

Only A Memory Away - The Dave and Vi Stogner Story

CHAPTER THREE

Cedar Valley

August 1, 2000

Bethany and her husband, Jeff, arrived early in the morning at the cabin in Cedar Valley. They were just a few miles from the south entrance to Yosemite National Park. Big Ponderosa pines laced the valley. At 4000 foot elevation, the sky was so blue, the air so fresh, and the stars would be brilliant at night. Bethany had been thinking about what her grandmother had said. She had the manuscript in her overnight bag. They would have the cabin all to themselves, so she could relax and read about what her grandfather was like before she ever knew him.

She thought back to her childhood and the years she had spent with her Papa. To her, he was a grand person in every sense of the word. He had given her so much love and attention. He entertained her and made her laugh. She knew her mother still had the pair of red cowgirl boots he had given her when she was still in diapers. When they went out places together, he'd seat her on the center armrest of the Oldsmobile and buckle her up between him and her grandmother. When she was older, he'd interview her as if they were on a radio talk show, and they would sing together. She had been as proud as could be when he went to school with her and sang for her classmates. His death had been very hard on her. She loved him very much.

She knew she'd enjoy reading about his life and his music career. She didn't know what it was that her grandmother wanted to tell her. It did sound a bit mysterious. She had mentioned the cabin as being an eventful place. Bethany knew the property had been in her father's family for a number of years. She didn't know much about its history. Actually, there was once an older cabin there that had been torn down.

The cabin here now had two bedrooms, a living room, kitchen and bath. Most of the time during the summer months was spent out on the redwood decks. The front deck, built around two large Ponderosa pine trees, was shady. The back deck had a slate-lined fire pit to sit around in the late evenings. In the living room, among the other furniture, was Dave's old recliner. Her family had spent many enjoyable vacations there. She and Jeff loved having the opportunity to spend time there together.

Since they would only be there a couple of days, she decided to begin reading the manuscript that evening. Jeff said he'd like to read it, too. After they ate an early dinner, they took a long walk along Lewis Creek that runs through the property.

Once they got back, Jeff built a fire in the fire pit. They were ready to pull up a couple of comfortable chairs near the fire and begin reading.

PROLOGUE

In 1937, a dance floor was constructed in an old barn that had been moved to a five-acre site off of Shields Avenue in Fresno, California. The barn was named The Big Fresno Barn and featured dancing to music of entertainers playing pop music. Pop music was about all people wanted to hear. Country Western music wasn't popular in Fresno, then. A person could go into a place, put a quarter into a jukebox, play three Pop songs and one Country and there would be someone complaining, "Who the hell played that one!"

By the late forties, though, more and more places were featuring Country Western musicians for entertainment and Country Western music segments were becoming popular on the radio. People who wanted to hear or dance to this style of music could go to places such as Fort Washington Beach, Riverview Park, Johnny's Place, the Flamingo Club on Broadway, Hoedown Hall and the Cozy Inn.

When Country Western musicians began playing The Big Fresno Barn, crowds were small. *Bob Wills and The Texas Playboys* was the only band that could draw a crowd then. The music wasn't popular enough to make it easy for the rest of the Country Western entertainers, but Bob Wills helped get the road open.

Then, in the early 1950s, Dave Stogner came along and turned it into a freeway. The Big Fresno Barn featuring Dave and his band became so popular it could have been called "Nashville West." This became the place where the top Country Western entertainers wanted to perform, and who they wanted to perform with was *Dave Stogner and The Western Rhythmaires*.

Because of Dave's life and inspiration by Milton Brown, he is a vital link to the origin of a style of music that today has almost become extinct. It is known as Western Swing, a big band sound.

IT WASN'T EASY WAS IT! By Dave Stogner

"A few years ago I was invited by a musician friend of mine, Gordon Terry, to watch the shooting of a sequence in a film called *Honky Tonk Man*. Marty Robbins, Johnny Gimble, Merle Travis, Ray Price, and some other musician friends of mine were in the film. I was sorry I wasn't able to be there. I saw the film when it was released. The young boy in the film portrayed a teenager getting a chance to travel to Nashville, Tennessee, 'leavin' the cotton fields behind.' For so many of

the Country Western musicians who grew up in the twenties through the forties, that experience is almost a tradition. Music was the bright spot in our young lives, so we were inspired towards music related careers. And most of us could say, 'It wasn't easy, was it!'

I was one of those musicians from the Midwest who came out of a cotton field and picked up a musical instrument. That was the beginning for me, and I guess for anyone else to understand how we were inspired and influenced in those days, I'd need to begin my story back there at the beginning. I've had a thought that I've carried with me throughout my life. From a small boy, until now, I've lived with a dream. That dream wasn't clearly defined in my mind when I was a small child, but by the time I was twelve years old I knew the direction it would lead me. Maybe a dream won't always pay as well as you'd like it to, but it'll do a whole lot to help get you where you want to go."

Dave Stogner Origins

As my oldest sister would say, "David S. Stogner made his grand entry on this world's stage the rainiest May night of a very wet spring in 1920. There wasn't anything wrong with his lungs or voice as they were both in fine tune. About the timing, I doubt if anyone except Dave could have danced to it!"

I was born in a place west of Gainesville, Texas, by the name of Saint Jo. When I was about five years old, my family made a move out to West Texas and stayed for a couple of years. My dad, Henry Richard Stogner, was quite a cotton farmer. If anybody in the country told him there was good cotton land, no matter where, he'd go try it out. After those two years, we moved back and stayed mostly around Saint Jo and Gainesville.

I liked Gainesville. I could go downtown, walk up and down the streets, and go out on Market Square. Everybody was there and I knew all the pretty girls! From the third grade on, I hung around the baseball field. I worked hard in tryouts, so it was a big event for me when I was chosen for the team. I played marbles, too. One kid and I won all the marbles in North Gainesville one year.

I didn't particularly like that my grammar school was about seven miles from my home, though, since I had to walk. When the cold weather came on, I still had to walk just like in the hot weather. If I had to walk it now, I'd put up a little argument. Once I got two A's at school, one for coming and one for going home! I went to school and helped on the farm. School and work, school and work was the general routine of my young life.

My boyhood days were rough, but I still had my fun. I was considered quite a jokester because I had such a sense of humor. No one ever knew what I was going to do next. There were nine children in my family, so there was always someone to share the work and the fun. Times were pretty hard, so it took all of

us working on the farm to try to make a living. We didn't have much to live on, but we had food to eat and a few clothes to wear. We made a living the best way we could, as well as anybody did back then. We accepted what we had and just lived with it.

1927 and 1928 were good years in that you could get a little money for what you raised on the farm and for the crops, then along came 1929. You'd think a little boy might not remember those things, but that year it was flat rough. You could sell nothing and you could keep nothing. There was just no money around. We still went ahead, plugging along. I was nine years old and I got a saddle horse and a saddle. I don't remember how I paid for it, but I'm sure it didn't cost me much. I probably traded for a pocketknife. It was easy to trade for a horse at that time because most people didn't have the feed. You could trade anything.

I liked to ride my horse to the cow pasture rodeos. There were a lot of cow pasture rodeos then, and I don't mean sanctioned rodeos. These rodeos were wild, the stock and everybody involved with them. They had a big time. Nocona, Texas always had one, usually every two weeks. I'd ride my horse up to the fence and stop, that was all the competing I'd do. I'd watch them do the riding and roping, and all that. I wasn't about to get out there and get myself broken up. I wasn't old enough, anyhow.

I thought I knew it all, though, when I was nine. I knew my family had to tough it. I was figuring, 'Hey, there's no money in farmin' for me.' I didn't fancy to cotton too well because I couldn't pick enough to make any money. I remember one time my dad told my sister and myself that he was going to give us each one dollar, if we could pick 125 pounds of cotton in one day. She got her dollar and I got mine. That was the least pay I ever got for picking 125 pounds of cotton! Then, we got the word right after that, "You go out tomorrow, and you pick it again." We picked so many 125 pounds of cotton for a dollar that it got to be where it wasn't even funny. I kept pushing along and pushing along. My dad let me know that I didn't know it all, but I knew I didn't want to pick cotton!

When I was ten years old, I started messing around with musical instruments. I started learning how to play a guitar. A guitar isn't easy to learn, but it felt easy for me. Just about everybody in my family was a musician, so it was natural for me to start playing. My dad played the fiddle and my mom, Mary Ollie, played the organ, piano and guitar. She was known in East Texas as 'The Singing Girl'. My four sisters, Stella, Faye, Merle, and Judy all played instruments. I had four brothers and only one didn't play, and that was Bill. We told him he could do the dancing. My dad and my three brothers, Carl, Orville, and J.B. went around playing at country dances.

Country dances were when someone cleared out their living room on a Saturday night and had people come to a dance. Sometimes, they would have sets. You might have six couples that would dance on the floor at a set. If there were four sets, six couples would dance every fourth set and sit the other ones out. I'd go to some of the country dances where my dad or brothers played. Usually, there was a fiddler and a guitar player.

