we knew that, that gig had unraveled, so we, er, we had a, we played - One gig that we did play was Gerde's Folk City and, you know, of course, Folk City is where Bob Dylan broke, Paul Simon, pl, Phil Ochs, you know, I mean, it was the, Maria Muldare, you know, it was, it was the scene in the heyday of the folk boom in New York City. And, it was still extremely prestigious. I mean, big-time gig. And, that was one that came through and it was packed, and it was just a, a glorious night. You know? I mean, it's just probably, you know, one of the, one of my fondest memories of any gig that I've ever done. Uh, Townes was just on the money. You know? He was in his element. He had this sophisticated crowd that, you know, understood where he was coming from, and, you know, got his jokes, and loved his music, and, you, I'll, I'll never forget, you know, that, um, you know, he'd bop off a good one liner. You know? The crowd would just erupt in laughter and he would turn around to me - I was standing on his left with this big grin. You know? It was just like this, hey, this is what it's all about man. This is why we do this. And, not, you know, just our musical thing but our friendship and, you know, all that, you know, it was just, a, a real moment. You know? The back stage was just, it, Rex ended up, he had showed up because he had moved with his wife out to Long Island to work at his father's, uh, father-in-law's, um, um, windmill business. Right? So, he showed up. Others, you know, notables and everything, I can't recall them all, but you know, it, it was a scene for sure. And, uh, so anyway that gig was really, really good. Um, but the rest of 'em were kind of a bust. We had enough money to kind of get back. We had one other gig at the Childe Harold in, uh, Washington, D.C., and so, you know, so we're driving. We kinda got caught behind, and we're, you know, pulling up at the last minute. We walk into the Childe Harold and, you know, walk up to the bar, and the bartender knew Townes, and, hey Townes. Good to see you. What are you doin' here? Turns out there was no gig at the Childe Harold, so I

think we even borrowed twenty bucks from the bartender, you know, to make sure we had enough gas, so we ended, Townes and I ended up at this little farmhouse outside of Nashville, you know, threatening the chickens to lay eggs, you know, so we would have something to eat. You know that kind of, I mean, we, we just, uh, uh, you know, everything was gone. There was nothing. You know, we had a, the, the Colonel, his pickup truck. So, we were kind of, you know, wondering what in the world to do, and, um, the phone rings. Course the phone and the electricity were on, by the way. It had running water and –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Mickey White: – flushing toilets and all that, but, uh, uh, Cheatham calls, and Cheatham's opening a club in Austin called You Scream, I Scream, and he wants Townes to come down and play it. So he's got one plane ticket for Townes. Then I go, you know, I'm, I see what's going on, and I grabbed that phone. And Cheatham, I'm gonna wring your neck. You're the one that got me on this tour. You know, you, you go down there and buy me a ticket, so he coughed up a ticket. So, Townes and I flew in, and it was kinda like the, the old days. You know, what else are we gonna do, man? We gotta get on the road, and we gotta find some gigs. So, Townes had made connections in, you know, like the West Coast. I think the first one we did was like, uh, uh, the Vancouver. He had an offer for the Vancouver folk festival, and he said, yeah. Let's do that one, and then call Great American Music Hall in McCabe's, um, in San Francisco and Santa Monica. So, we booked that, and some other gigs kind of fell into place and everything. So, we started touring again. And, uh, you know, one, once again, to kind of, you know, reiterate, Townes having game plans, and, you know, having ideas of what he wanted to do. Um, he wanted to put a band together, and make a record. You know, let's do it. You know, if we have to do it ourselves, we're gonna do it, but that's gonna be the plan. So, we eventually added, uh, David Waddell, Leland Waddell on base and drums and Donny Silverman on flute and saxophone. Donny was a friend of my wife, Pat Mears who come down from Boston to play on her record, which I had produced, which never got completed, but that's a whole 'nother story. Um, so, eh, eh, actually, and it, and it was crazy. It was the end of my particular, you know, involvement in mind-altering substances. You know, of course Townes, you know, he can, you know, he, he'd do these gigs, but his alcoholism, you know, um, we all know is a progressive disease. It was becoming more and more bothersome, and the, the band set up was pretty pricey. I'll, I'll put it that way. There was a lot of drinking going on. Um, but we played some, um, some pretty good – we did this TV show, and I can't for the life of me remember. It's out there on YouTube and there's a cut of us doing, uh, “If I Needed You,” and it sounds pretty good. I was really surprised. Ya, how in the world? Were we even conscious when we did this thing? But, uh, you know, I guess, through it all, you know, you kind of revert to what really means something to you, and we were all playing pretty good, but, um, David and Leland had other things anyway. So, uh, but Donny stayed with the band. So we toured as, uh, that trio, and, uh, Harold Eggers, Kevin Eggers' little brother had set up a gig for us in Nashville, and we went and played that gig, and Jack Clement came out, and Jack Clement had, he had always been cognizant of the criticisms and production on the albums. Um, so, he heard that gig, and then he phoned Jeanene, and Jeanene called, caught up with us on the road, said, hey Jack wants to record you guys. Um, you know, he'll put up the studio time, and, uh, you know, buy the tape, all that kind of thing, and, uh, so we went back to, that, eh, we did that, that one in, that would be *At My Window*, and that was done in Jack's studio, you know, the upstairs, the attic studio at Belmont with Jim Rooney