I got to eyeing these ol' boys playing these instruments and I thought to myself, 'Hey, you guys ain't doin' nothin' I can't do.' My brothers showed me a little about playing the guitar, and I picked up a lot from just watching and putting my own ideas together. One of my brothers wanted me to hop a boxcar on the Rock Holland Railroad and take off to play music. I hopped a few boxcars, but I never went very far! I still had an interest in playing baseball, shooting marbles, and going hunting with my slingshot. There was some fishing that needed to be done, too.

It wasn't too long, though, until I started playing the guitar at the dances with my dad. The first time, we played two songs all night. Then, the next Saturday we played four songs. We learned enough, I thought, to keep us busy and to keep my hands sore. I didn't like playing the guitar because there was no challenge to it. So, I started playing my dad's old fiddle, and it was old! I couldn't have hurt it anymore, if I had sat on it! He wouldn't let anybody pick on his fiddle, though, so I'd find any way I could to get it out without him knowing it.

I'd take that fiddle, sneak out of the house, and practice for hours at a time. I played the guitar at the country dances, but every chance I could get I was practicing on the fiddle. Sometimes my dad would catch me, and then he'd beat the tar out of me and tell me to get out to the field. In a way, my dad taught me fiddle playing because he was the only person I had a chance to learn from, but in another way he didn't. He didn't want me playing the fiddle. He said that there was just nothing in it for me, or for anybody. He wanted his sons to be cotton farmers. My ideas about that were different from his.

When I was young, we had a Brunswick hand crank phonograph and I listened to Jimmie Rodgers, The Singing Brakeman, records. I thought he was the greatest thing in the world. Radios weren't plentiful, but we usually had one so I listened to radio shows, too. When I was about eleven, there was a show that really began to influence my thoughts.

The Burrus Mill & Elevator Company sponsored a radio show on which a string band named *The Light Crust Doughboys* played. I'd sometimes get my dad's fiddle out and play along with them while they were on the radio. My ideas were forming then, along with a dream of becoming a musician. There were two members of that band who would eventually have a great influence on my life. They were Milton Brown and Bob Wills, especially Milton Brown.

Milton, and his brother Durwood, first met Bob Wills and Herman Arnspiger when they went to a country dance at a house where Bob and Herman were playing. Milton asked to sing a song, which was *St. Louis Blues*. When he finished singing, they introduced themselves. Bob told Milton that he had the sweetest voice he had ever heard, and that he had never heard anyone that could sing like Milton. Milton, Durwood, Bob, and Herman got together and were eventually hired by W. Lee O'Daniel. They became *The Light Crust Doughboys*.

While Milton was with the Doughboys, he organized his own band *The Musical Brownies*. He started with Durwood, Jessie Ashlock, Wanna Coffman and Ocie Stockard. They played jazz then, the same as New Orleans jazz bands played, but with string instruments. He added musicians to his band, and using two fiddles, piano, and steel guitar together with other string instruments he created a sound that became referred to as Texas Swing.

Milton was a wise man about the entertainment business. He knew where he was going at all times. His musicians knew what they were doing and what he wanted them to do, and his singing matched that. He had each of his men playing their own instrument, rather than playing various instruments. By using two fiddles, he knew he had come up with something new. In a sense, with that Texas Swing sound he was an overnight hit. He started right out making a name for himself and his band. He didn't mess around.

I listened to *Milton Brown and The Musical Brownies* on the radio. Then, one day I got to see them. I was just walking around Gainesville and I saw their bus pull up and stop at the Barnes and Wooten Cafe. They got off the bus wearing their suits, white shirts and ties. They looked like a million dollars! They went into the cafe to eat. I just went in and took a vacant stool by the cash register. As they paid for their meal, Milton stopped, patted me on the head, and said he bet I was going to be a musician. I told him I was working on it! He said, "Really, are you? You'll be all right, stay with it." I don't think I washed my head for two or three weeks after that! You have to admire a man for making it as big as he did when times were so hard.

I knew that I wasn't going to make any money in the cotton patch, any way it went. Sometimes on Saturday night, Dad and I would play and make fifteen dollars. That was a lot of money on the side. But, when we did make \$15 or \$16 playing together, I'd get maybe two bits and Dad got the rest. Finally, I told my mom that I was going to quit playing with him. I said, "I ain't even makin' enough money to buy guitar strings, and I don't have any decent strings on my instrument." She laughed and asked what I was going to do. I told her I didn't know, but I knew I wasn't going to play with him anymore.

I knew it would be hard to try to make it as a musician. At the same time, it was easy figuring I was going to make it and even easier figuring I had to make it! It took me about as long as a short piece of rope to figure out that playing music was easier than picking cotton. It wasn't that I was lazy either, because when it came to playing the fiddle I wasn't lazy in any way. I went out on my own and got a few country dances. Then, I went down to Gainesville to live with my sister, Stella, and her husband while I made up my mind what I was going to do in the music business. Her husband had a fiddle and he let me use it. I was left-handed, but left-handed fiddle playing looked odd to me so I stayed with a right-handed fiddle. I had it in my mind that I was old enough to play in some kind of band. Dad ripsnorted around for a little while. He still wanted me to work the farm and play guitar at dances with him. He didn't whip me, but he felt like it I guess. My mom understood, though, and helped convince him that I wasn't going to stay around there.

My sister didn't live very far away from my parents' home, so I was back and forth staying at one place as much as the other. I went to high school in Saint Jo before I quit to help on the farm and play music. When I was in school, I played baseball a lot. I could have had a pretty good future in baseball, but all the time I was playing music, as well. I couldn't have continued with both. When I told my sister that I thought I was a pretty good musician, she said she knew a kid named Red who lived out in the country and played well. He was about thirteen, also, and she thought we'd make a nice team. I got together with him and we played some country dances.

One night Red couldn't go, so I got a blind boy to go with me. We went down in the Red River Flat in North Texas to play a country dance. When we got there, an ol' boy told us the best place for us would be over by the window. I didn't know what he meant. We had been playing about an hour and a half when a fight broke out right on the floor. This ol' boy came around with a gun and was bumping and thumping everybody around. He pointed his gun at us and told us to keep right on playing. I said, 'We will!' The fight got rougher. The blind boy went out the window and left me standing there. They got him back inside, though, and we played all night. I was tired. I asked at about five in the morning if we could quit, but that ol' boy wouldn't let us quit until seven o'clock. We made about twelve dollars that we split between us and we never went down there again.

Red and I played all over the country in North Central Texas. His dad went with us about everywhere we went. A few months went by, then Stella suggested I should get away from there and start a dance band named Dave's Dance Demons. I knew I'd like to get a few more boys together and start a band, but Red decided not to continue in the music business. So, I got George Taylor, Red Phillips, Doc Davis, and Jimmy Hampton to work with me.

It took us about two or three months to achieve the kind of band we thought we should have. Two of us kept playing the country dances to keep a little spending money. We called our five-piece band *The North Texas String Band*. That was when I first bought my own fiddle. I got it with a case and a bow for three dollars at a hockshop. It was a good fiddle, and I was proud of it. I used it for a long time.

I was fourteen, and the oldest one of us was sixteen. Back then, you were a grown man at thirteen and you acted like it because you had to get in and compete to make a living. It wasn't easy. You might make a dollar, you might make two or three dollars, or you might not make anything at all. Sometimes we'd make five or six dollars a week. That is where your dream comes in. We'd go to work thinking that maybe we'd have a big crowd and make some money. We wouldn't miss a night, even if it were for twenty-five cents. We'd play a street corner if we couldn't find any other place, instead of sitting home brooding about not having a place to play.

If you were young and energetic, you were going to play. I never thought to give up. I wasn't going to make any more on the farm, even though there I'd get room

and board. But, when you had worked in the cotton field so long it didn't make any difference, you were too tired to eat! I'd always look back and make my statement, 'It sure beats workin' on the farm!'

We booked dance halls, but most of the time we rented halls and held dances. On good nights, we'd pay the rent and then we'd keep the rest of the money taken in at the door. There were more bad incidents than good nights, though, with times like playing washouts or water holes (empty halls), transportation problems, or sometimes just making our rent.

We'd rent an apartment or sometimes a house for ten dollars a month, and the band would all live there. Many of those places didn't have a kitchen so we'd go out to eat, usually hamburgers. You could buy a lot of hamburgers at ten cents apiece. They were big hamburgers and they had a good taste to them, I'll tell you.

There were times when we'd go out and drive around and we'd pull over, jump a fence, and take a watermelon out of some field. One time we saw a patch with nice big watermelons. We didn't want just one. We were hungry and that was our supper for the day. We ran into the patch and got a melon under each arm. When I was coming back, I started through the fence and a shot rang out over my head. It didn't seem high, so I thought maybe they didn't want to just scare me, but they wanted to hit me! I dropped both my melons and they busted all over the bar ditch. We still had about four or five melons, which were more than we could eat. We thought we could eat them, though.

We'd play anywhere we could. Occasionally, we played rodeos. I loved rodeos and I liked to play at them, but it was the most unhandy thing you could do in the music business. There were places that had bandstands and everything set up for a band, but 95% of them didn't have anything for a band. They would put you right out in the center of the arena with one mike, and nine times out of ten that wouldn't work. You had to improvise a lot of working equipment. If there was anything that was hard to use, it was what was called a field arena P.A. set. It echoed back at you. You'd sing one line and the whole line would come back. But still, I loved rodeos. I liked the atmosphere and the action, and they paid good money.

Once we played at a cow pasture rodeo in Nocona, Texas. It was awfully wild. The arena wasn't too good, and the stock was fenced just off of it. Of all the stock that could have gotten out, it had to be the Brahma bulls, and just when we were playing in the center of the arena. There were about seven bulls right out there with us. We headed for the nearest fence and went over it, instruments and all. Two clowns went out for about two minutes, then they were right over that fence with us. It was all right after it was over. We got paid. We had done all we could. We weren't going to try to mix it up with those bulls. They got the whole show!

There was a little radio station in the hotel in Gainesville. The station's broadcast area didn't reach outside of town. In fact, it didn't even cover all of Gainesville. One way people could hear us was out of the hotel window as they were driving

by! We played there for six months. We weren't paid any money, but we could advertise our dances and it gave us experience. We were doing pretty good making two or three dollars each, sometimes five. It wasn't big money, but it was good money. We didn't know how far we could go. We thought that maybe that was all that was possible.

Bob Wills was playing in our back yard. We never knew what nights he was going to be there. Then, we had someone even more popular within traveling distance right down in Fort Worth - Milton Brown. He could knock your props off, if he came into your neighborhood. You'd just cancel what you were doing and go to his dance. He and *The Musical Brownies* played Thursday and Saturday nights at The Crystal Springs Ballroom. He had big crowds right off the bat. He couldn't miss. We got knocked down a time or two listening to other bands that were better than us, but we kept going. We were doing the best we could.

My brothers, Orville and Carl, knew Milton Brown when he was doing his radio show in Fort Worth. They took me to the radio station to meet him. I admired him. He had a great band, one of the best I had ever heard. My favorite fiddle player, Cecil Brower, was in his band. Cecil was the national champion fiddler for five years.

When we went to the station, I also met Milton's brother, Roy Lee Brown. Roy Lee and I became good friends, and we played quite a few engagements together. My band, *The North Texas String Band*, and my two brothers got to open dances when Milton played in Gainesville and Denton. I talked with him as often as I could at the dances, at the ballroom, or at the radio station. One Wednesday night my band and I played Denton, and Milton came by. He was nice as he could be.

Milton told us, "You guys have got to watch this ticket selling business. If you charge fifty cents, you're going to have to pay a state tax. If you charge forty-nine cents, you don't have to pay anything." We took him at his word. He was the boss of everything, so why not? You can't beat that!

In 1935, *Milton Brown & The Musical Brownies* were voted the nation's number one Texas Swing band. There were no other bandleaders that could match what he could do. He was the only bandleader I ever knew who was respected and spoken highly of not only by his own musicians, but by musicians who didn't even work for him. He created with his musicians a style of music that became known as Texas Swing, and later was renamed Western Swing.

He knew what he was looking for with his band and he worked until he got it. They played the kind of music that I liked to play. Two of my most favorite songs that they recorded are *Walbash Blues* and *When I Take My Sugar To Tea*. I was very fortunate to be acquainted with Milton, and to have had an opportunity to work around him.

On April 18, 1936, Milton Brown died as a result of an automobile accident on April 13. I was in Gainesville at the time, and I heard the announcement on the radio.

It hit me hard. It was as if I had lost my last friend in the music business. All at once the person I was patterning my life after wasn't there anymore. That made me more determined than ever to try to carry on his unique style of music. I didn't want to let it die, too. I had lost the person who had inspired my music playing, but I hadn't lost his sounds. They were the sounds that would stick in my mind and give me the direction that my dream would follow.

Roy Lee Brown

"Dave and I were young when we used to go out to the Crystal Springs Ballroom to hear my brother, Milton Brown, sing with his band, *The Musical Brownies*. My other brother, Durwood, was in the band on guitar. I worked a couple of summers during school vacation with the band. I was paid to restring Durwood's guitars when he broke the strings. I learned a lot about the band mostly at home, listening to Milton and Durwood talking with my parents. Milton had a tremendous personality and such charisma. He was a lover of music and an innovator. He was not afraid to try anything. He left *The Light Crust Doughboys'* radio show on a Saturday in September 1932. Then he started on KTAT radio in Fort Worth the following Monday at 2:00 in the afternoon with his own band, *The Musical Brownies*. I am glad there are still people around like Dave Stogner who talk about Milton, who remember him and his music, and know that he was the originator of Western Swing.

Adolph Hofner

"I share Dave Stogner's admiration and appreciation of Milton Brown. Although I never had the pleasure of knowing Milton, he and his band were my big inspiration, too. They played jazz, then, the same as New Orleans Jazz, but without horns. They did it with strings. When Milton created the Texas Swing (Western Swing) sound with his string band, he was all the rage around there as he had the perfect band for Western Swing. Ft. Worth was the heart of where it began, and Milton was the lifeline who opened the roads for other bands to play Western Swing - groups such as *The High Flyers*, *The Tune Wranglers* and *The Texas Wanderers*.

I started my band in 1938, *Adolf Hofner and All The Boys*. It was hard to sell our type of music because of the competition from the big bands. Milton sold, but with us it was a matter of wanting to do it and enjoying it. There was no money to be made then. There were times when we would have baloney for breakfast, lunch and dinner, along with a little bread and soda water. We were on the road, doing a lot of traveling. In fact, sometimes there was no time even to do the laundry. Once one of the guys had ring around the collar so bad that he put white shoe polish on it."

On The Road

I left Texas for a while and went to Duncan, Arizona to play fiddle with my brothers, Orville and Carl. We stayed for a couple of months, but working there wasn't as good as we had been told. When I came back, my band and I went to Ardmore, Oklahoma to audition for a radio show on KVSQ which was the only station between there and Ft. Worth.

We got on the show, but then they all decided they didn't want to stay in Ardmore. They wanted to go back to Texas, but I wanted to be on the radio. I moved into Ardmore and got together a new group that I also called *The North Texas String Band*. We did a daily show on KVSQ. Being on radio was "big time" to us, so we did a lot of playing and we kept busy. We played music the way we were learning it. We played the standard tunes, what everybody else was playing. We all played by ear. None of us could read music, and that was what kept us out of the musicians' union. Tulsa and Oklahoma City had locals, but not for "cowboy musicians." They said you were an act, not musicians, if you couldn't read music.

For my first band, I had used one fiddle, a guitar, a lap guitar (that sounded like steel guitar when you put the mike down to it), a tenor banjo, a piano and a bass. Everybody used a tenor banjo in a string band, but with my second band I was crazy enough to try drums. Using drums in a string band was definitely not common, but drums had a fuller sound. Also, I liked them better than tenor banjo. Lee Goodard was the drummer I used. When I used Lee with the band, I'd tell the listeners that I was putting on a drummer. From the comments I got, the people liked the sound.

My second band consisted of J. D. Sullivan on guitar, Jack Davis on fiddle, Myrtle Davis on piano, Pat Reed on bass, and myself playing fiddle. I had two fiddles, but we were not playing Western Swing. I knew we weren't doing what we should be doing with two fiddles. To work two fiddles together, you have to rehearse them to produce the right sound for it to be Western Swing.

During the year, we traveled back and forth between Oklahoma and Texas. We played in many kinds of situations. Some were pretty rough and some were pretty funny. There were dances where there'd be a 1000 people. It didn't make those people any difference, they were going to get there so they could fight. They didn't pay any attention to what the band was playing, as they would fight to anything. In Binger, Oklahoma, though, you'd never see a fight until after midnight. Binger had the coldest dance hall we ever played. In winter, you'd almost freeze to death. We almost had to wear gloves to play! They would never heat the place before people came in, then it took until after midnight to warm up.

We never played behind chicken wire, but once we were put behind a string net that had been strung up in front of the bandstand. That was in Sunray, Texas, at the roughest dance hall and club we ever played. I thought we were going to need more than that string net. They didn't hire the band for the people to dance, they hired us for them to fight!

That part of Texas had beer and whiskey. There were wet counties and there were dry counties, and Oklahoma had its 3.2 percent beer law. North Texas and Oklahoma had bootleg, too, and the bootleggers did awfully well. In many places, the bootlegging was overlooked since a lot of people were able to find their only good times from a bottle during those hard times. I saw bootleg sold for as little as two bits a pint. You'd just have to look for the guy in the big topcoat, summer or winter.

We played a street dance one time in a town in Texas. We were up on a flatbed truck, high enough to see everything that went on. I saw this ol' gal with a beer bottle crack an ol' boy over the head with it. He just dropped, and then the beer bottles really went to work. Everybody started using them. Instead of drinking the beer, they started clouting people on the head. I thought, 'Boy, we might get it up here!' It went on for about ten minutes, but it seemed longer. You can put a lot of people out with beer bottles in ten minutes. There were people lying all around. We stayed in there and played, though. We needed the money awfully bad, so it was stay and play or not eat.

Once, we played in Terral, Oklahoma. We knew it was rough there before we went in to play. A guy had rented a vacant store building. I wondered how so many people could come out on a Tuesday night in a little town like that. They would dance, and then all at once someone would grab somebody around the neck and they would get into it. About eleven-thirty, I told them over the mike, 'We're goin' to take a little intermission. They're havin' a big gang fight three blocks down the street and we're goin' to watch them.' Boy, everybody darted out the door and headed down there. The place had been jammed with people. When they left, we packed up our instruments real quick, put them in the car, and got out of there. It was a place with a big crowd to make money, but I didn't want to make it that badly. We never did go back there again, and any time we had to pass through we'd just slip by and never stop.