engineering, and, um, it was done, um, it, it was all done live. You know, Jack, eh, eh, uh, uh, I wish I remembered 'em all, and I think my wife has a list of, uh, you know, the, the copy that Jack gave us about the rules for recording. The two that I remember are no headphones and remember it only takes 3 minutes to cut a hit record. And so, that was his philosophy. He wanted to take our, our sound, our little trio sound and just add a bass and drums and just, you know, sit around in a circle and play 'em. We ended up doing a little production on it. You know, I, I've got a, would leave some blank spots here and there so I could come over dubs some things. You know, we had, like, Mark O'Connor and Mickey Raphael on harmonica came in, you know, uh, Chuck Cochrane on piano. Roy Huskey, Jr. played the, upright base, and Kenny Malone, uh, did the drums, and it was a neat little record. You know, a lot of, um, you know, I think some of the stuff that he did earlier, you know, despite the production, you know, there's some beautiful stuff on those albums. *Our Mother the Mountain*, you know, the kitchen album, *The Late Great Townes Van Zandt*. You know, there's some definitely definitive cuts on all of those record, but I think taken as a whole, a lot of critics, uh, prefer that one because it's clean and unadorned. Um, I don't think Townes is playing as good, or singing as good, as he was in his heyday. You know, his finger pickin' had kind of fallen off a little bit, but he was still there. I mean, it, he was definitely, you know, wantin' to make a good record, and I think it came out pretty good.

Norie Guthrie: And then you continued to stay on with him for a number of years.

Mickey White: Yeah. So, um, that record would have been done about '86.

Norie Guthrie: Okay. Okay. So coming to its end.

Mickey White: And then Townes moved back to Nashville in '89.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Mickey White: Thereabouts, and that kind of ended it. You know, we played a, a couple of gigs here and there. I think that was at the, uh, the KiMo Theater. We kind of met there to do that one. Um, he had a period of sobriety. Um, and Jeanene actually called me and asked if I wanted to accompany him to New Zealand for a couple of weeks. He was doing some gigs down there, and, um, I don't think it was Townes's idea. But we, that, that was the last tour that I ever did with him, was in New Zealand, but it was good. You know, we had fun. Townes is, you know, I mean he was bipolar, and, uh, when he wasn't drinking, you know, I think that, you know, that, that's a lot of why people of that ilk drink is because they, you know, they like, they don't like the way they feel, and you know, the depressed parts. But he was still, you know, real pleasant with all the, the people, and the gigs were, were good. You know, they might not have had the kind of energy, uh, but they were good and clean and professional. I'll put it that way.

Norie Guthrie: So, after touring with Townes so long, why did you decide to stop touring with him, and basically kind of leave, not completely leave music, but step into a different, different role?