A lot of times were dangerous, and you could get into some pretty bad spots. If you weren't bothering anybody you could get out all right, but if you were bothering anybody you could get into it all right, too. I have seen musicians that would drink heavily and get in brawls. I didn't drink much because I had my mind set on the music business and I knew I couldn't do both. If you are going to drink, you have got to do it right and if you are going to play music, you have got to do it right. It was as simple as that. I figured I had to work and handle the crowd and I had to be wide-awake and ready for them. I went along with that theory all the time. What little drinking I did wouldn't stop me from having my head clear.

We had our times traveling on the road, too. Times that were funny, usually after they were over. One incident was when our car broke down on our way to Pauls Valley, Oklahoma. I don't know how it held together as long as it did. We needed to get to our job because we had to have the money, so we hitchhiked with all our instruments. The first guy that came by had a small flatbed truck. We thought we had better send the guitar player, the bass man, and the drummer since they had more stuff than the rest of us. He said he'd take them right to the dance hall. It was hot, and I imagine they got well-baked.

It was about an hour until we caught a ride with a fellow going to Oklahoma City. He got the idea that he wanted to hear some music, so we got out our instruments. We had to egg the guy on, so we played for him while he drove us to the dance hall. He decided to come and stay for the dance. The other guys had just got there when we did.

The bass man, Pat Reed, said, "I'll never take another ride in my life like that one. I'll just turn around and go back home!" We made ten dollars apiece that night. Pat asked if we could use it for a down payment on a car. He was a humorous guy!

After the dance, we decided there was no use going back for our car then, so we got a ride to Ardmore. This ol' boy had to go down through the Arbuckle Mountains, so he said he'd take us home no problem. We got into his car with all our instruments. The upright bass had us hemmed in, and I wanted out of there as soon as possible. The guy was really taking the crooks and turns. He pulled over once to ask how we were doing. He told us he had taken a short way and had taken it easy! I had a notion to walk, but he finally got us back home. The next day we went out and brought our car back, although it wasn't the one Pat Reed ever wanted to see again. He thought we had gone out to get a new one.

Those times always came up. It was crazy then. If we hadn't been a bunch of young guys, we probably wouldn't have taken it. There were times when most guys would have given up. You had to have nerve and a lot of get-up to stay in the business. It was thin and often bad. There were many good young musicians who could flat play, and they would give it up. They would quit. They knew they didn't want to, but they just couldn't take it. We didn't like it, but we weren't down in the dumps when those things happened. We just had our fun along with whatever we were doing. We didn't have any money, and if you are not going to have any money or any fun you are ready to throw in the towel.

One time in Ardmore, one of the boys hung out four of his colored shirts on the line to dry. I don't know how he got that many, but someone stole all four of them. He came back cursing and said, "I guess they showed me how to get four shirts out of one yard!" Losing four shirts was serious, but about all you could do was laugh about it. He said he still had two clean white shirts, so I told him he'd just have to wear those and figure out a way to keep them clean!

We always wore suit clothes, white shirts, and ties whenever we played. When we got out of our car at places, we wanted to look like we just stepped out of a bandbox because that made fifty percent of the impression on the people. We always had suits of some kind to wear. You could buy pretty good suits from J.C. Penney's for six or seven dollars. We may not have had anything else, but we had that.

In Oklahoma once, I let a guy talk me into going to Hollywood. He was a fiddle player and couldn't get a job. He told me I was good, and I thought going to Hollywood was a fine idea. I decided there was too much work there for *The Sons of the Pioneers* to do it all! So, I took my fiddle, two suits of clothes, four white shirts, and got on a bus headed for Hollywood. It kind of dawned on me while I was riding along in that bus, 'I wonder who got my job?'

In Hollywood they had agents, but I had it all figured out just how I was going to do it. I'd just pick up a telephone and call and get a job. I called the owner of

Monogram Pictures. I never got to talk to him. I never got to talk to anyone. I went all over Hollywood and Los Angeles. There were horn bands and some let me sit in with them. One leader said I sure was a fiddle player, then he asked how come I was in Hollywood? I told him that I was sent out here by an ol' boy who said I was good enough. The bandleader said, "Well, you would be if we had that kind of music out here."

I don't know if a person does those things just to prove it to himself, or if it's because you think you are so good. I did know to save enough money to get back home. It took me two weeks to go to Hollywood and come back. That same ol' boy who had told me to go was playing fiddle in Oklahoma City in my place. He asked, "Didn't you get a job out there?" I answered, 'You couldn't buy a job out there!' I decided to let him keep that job and I went to Waurika, Oklahoma, where my parents had moved. I guess you had to weigh things out and learn from these experiences.

Sometimes I'd get jobs other than playing music, but I didn't stay away long. I always kept my foot in the music business door. One job I got was at a chicken hatchery in Waurika. I wasn't there long before I talked the boss, James London, into sponsoring a band. I got my group, *The North Texas String Band*, together again. We changed our name to *The Chick-A-Dees*. We drove all over Southwestern Oklahoma going to stores he owned where he had chickens. We played those places and also played a regular dance schedule.

In 1937, the boss bought radio time in Wichita Falls, Texas on KWFT at 6:30 A.M. on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, so that we could advertise his chickens. He also hired Joe Holley to work with us. Joe was the fastest left-handed fiddle player that I knew of. In fact, I always said he was the world's fastest fiddle player. He could play up a storm! He was a natural, self-taught musician who had been working with different bands - *The Range Riders*, *The High Flyers* and *The Crystal Springs Ramblers*.

While we were on KWFT, the boss wouldn't let us play any more dances. He just wanted us to advertise his chickens on the radio. There were no tapes in those days, so we had to squeeze the chickens' necks to make them chirp loud enough to be heard on the air. You had to be careful, those chicks could really mess up a pair of boots! I'd hold them up by the neck and make them chirp into the microphone so people could hear those real chickens and want to go out and order some. That guy sold all his chickens!

For us, though, there wasn't any money in working for the chicken hatchery without the dance schedule. We didn't seem to be getting any better, either, and we weren't accomplishing anything. Nothing was egging us on. I finally decided to leave and go out and learn what Western Swing music was all about. I told the others they could go home or anywhere else they wanted. Joe Holley went back to Fort Worth to work. The next time I heard from Joe, he was with Bob and Johnny Lee Wills. He worked with them a long time, until he moved to California to stay.

Western Swing was created by using two fiddles, piano and steel guitar. It was a little different from what most bands were playing. I wanted to learn everything about it, and how it could be done. I still carried those sounds with me, sounds that only Milton Brown had been able to create. I wanted to learn Western Swing in a way that it would be right, because if I did it right maybe something good would happen to me. If I had that fiddle under my chin and there were two people out in front of me, I was happy. But, I knew I'd be happier with a thousand people.

I first decided to go up to Tulsa to mess around a little bit. I had a lot of free time then. In Tulsa, I had a chance to be around *Bob Wills and The Texas Playboys*. I'd first become acquainted with Bob when he was with *The Light Crust Doughboys* in Fort Worth. I admired him and I liked his music. While I was in Tulsa, I went on three or four trips with them and played my fiddle.

I sat down to talk with Bob once during an intermission at a dance they were playing. When the intermission was over the band went back to play, but he stayed and talked for another thirty minutes. He told me to come to work for him in Tulsa and see if I liked his setup. He'd had the Texas Playboys for about three years, and at that time had only six or seven musicians.

I didn't want to stay in just one place and work for someone. I was young and I still wanted to learn, and eventually have my own band. I always liked Bob and he was a lasting influence on me. He did so much over the years to keep the roads open for guys like me, and I for one appreciated that. We continued to cross paths. We'd meet after a dance in some cafe. We'd sit and talk for hours. Musicians did this all the time, then.

In Texas and Oklahoma, there were a number of bands. Usually, you'd run into some of them coming off a job from various dance halls. We all seemed to pick the same cafes. We'd talk about music and everything. It was fun, and you could gain experience from talking with other musicians this way.

I went from band to band. They all played a little differently. I liked this one and that one. I couldn't be in all of them, but I thought I could. I thought the more bands I could work with, the more I could find out about Western Swing music. I wouldn't stay with a band more than a few months. I wanted to learn all I could. I didn't want to copy anyone. Standing up there on the bandstand, you might imagine you are someone you are not - I am Milton Brown or I am Kay Keyser. But you should just be yourself, and if people like it they will buy it. If they don't, they won't. The first band I went to work for after leaving Wichita Falls was *The Arkansawyers* in Oklahoma City on WKY radio. Then, I was lucky enough to play with *Billie's Melody Five (All Eleven of Us)*. Playing with an eleven-piece band gave me an idea of what a big band was and what you had to do.

Next I worked for Little Doc Wheeler who did medicine shows. He paid three dollars a night seven days a week with Sunday off, but I got paid for it. He'd rent a vacant lot in town, set up six or seven hundred chairs and use a trailer that

opened up into a stage. He had thirteen people in the show. He sold Am-ergo tonic for a dollar a bottle. After a while with Doc Wheeler, I worked with Jack Loney's band. I liked that bunch. After all the traveling with the medicine show, I decided I liked it that they just worked one place, Fred's Old Barn in Amarillo.

I played some jobs with *The Light Crust Doughboys*, occasionally. For about a month, I played some engagements with Bob Wills' cousin, *Son Lanceford and The Flying Dutchmen*. One night after we played in Dalhart, Texas, we got halfway between there and Dumas where there was nothing but tumbleweed. It was snowing, and we went as far as that old bus would go until it stopped and froze up. An ol' boy came along in a pickup and said he'd take us to Dumas. There was nothing colder than riding in the back of that pickup. When we got to Dumas, all they had to do was stand us up against something because we were frozen stiff!

We asked a service station man if he had a wrecker. He answered back, "Sure, I've got a wrecker!" So we asked what it would cost for him to go get our bus. He said about five dollars, but he'd have to get his boy in to work first. I told him he didn't have to call anybody, that I could run his gas pumps while he got the bus. He got the bus all right, but it was daylight before it thawed. We made it into Amarillo about thirty minutes before it was time to do a radio show.

I used to think that when the big bands came through they had wonderful transportation, but they didn't have anything better than we did. It was a case of let's get up and down the highway if we can. Musicians held up all right during breakdowns, and times like that. It went with the business. Wally Walker was with us on that bus. He was a polished entertainer, so good on the bandstand. He played the fiddle and sang at the same time, and never missed a beat. I told him he was going to be "big time" one of these days, not to worry a bit about it. He said, "I hope it ain't ridin' around like this!"

He suggested that he and I go to Lubbock, Texas. I'd play the guitar and he'd play the fiddle for an act. I couldn't play the guitar very well, but I went. I had trained myself to be a dance band man. I didn't like just fiddle and guitar, so when I decided to leave Wally got a guitar player named Gene Sullivan to join him. They went down south of Fort Worth, started a show, and really cleaned up. Then Wally went to Oklahoma City and really cleaned up there, too. He recorded *When My Blue Moon Turns to Gold Again*, that Gene Sullivan and I had written with him. He also recorded *Live and Love*, and a bunch of songs that were big sellers.

In June 1939 I went to work for *The Sons of the West* in Amarillo. When I went to the audition, I thought to myself, 'Dave, how good do you think you are?' I thought that if I worked with *The Sons of the West* I'd have to be pretty darn good. When I took the audition, I think I must have played better than I ever had because they gave me a job. Jimmy Meeks was the leader, with Pat Trotter, Loren Mitchell, Slick Robertson and myself. We did a radio show at Cal Farley's dry goods store. We broadcasted from the store everyday at twelve-thirty in the afternoon, and we also had a road schedule. I remember playing one night when the crowd was getting rough. Jimmy said he hoped they didn't pick on us, or he was going to make them a new door in the bandstand! I said, 'I'm going to follow

you, if I'm not there first!

The fun times and rough times happened anywhere I went. I crossed paths with numerous musicians and tried many different setups. I still had one thing. I had a dream and sometimes a dream is all you have going for you. I carried that dream right along with me.

Joe Holley

"I was thirteen when I started practicing on the fiddle. I'd been playing everything I could get my hands on since I was five, so learning fiddle playing was just natural with me. By the time I was sixteen, I got my first job with The Range Riders, and was paid \$9.00 a week. When I was with *The Crystal Springs Ramblers* in Fort Worth, I made about \$12.00 to \$13.00 a week. Then, I got the chicken hatchery job with Dave and received \$14.00 a week. You could say there was no money to be made in the music business then, but like Dave, I was a self-taught musician and I too, was out there to listen to everyone I could, especially the fiddle players.

After the chicken hatchery job, I went back to Fort Worth and played fiddle with *Ocie Stockard and The Wanderers* at the Blackstone Hotel. Art Satherly, of Columbia Recording Company, was recording us in the WBAP studio in the hotel when Bob Wills came into the studio. Bob was in Fort Worth to record for Columbia. He heard me playing and hired me. I joined the Wills clan February 4, 1941. At first, Bob hired me for his brother's band - *Johnny Lee Wills and All The Boys*. Then, over the next ten years, I played for both of them off and on. It was good working with either Johnny or Bob, but Bob had something no one else had. He put life on the bandstand when he walked on. He was a showman and a leader. He could get full capacity-plus from his band. I first traveled to Fresno with Bob in 1945, then some years later I decided to make my home there."

Transitions

For most of 1940, I worked with bands between Amarillo and Wichita Falls. I was on the road moving from place to place. The places weren't always what you'd call pleasant. One time, I had to share a room at a motor court with a fiddle player I had met. He smelled so bad! He never took a bath. He complained that his feet always irritated him. Because I had to stay with him, I told him that I knew he had athlete's foot and that I could cure him. I had him take off his shoes, then I took a box of salt and I poured it across both of his feet. By the time I poured the salt across his second foot, he was headed for the bathhouse out in the yard, running like a wild man. Besides having a little fun, I cured him! He started taking showers after that!

In 1941, I enlisted in the United States Marines because I knew it was only a matter of time until I'd be drafted. I wrote on my enlistment papers that I did construction work and that I was good at it. I had decided to rest from playing music, so I didn't say I was an entertainer. I was called into the O.D.'s (officer of the day) office after I finished boot camp. He said, "Stogner, you didn't tell the whole truth. You didn't tell us you were an entertainer." I told him I didn't want to entertain for a while, that I wanted to rest from it. He told me, "You rest until

tomorrow night. You go to the barracks and find four or five guys and get ready to play a private party." I put together a six-piece string band. From then on, that was all we did. We played at officers clubs, mostly. We'd travel from San Diego to places as far away as San Francisco. We didn't play overseas. I was in the Marines for three years and I just stayed in California.

My parents had moved to California and were living in San Francisco. My father was working in the shipyards. Three of my sisters and brothers had also moved to the San Francisco Bay Area. After I left the service, I went back to Amarillo to see *The Sons of the West*. Everybody had left, though, just like I had. I returned to California, moved in with my parents, and went to work in the shipyards, too. I was supposed to be a pipefitter, but there were so many others doing that job I didn't have to do much. It seemed there were more people than jobs.

While I worked, I planned out what I wanted to do in the music business. Because so many people had moved from the Midwest to work in defense jobs, Country music had become prevalent in the Bay Area. So, to get my feet back on the ground, I went to work for *Elwin Cross and the Arizona Wranglers*. Elwin had a big band, but used only one fiddle. He had a lot of guitars and five string banjos.

While I was with Elwin's band, I met and became good buddies with Bill Woods. He was just out of high school. Bill was from Texas and had been living in California for a few years. We started right out being friends. He was a guy I could understand. We worked mostly at the Moose Hall in downtown Richmond until we both quit and got a little group of our own for a while. I named our group *The Arkansawyers*. We wore striped overalls and white shirts and we thought we were really dressed for the occasion!

Bill kept the group together when I left, then he eventually moved to Bakersfield. He became successful there. His instrument is lead guitar, but he can play several other instruments and play them well. Over the years, we have crossed paths and have met to play together. We meet, sit down, and he starts making jokes about everything. He is quite a guy to be around and he just has a way about him. He never does say anything bad about any entertainer. If he doesn't think much about someone he might not talk very long on the subject, but he won't say anything bad. We have remained good friends.

After leaving Bill and *The Arkansawyers*, I went to work for *Wade Ray and The Rhythm Riders*, a thirteen-piece band. We had four or five different western-cut uniforms with boots and hats to wear when we performed. We played all over the Bay Area. We played Maple Hall in San Pablo on Friday and Saturday nights and at East Shore Park on Sundays. Wade Ray's rival was Dude Martin. They always talked about who was going to draw the most people. Then, during WWII, every band drew a crowd. If you had a dance hall and had it open, you were going to draw a crowd. You couldn't miss with so many people employed by the shipyards. They worked in day and night shifts, so there were always enough Country Western fans available to fill up the dance halls.

I got all the knowledge I could from the bands I had worked with through the years. I kept it in my head until I could use it to organize my own Western Swing band. By 1944, I felt I was ready to do this. My ear knew the sound I had to have and the sound I wanted. I was gambling, but I was going to do it. Even though during World War II it was hard to find musicians that amounted to anything, I was lucky. I got Jed Derusho, Sid Wollver, John Texari, Art Amaril, Pauline Graves, Jimmy Peterson, Bob Rodgers, Bob Thompson, and a couple of horn players that I used occasionally. These musicians were all from the shipyards and they were all good players.

I had two fiddles, a piano, a steel guitar, drums, rhythm guitar, a bass, and to make it sound full I added horns - trombone, trumpet, saxophone and clarinet. Now I had my own Western Swing band, and I named it *Dave Stogner and The Western Rhythmairs*. It was the kind of Western Swing band you'd dream of putting together.

Bob Wills had pioneered Western Swing right through to California on his traveling tours. Spade Cooley had a big Western Swing band, but others would put together a Western Swing band, have it a month or two, then wouldn't be able to keep it going. They just couldn't get a large enough band that could play Western Swing. They might have the right instrumentation with at least two fiddles, steel and piano, but couldn't get the true sound. They would try playing Western Swing, but neglected to find the right musicians.