Mickey White: Well, it, it, it wasn't my decision to, to leave Townes. Um he moved to Nashville, and it, in my view, you know, I was still thinking, you know, the understanding was that, you

know, he would live there. I would live in Austin, but we'd just meet up to begin the tours, and, um, I had actually, you know, and I'd been doing all the booking. I booked all those tours. I had all the contacts, all the numbers. You know, and I don't want to sound, you know, bitter or anything like that, but, you know, I, I personally don't think that it was very cool that I turned all of that stuff over to a booking agent in Nashville, who, you know, the name doesn't really matter, but he just started booking Townes solo, and Townes didn't, you know, he, he never stepped in and did anything, you know, never did come to me and explain the, what, just logistically, Mick, you know. We never had the talk. It just, all of sudden, you know, Townes is playing all these gigs without me. So, um, you know, I was, I was disappointed. We, we remained friends, you know. Um, I ended up running into him when I was accom-, playing guitar for Pat, my ex-wife, in Europe, and, um, I sat in for, oh, four or five songs at the Milky Way in Amsterdam, and that was actually the last time I ever played with him. So it wasn't really my choice, but, you know, so there I am in Austin, and, uh, Pat and I had been married since the early 80s, and we were in the process of separating and divorcing. Pat had a record deal in Holland, and we had a 5-year-old son, and I didn't have anything goin'. I said, Pat, you've gotta, you gotta go do that. I'll take, I'll take care of John. So, um, you know, I actually worked as an auto mechanic for a while, and, um, you know, kind of, you know, was doing the dad thing. And I heard from a friend of mine, this old friend of mine that you can substitute at this school district if you have 12 hours of college credit. It was actually the, the Elgin School District, and I, I kind of lived out in that direction. And I said, well how coincidental is that? I managed to secure 12 hours at the University of Texas back in the fall of 1969. Right? I actually passed and got credit for it. So, um, I started subbing but just to kind of, you know, supplement my income. I was still trying to get gigs. I, I, I did a record which was copy some gigs, but, you know, I couldn't sell it. I'll put it that way. Right? Um, and, you know, I was still trying to keep, you know Mickey White alive, and the Austin music scene was really changing, you know, becoming much more competitive and business-like, and, you know, I think the moment that I knew that it was over with was when Griff Luneburg at the Cactus Café hired me like for a Wednesday night. You know Mickey White at the Cactus Café and one person showed up. I mean, and that one person she was really nice, and she sat there and I played my set, you know, but I think I knew then that, you know, I, I just can't start over. You know, I, I can't. I've got a son to raise, and, um, but right about that time, Pat's guitar player, she had her second record coming, her, her first record had come out, and she had a tour in Europe, and she needed a guitar player. Well, you know, we parted amicably. You know, uh, I mean we're still best friends, and, um, I think that, you know, I'm not much of an electric guitar player. Uh, it's certainly not my forte, but I think she needed someone that, you know, she knew and could rely on and not have to mess with, you know. I mean, running bands, it, it, it's tough, you know. I mean, um, so, I, I said sure, you know. And, um, the gigs went okay, you know, my guitar playing, eh, you know, my electric guitar playing was not received very favorably. I'll put it that way. Um, but the gigs were great. But what was cool about it is, you know, just, I lived in Europe for 6 weeks. Jack, wo, uh, you know, our son went and lived with my mom and dad on the, the beach in Malibu, um, for that time, and it was kind of when in Rome situation. Um, there was a, an apartment that the Watchman, Ad van Meurs had an empty apartment. So I had my own place to stay, and, um, we'd have, you know, 4 or 5 days off, you know, and I'd get to kick around in the coffee shops and kind of, you know, I, I, I went to London, like hopped on the train and took the ferry across from the Hook of Holland, uh, to England and spent like a few days London, went to Abbey Road. You know it just, you know, I had always been interested in history anyway. You know, I read history, just, you know, I was

good at it in high school, and, you know, I'd always kind of read historical novels, you know, Gore Vidal and, you know, and, you know, it just kind of peaked my interest. Well, you know, I need to, you know, kind of, um, you know, catch up on, there, there's some gaps in my knowledge about how Europe developed, you know, into nation states and things like that. So, when I got back to Austin, I started auditing some classes, and I was subbing, and I didn't want to be a mechanic anymore, and I figured, you know, I think I'll just, you know, kill two birds with one stone, go back to school, study History, get a teaching certificate and be a teacher. It just all kind of, you know, fell into place, and, um, I guess kind of the, you know, confirmation on that is the one school that I subbed at, um, er, you know, I subbed at, it, the, the one school that I did sub at was like the one that I wanted to teach at, and I got my application into them and they were the first ones to call, you know, Westwood High School, you know, just kind of this premier school in the, you know, the Austin suburbs, and uh so, I took the job and taught up until May 31st, couple of weeks ago, and completed 22 years as a Social Studies teacher.