I started on a small scale with eight musicians. That was the lightest I felt I could go to do it right. We started making our own arrangements. We all played by ear and had it in our heads how we wanted to sound, so if we got close to that we let it go. We were not playing Country music or Country Western. We were playing Western Swing. When you have the right instrumentation on the bandstand and the right musicians, you know you have the right stuff. I worked hard with this group to come up with the sound I carried with me, that Milton Brown sound. I lived with that sound, so I knew what I wanted. I just couldn't quite get it with this band. I liked what I had, though, so I settled for that.

I joined Local 424 of the musicians' union in Richmond. It wasn't required that I take a test to see if I could read music. Later, I transferred to San Francisco Local 6. There, I had to take a bandleader's test. I performed with my band in front of some people who were considered experts in the musicians' union. San Francisco had only Pop bands, but these people understood what I was trying to do with my band.

I started having clothes made for the whole band by N. Turk Western Clothier in Hollywood. We played three nights a week in Richmond at Sterling Hall, capacity 1200. We had crowds. We packed them in. Gas wasn't plentiful, so people rode buses. The bus stopped right in front of the box office. We got a percentage of the door and a guarantee of an amount that was more than union scale at that time. There were some big promoters out of Oakland who came over and heard us one night. They said they could keep us busy from then on, as long as we wanted to work. I said, 'I'll work as long as I'm here, but I don't know how long that will be.'

After the war was over and the shipyards closed down, people were going back to their home states leaving the Richmond area thinly populated. Not many Country music or Western Swing fans were left. In 1946, I left Richmond and went to Fresno. I had checked around there before that. It was a good size town and had several small towns around it.

I jumped on with a band there and went to Tulare to a show on KCOK radio, a 500-watt station. The group only lasted a couple of months, but I stayed on KCOK with a guitar player named Bill Mounce. We were called *Tom and Jerry*. When he left, I needed someone to take his place. It wasn't hard to find musicians. If you were heard on the radio, they would show up to audition any way it went. If you were bad, they figured you needed musicians. If you were good, they wanted to work for you. It was hard sometimes to find good musicians, though.

I had talked with my mother and she told me that my brother, J.B., was picking peaches on the Tagus Ranch. I went out there to find him to see how he was doing. He said he was barely making a living, so I told him what I had and asked him if he wanted to join with me. He said he did, so the two of us became *Tom and Jerry*. We didn't play very well. In fact, we sounded so bad I don't know how we stayed on that radio show. We were on at six-thirty in the morning for about six months, then switched to midday.

We started playing theaters around the San Joaquin Valley. On Friday and Saturday we'd add some musicians and play dances, too. Once we got our act together we even received fan mail, 500 to 600 cards a day. Everywhere we went we had people lined up to get in. Back then, though, you could go out in the parking lot and start up a truck and everyone would start dancing. They thought that was the rhythm! Those days were odd.

Once while I was at KCOK, Roy Acuff was playing a show at the fairgrounds. To Country Western fans he was a big favorite on The Grand Ole Opry, as well as the rodeo, concert, and county fair circuits. He came into the station and I interviewed him on the radio. He told me I should remember one thing, "No matter what people say, as long as they are talking about you saying your name, that is just one more time your name gets mentioned whether it is good or bad." He told me if I remembered that, I'd always do better.

I did want to have people talking about me in the right places, but I preferred the good talk. To make our act better, I added four musicians and formed a new group. Now, I had J.B., Kelly Posey, Bruce Pillow, Burl Chenoworth, and Virgil Thompson - *Tom and Jerry and The Oklahoma Troubadores*. Sheldon Anderson, KCOK owner, came up with that name. We practiced three hours everyday at the radio station and we did sound pretty good. We drew big crowds in theaters.

A friend of mine had a tent theater that he'd move every month or so to another town. He always did a big booming business doing that. He played us opening night, then three or four other nights that he was in town. We played a lot of

dances traveling from town to town. The bad part of that was the nights we had rough traveling in the tule fog that is so common in that area. You'd think we could have memorized the roads, but we couldn't see anything; not even the hood of the car, sometimes. There was often zero visibility, so we'd have to drive ten miles per hour to get back home.

The crowds we were having were all right, but when you stay in a place too long you see it taper off. It's a good idea to make your move before it drops off. I had a friend named Curly Cochran who lived in Los Angeles. I had been to visit him. He told me he knew a club owner who'd offer me a job if I came to audition for him. I felt L.A. was the place to go, so I went to see the club owner and auditioned. He liked my work and gave me a job. I worked four nights and two afternoon swing shifts.

The club owner couldn't get enough people who were able to play different instruments. Since I could, I'd play bass one night, guitar one night, then fiddle the next two nights. On Saturday and Sunday, during the day, I did a one-man show, playing guitar and singing. I was young and I thought it was fun doing that show by myself. I was off on Saturday and Sunday nights, except when one of the bandleaders chose those nights to get drunk. He'd call and ask me to work in his place, so the work schedule got kind of rough.

I had another good friend in Los Angeles. His name was Jimmy Childress and he was also a fiddle player. He and I wrote a song titled *Tulsa Baby*. Our idea was to have Bob Wills and Tommy Duncan, who was singing for Bob then, record it. I had known Tommy for years, since the time I had met him in Fort Worth with Bob and his Texas Playboys. We were sure they would do it, and we would make some money. Tommy said he'd like to, but soon after that he went out on his own so he didn't pursue it. I recorded it the next year on the Morgan label. I did it with a five-piece band, but it needed a big band. It was a big band song, a Bob Wills type tune.

I finally decided I'd had it in L.A., so I moved back to Fresno and stayed there for the next sixteen years. Those sixteen years became the most memorable and valued years of my career.

Bill Woods

"I found out that once a friend of Dave Stogner you're always a friend, through thick and thin. We met in 1943, so any way you figure it we've been friends for a long time. Dave always had an ear for good talent. There never has been much said about Dave helping up-and-coming artists, so I'd like to go on record for saying that he has helped a lot of people in the business, including me. We love him. Besides all that, he's one helluva fiddle player and country singer. I'd describe his fiddle playing as Country Jazz style. His specialty is dance music and he can play notes on his fiddle like what saxophone or horn players would play on their horns. As for his singing I can say that Dave Stogner's unique style of singing was way ahead of its time. After having listened to Dave sing since the early forties, the first time I heard Willie Nelson in the early fifties fronting Ray Price's band, with Roger Miller playing fiddle, I thought to myself that Willie Nelson

must have heard Dave sing because he sounded just like him. When I was on tour with Tommy Duncan in 1949 and with Merle Haggard in 1972 in Texas and Arkansas, several old timers, name musicians, asked me about Dave Stogner. Whenever the names W. Lee O'Daniel, Bob Wills, Adolf Hofner or Milton Brown are mentioned, the old timers remember Dave. If he ever wanted to go back big in the music business, he could certainly teach some of today's musicians and bandleaders how to be professional. He did not ever become a millionaire (although he came close at one time), but I know he'll always be a rich man when it comes to friends and talent."

The Big Fresno Barn

I drove into Fresno at night pulling a mobile home. The next morning I went out to the clubs to find a job. The owner at the first club I went to hired me. I phoned Bruce Pillow and asked him and his sister, Mary, to join me. We drew the first crowd that place had in a long time with me on fiddle, Mary on fiddle, and Bruce on guitar. They didn't dance, and to draw a crowd without dancing was hard to do.

I also went to radio station KSJV in Sanger and got an early morning show playing Country Western records. I hadn't done disc jockey work before, but I figured I could do it. So, I learned by doing it. Eventually, Kelly Posey joined with Bruce and me. Then, the three of us worked the club circuit for about three months. Country Western music had gained in popularity, but every crossroad didn't have a Country Western band playing in some club. There weren't many of them and there were very few Country Western musicians in the musicians' union. I encouraged all of them I knew to join. It gave our kind of bands and musicians a higher standing.

One night, a fellow came into the club where we were playing and wanted to hire us for the Cozy Inn. I told him what we wanted to be paid and that if he could meet it to call me. He complained that it was double the standard, but we signed a contract and went to work the next Tuesday night. The inn seated 240 people, and we filled it up Tuesday through Sunday, every week. I kept working at that place, continued the radio show as a disc jockey, and started a little dance band. I was also doing personal appearances that were paying well. I thought to myself, 'You're doing all right, stay with it!'

In 1950, Mrs. Izette Davis, the owner of The Big Fresno Barn, sent her representative to see me to ask me to work there. I had been to The Barn. The building had been moved to its location in the country, four miles west of Highway 99, and converted to a dance hall with a capacity of 2000 people. It had no air conditioning, something to be considered with Fresno's temperatures typically ranging in the 100s during the summer, but the side windows could be dropped down about three feet to circulate the air.

It had a genuine hardwood dance floor that was one of the best in California. There was plenty of seating all the way around the place with bench seats and chairs along the walls, and booths and tables. The bandstand was built in the

center of the south wall with stairs to the side of it. The offices and restrooms were on the east wall near the main entrance. There was one small dressing room down a short hallway on the east side. There was a bar area on the north wall. The ceiling was just what you'd expect inside an old wooden barn. It had large wood rafters, and big space heaters were spread out in them to heat the place in the winter.

Local bands played there, but they were only averaging about 125 people. They were charging \$1.00 per person admission, minors welcomed. They had a concession stand that served hot dogs, hamburgers and soft drinks. I knew it would take some work with advertising and promoting, but the place had potential.

In two weeks, we had a deal that suited me. I signed a union contract with Mrs. Davis to work every Saturday night, every other Wednesday night, and every New Year's Eve for a percentage of the door. We raised the admission to \$1.50 per person and \$3.00 when we worked guest acts. The small dressing room wasn't good for much more than a 'drinking room', so we eventually opened a beer room there. Mrs. Davis provided a room in her home behind The Barn for entertainers to use as a dressing room. She was a nice lady to do business with.

The first two Saturday nights my dance band played, we drew our smallest crowds. We had from 600 to 800 people, and then it went up from there. When I saw that there was going to be such large crowds, it didn't take me long to realize I was ready to start putting together a Western Swing band again. I wanted a band like the one I had in Richmond. It was a hard decision to start a big band, but the time was right.

No one had played Fresno with Western Swing to make it pay off as I thought it would. I had listened to everyone on local radio. I went to listen to other bands that played in the area. I didn't hear one that was playing what I had in mind as my goal. They weren't drawing very big crowds, either. Those bands just couldn't put it together, and I knew what they were doing wrong. I had the years of experience and I had gathered the knowledge while I was making a living. I said to myself, 'O.K. I'll make it and I'll reach my goal right here.'

I already had Bruce Pillow on rhythm guitar and Kelley Posey on lead guitar. Mary Pillow agreed to play fiddle. Delbert Keplinger, a good entertainer I had met in Tulare, joined us on rhythm guitar. I got Rudy Farmer, a steel man I liked, and Pat Marchese, a Fresno native, on drums. There was a piano player and a bass player I had wanted for so long. The piano player was Herman "Schmitty" Schmith. He was working for Elwin Cross. I wrote him, asking him to come. He answered that he would, but it would be a couple of weeks. Leon Carter was the bass man. He was working for Elwin, too, and he said yes when I asked him to join us. I was lucky to get them. Once again, I had a Western Swing band named *Dave Stogner and The Western Rhythmaires*.

As a bandleader, I approached the public in a casual and friendly way. I never gave them the impression that I was better than they were. I never figured I was

better than the people who paid their money to see me and to see my band. I used several approaches for opening shows, along with our opening theme song – ‘Hello friends and neighbors, how do you do? We’re here to play and sing and we hope we bring some happiness to you.’ I’d introduce the band using humorous one-liners that the audience could get a little fun out of it.

If I was in the mood and there was a good crowd, I’d talk for ten or fifteen minutes. It was all ad-libbed. To introduce each song I’d say a little something, but I’d keep it light and put some fun into it, as well. I sang, and so did Delbert and Leon. Then, one Saturday night, I got a call from Tommy Duncan. He had left Bob Wills a long time before and was working out of Fresno. He asked, “How about me singing with you guys?” He started doing personal appearances with us when he wasn’t on the road. We usually had a singer who wasn’t one of the musicians on regularly with us. We’d have a loose schedule of songs so that we could work in requests, but we kept the music going steadily.

During our first year, we cut our first record on the Morgan label. I wrote and arranged a song titled *Jukebox Love*. The flipside, *Hard Top Race*, I co-wrote with two women, Van Zant & Morgan. It had good sales in California, but not outside the state. I wrote another song recorded on the Morgan label titled *Everything Happens To Me*. It’s my favorite of the songs I have written. I felt it was a simple song for people to understand or relate to, and it matched their feelings at the time that I wrote it. That song was released at the same time as *Hard Top Race*. It wasn’t pushed as much, so it didn’t get a lot of play on the radio. We recorded our biggest seller, *Big Yellow Moon*, in 1951 on Fairway/King Records. None of these were Western Swing, though, because they were not recorded with two fiddles.

Once I had the nucleus of the band, I added musicians one at a time. We were good, but I wanted to be better. In the band business, I have been a person who is always looking for a musician I can add to make my band have a better and fuller sound. A fiddle player named Red Belt had replaced Mary Pillow. Then, when he left in 1953 I added Joe Holley on fiddle. I was lucky to get him, too. He gave me the Western Swing sound I needed because he’s an exceptional fiddler and had played for so many years with Bob and Johnny Lee Wills. I played lead fiddle and he played harmony behind the lead. He always said, “You just play me a good strong lead, and I’ll do the rest!” Rudy Farmer went into the service, so I got Jack Ansel to replace him. Jack had once been with a Fresno group called *Curly Roberts and The Valley Rangers*.

I auditioned some horn players and I listened to some in other bands. I was crazy about horns in a string band. In Richmond, I had used horns and I tried it in Fresno. I added Kenny Cannon on trombone and I got Alex Brashear on trumpet. Alex was the only horn I kept because I couldn’t get enough horns to do what I wanted. I couldn’t get the right sound. If I could have gotten the horns, Alex could have done the arranging because nobody could arrange music better than he could. He had done all the horn arrangements for Bob Wills in Tulsa.

Our music was all arranged. No one could just sit in with us. We did have guest stars that would rehearse with us. We did less rehearsing than probably anyone,

though. We just felt a tune and we played it. By the time we went through it one time, we had it. That is how it was playing together on the bandstand year after year. We'd take about five minutes learning something new and we'd make it sound the way we wanted. I didn't want us to sound like anybody else's band. We had our own style. I had mostly Texas/Oklahoma musicians with their own style, and they stayed with it. We did as Little Jimmy Dickens always said, "Learn by let'er. Just rear back and let'er fly!"

I had some of the finest musicians that could be hired in my band. I paid them top money, more than any band member in the Country or Pop field. They were professional about what they were doing and they wanted a good band. They weren't only good musicians, but also good people to be with and to work with. I never had any trouble with them.

Each one shared the responsibilities of keeping the band functioning. Leon took care of our uniforms. Jack took care of the fan mail. Joe and I would make up the arrangements. Everyone was making the band what it was. It's impossible to improve on the best, but I was still looking. I was an explorer, always seeking a certain sound. Most of them had grown up on Milton Brown and Bob Wills, so I knew with them I could get very close to that sound I wanted.

I had thought that when I put my big band together it might release some tension from me doing personal appearances, being on the road and with things in general. I figured it would all fall into place so I wouldn't have to work as hard, but it never does that. There are always situations that come up that can cause a few "headaches." There were small headaches, such as, the bandleader has to be in all the places at the right time. He has to be the person to iron out all the pet peeves and to solve any problems that might come up with his band members. Also, he has to be the one to ride along on occasion in the back of the car playing poker whether he feels like it or not!

There were a few bigger headaches in that I could never find anyone sincere enough to be my business manager. I felt the person doing the work of a business manager had to be the most sincere person in the band. He is the first and last in contact with the people, and must have respect for everyone working in the band. I wouldn't tie myself up with a booking agency, either. It was easier for me to be my own business manager and do my own bookings than to worry about what someone else might or might not be doing, even though doing this still created all the tensions I had hoped to get away from.

We usually always did one-night engagements, which required a lot of booking work. I either telephoned or I took a couple of hours to drive to a place. Dance hall operators up and down the line, whether they knew me or not, wanted to think they knew me, so that made it a little easier to set up jobs. One-nighters were backbreakers, too, as we were always having to load and unload instruments, P.A. sets, etc. Usually, we had somebody to do it for us. Johnny Russell will say, "Yeah, I was that somebody!" Johnny started singing with us when he was thirteen. He did comedy, too, and became a very fine Country Western entertainer and songwriter. He even wrote a song about me titled *Hey,*

Mr. Fiddle Man.

Besides The Barn, I think every town in the San Joaquin Valley had a dance hall and we played them all. We played in small towns, but people from other towns would come, as well, so we'd have large audiences. We had a lucrative dance schedule. We played dances every night, but Monday. Advertising did it. I had the band and the publicity, and with that I became a celebrity.

If business is good, you should reward your audiences. You should give them something extra once in a while by bringing in some other entertainers. This is so they will know you appreciate them. A good club owner knew to do this for customers who had built his club and a good bandleader knew to do this. I'd often book guest acts to appear with us at The Barn. I wanted to reward the people who made it what it was. The guest acts would usually have two forty-five minute spots during the evening.

I also booked entertainers at the Fresno Auditorium and other dance halls throughout the Valley. I used people who I knew would draw good crowds at the dance halls in Hanford, Layton, Merced, etc. Any of The Grand Ole Opry acts would draw crowds. Bob Wills was always a good drawing card as well as Pee Wee King and Hank Thompson. They had big Western Swing bands, and sometimes I'd play my fiddle with them or we'd have double band shows.

Dave Stogner and The Western Rhythmairs didn't need guest acts to draw crowds. Our record at The Barn was New Year's Eve, 1956. People were wall to wall. They could hardly budge! We beat *Bob Wills and The Texas Playboys'* record for the largest dance crowd with this one - 2141 people.