Norie Guthrie: So how, with this kind of big change in life, career change, how did you kind of balance the being the teacher, but having this back story of being a touring musician and –?

Mickey White: Well, I shared it with 'em. Yeah. I would, uh, you, when I taught U.S. History, um, I did several singing lessons, one, like when we studied the Old West, I'd do some, you know, old western ballads. You know, that kind of thing. When we did the depression, uh, we'd do some Woody Guthrie kinda stuff. Um, when we did the 60s I would do, you know, stuff that I was actually playing in the 60s, right, some Donovan and Dillon and, you know, things like that. So, I, and, and, you know, I shared it with 'em. I would, you know, the kids would ask me to do, like, benefits for the literary magazine. You know, so I played, you know, several gigs, you know, in the student center. So, I kind of, uh, in fact there was, just right before I left, there, one of these kids today, uh, kind of a graphic cartoon of Westwood High School with all the, you know, different caricatures of the teachers, and right in the middle is me with my guitar on. That was kind of my identity at, at Westwood, you know, I was kind of a guitar-playing teacher. So it's, yeah, they knew it. The, you know, I would bring in, when I ss, ended up teaching Geography, I, I figured out that, you know, there's this, uh, you know, concept, you know, cultural convergence and diffusion. So I would do less, you know, I'd play a blues song and a country song for 'em and explain how that you know, kinda fused into rock and roll. You know, so, you know, they, they got a little bit of that.

Norie Guthrie: So, since your teaching career has come to an end, what do you have going on next? What are you, what are your plans?

Mickey White: Well, I have a tee time at Pebble Beach Golf Course at the end of, the end of August. Um, I'm, I'm actually workin' on a memoir. So, a lot of this, you know, a lot of the things that I've talked about with you today are gonna kind of in there and elaborated somewhat. Um, and I, one of my colleagues at Westwood is a bass player, and he knows my stuff, so when gigs pop up, you know, I do have, and, and I have a drummer that I work with, so, I'm still kind of in, you know, I, I don't pick up the phone, but if the phone rings, I'll answer it. I'm kind of in that mode right now. If the opportunity arises, I still, you know, love playing and performing and, you know, I doubt that I would, um, – you know, I, I've talked about, uh, there's a friend of mine that has a home studio, and if I were to do any kind of recording, I would probably just get

my bas player and my drummer in and set everything up and play 20 songs and pick the best 12, stamp it out as a CD. You know, I've, I've thought about doing that, but right, as far as, you know, anything related to the music business, the main, the main thing is the memoir, and I, I really, you know, enjoyed working on that. It's, it's the first time in a long time where I've had stuff that has to be done. You know, back in the, in the days as a musician, you know, you mean, you had, you had to put, you had to do this. You had to play the, you know, de, develop that lick. You had to write this song. You had to get this done. You had to play the gig, and, um, you know, with the memoir, and, and telling my story, and kind of, you know, trying to place it in perspective in one of the you know, dramatic periods of change in American society, you know, I've just had all these things that are just kind of urging to get down. You know, so that's been, you know, I really, most of the stuff that I write is already written by the time I sit down at the, at the word processor. You know, it's already kind of formulated, and it's really kind of fun to just sit down and kind of bang it out, and you know, I don't know if anything will come of it, but, for me, it's, it's the process, and it's being engaged in a creative process again, and that's kind of, you know, probably the most dominant thing that I'm workin' on right now.

Norie Guthrie: All right. Well, I want to thank you so much for coming in.

Mickey White: Thank you for doing this.

Norie Guthrie: ... and being here.

Mickey White: This is great. Um, you know, I just love, you know, the, the whole concept of what you're doin'. You know, it, it is important and significant, and there's, you know, a lot of, you know, I know from our discussions that, uh, you know, you've talked to all the right people. Yeah. You're gettin' it. So, it's very cool, so, thank you.