We had capacity crowds everywhere we played. As in Texas and Oklahoma, sometimes there were rough crowds, but I could fake being drunk and act as rough as they were. They wouldn't bother us. We had nights such as one at the ITLO American Lodge in Merced. There was such a large crowd that the place was overfilled and some people couldn't get in. They were determined to see us and got rowdy when we pulled up. They reached out and grabbed our clothes and shouted, "I touched him!" Most of our crowds were pretty friendly, so we were usually available for autographs after our shows. Also, everywhere we went we sold photographs of the band and myself.

In 1954, my band was voted the number one Western Swing band on the West Coast. We continued to be voted #1 for the next four years; until this distinction was no longer given.

Leon Carter

"I moved to Fresno, California, with my family during the 1930s from Oklahoma. Music was part of my family heritage. Everyone in my family played musical instruments. My inspiration to become a bass player came from my brother. His rhythm on the bass wasn't so good. I had to take over so it would sound right! In Fresno, I joined the musicians' union and played at the Fresno Memorial

Auditorium and The Big Fresno Barn. We played Pop then because Country Western wasn't very popular. Once Dave Stogner came along, things changed. I told Dave in 1949; "One of these days you are going to make my living for me!" I went to work for Dave. He was a taskmaster and really worked us. He became the best friend I have ever had."

Joe Holley

"After leaving Bob Wills, I had my own group for a while. Then I worked with *Curly Roberts and The Valley Rangers* on KMJ-TV, Channel 24. All along I knew Dave there, and in 1953, I had the opportunity to go to work for him. Because of my background in Western Swing, he gave me bandleader responsibilities as well as having me play fiddle. I had never worked with Milton Brown, but I had patterned my playing after the styles of Milton's fiddlers, Cecil Brower and Cliff Bruner. Cecil played smooth and Cliff played hot, so I learned a lot from each one. When I was with Dave and *The Western Rhythmairs*, we wanted to sound as much as we could like *Milton Brown and The Musical Brownies*. We couldn't be the same, although Dave was pretty good singing Milton Brown type songs!"

Al Brumley Jr.

"In the late 1950s, I had the great pleasure of being the lead vocalist for *Dave Stogner and The Western Rhythmairs*. I had a wonderful time working with Dave for three years before moving on to Bakersfield. When I was with him, we performed on KMJ-TV. I also recorded a couple of singles for him on 4-Star Records that regionally got a lot of air play. In looking back to those years, I remember Dave as always smiling and always having a kind word for everyone. He was a true gentleman and I respected him very much. He kept Western Swing music alive on the West Coast after the Bob Wills days. Although I never met Bob personally, I knew that all the old Wills band members respected Dave. Some of them also performed in his band.

Nashville West

The Fresno Barn became the number one music spot in the San Joaquin Valley. There we averaged 1500 to 2000 people every dance. It was where Nashville wanted to book acts in California. The Hubert Long Agency booked most of the acts that came out of Nashville. We booked all of The Grand Ole Opry acts that came to California. We could have been called Nashville West. The Opry acts said they liked to play The Barn just to listen to us. I worked with other booking agents including Sam Gibbs out of Wichita Falls, who booked *Bob Wills and The Texas Playboys* with us a number of times.

I also brought young artists into The Barn to help promote them. I had worked hard doing my own promoting when I was starting, but out on the road you couldn't do much without a little help from some local boys. There are guys you can help and there are guys who can help you. There were kids who were working hard, and I thought I could help some of them. Some were singers who became steadies with us, including Johnny Russell, Jeanne Shepard, Myra Hurley and Shirley Williamson. There were musicians such as Al Brumley, who played guitar with us for a couple of years, groups such as *Noble's Melody Ranch Girls*, and

there were others who stayed local.

At the beginning of Elvis Presley's career, I booked him from Tom Parker. I was going to play him at the football stadium. Before I had a chance to sign anything, Tom doubled the price on me. I couldn't take him for that amount. I didn't blame Tom because Elvis snowballed right through after that.

One of the first acts we booked with us at The Barn was *Maddox Brothers and Rose* - Fred, Henry, Cal, Don and sister Rose. They were a colorful show band and they were very popular. I booked them several times. It was quite a sight to see them driving up, each in their own Cadillac. Their cars and their fancy uniforms were their trademark.

Which reminds me of the night Little Jimmy Dickens played The Barn with us. For forty-five minutes his band didn't play a note. He talked to the people. They were spellbound. I told him afterwards that I had seen a lot of performers work, but I had never seen anything like that and I'd had a lot of years in the business. He thanked me and said that was a compliment coming from me. I told him it was meant to be a compliment. His band said this was the easiest night they had played!

After the dance was over and the crowd left, Jimmy wanted to show me something. He had just bought a new Cadillac limousine. He had someone open both rear doors and he walked upright straight through it, in one door and out the other. It was funny! He told me that was something he could do that I couldn't do! He is a humorous man and such a good showman, and quite a talker! When he'd get wound up, he couldn't find a place to wind down!

I first met Little Jimmy Dickens when I played him at The Barn. He was with The Grand Ole Opry, and I was asked to book him while he was on tour in California. It wasn't hard to become good friends with him. He is a very open, friendly sort of guy. I have always kidded him about the time Art Satherly, an Artist and Repertoire man for Columbia Records, was at his home in Nashville. Jimmy played a dub of a song written by Lefty Frizzell, *If You've Got The Money, I've Got The Time*. He told Art that this would be his next record. Art asked Jimmy where Lefty Frizzell lived. Jimmy told him that Lefty lived in Dallas. 'Uncle' Art left to fly to New York, Jimmy thought, but flew to Dallas instead. He found Lefty and signed him with Columbia.

When Lefty Frizzell first came to California, Marty Landau, a booking agent out of Los Angeles who I used, asked if I wanted to book Lefty. I told him to wait until he got another record. I liked his record. I hadn't met him yet, though, so I couldn't take a chance on the booking. Other than some of the young musicians I'd bring in to work for us, I just booked acts that had credits behind them. I said I'd pass on Lefty this time and told Marty to sell him to Noble's Melody Ranch in Hanford.

I went down to see Lefty and I got the shock of my life. At Hanford, he had them packed all over the house! I got acquainted with him there. Then during the next

week, he phoned me from Dallas. I told him the next time he was through I'd play him two nights. That made the schedule a little lighter for Marty, taking two good nights away from him!

Lefty came back to California and worked in San Diego and Bakersfield. Then, I worked him in Merced on a Friday night and at The Barn on Saturday night. Noble's Melody Ranch didn't want to be left out, so they took him on Sunday. He was a big hit. He impressed the people.

Lefty had a good band with about eight pieces. He also had two guys traveling with him, Bill and Joe Callahan, who did a musical comedy act. When he returned to Fresno, he just had a piano player, Floyd Kramer, traveling with him. Lefty would use house bands when he wasn't working with us, but he used us for as many jobs as he could. He always told me he'd give anything in the world to have my band on the road with him.

When he was working in the area, I'd go out to the airport to pick him up and bring him to my house to stay. He'd be sitting in my living room and Marty Landau would call, wanting him. I liked to kid Marty, so I'd tell him Lefty wasn't there. Marty would say, "Dave, I know he's sitting right there in your living room!" Marty and I were good buddies. We both knew then how big Lefty was going to be, and he was. He had seven hits right in a row that sold over a million. Lefty Frizzell was far and away the best friend I ever had in the music business, the absolute closest I have been to any other musician. Over the years, he was a big help to me. We'd talk about what we were doing and how we'd do this or that. He'd call, and we'd talk about the way he'd do it and he'd always say, "You can take this for what it's worth." I'd try to do it just as he said.

There are always so many people giving you advice that if you did everything everybody told you, you'd just be a copy. You have to have your own style or you aren't going to go very far. With Lefty, if he told you something he meant it as a help to you. There was nothing phony about him. He was always so humble about everything.

Lefty liked to have his fun, too, and he was fun to be with no matter where it was or what we were doing. We sat in a bar in Fresno one afternoon for about four hours. It wasn't a western bar. The bar was part of a restaurant that served Italian food. They had punchboards and a shelf of stuffed animals for prizes. He bought every one of the punch spaces until he finally got a bear! He was a fun-loving guy. When he came to town, we'd take off and go fishing when we got the chance. We'd sit and talk, and maybe catch a few fish. We never had any good fish stories, but we sure had good times together.

It was Lefty who told me I should book Hank Williams into The Barn. I said I'd talk to him and arrange it. That was the first time I met Hank. The first Saturday I booked him, my group played the first hour then he played the second hour. At intermission, he and I were standing at the end of the bandstand and he said, "Boy, you have a hell of a band, but it won't sell." He was from Alabama and at

one time had a Western Swing band that would knock you out, but it wouldn't sell in Alabama. He broke it down into a little Country band for his songs. I felt kind of funny knowing here was a guy who knew what he was doing and not doing. He was a man with so much success, making money with everything he touched. I just wished he hadn't said that. Deep down I felt my Western Swing band would sell because it had been done before, but I didn't tell him that. I just told him that I had to try.

I stayed with my theory that Western Swing sold west of the Mississippi and Blue Grass sold east of it. I played dances and Hank played shows. If you have a big band well-arranged, you can play shows, too. We did shows, but Western Swing and dance go hand in hand. It's not concert style music. I preferred dances to concerts because I like to see people moving around to my music, having a happy time. I feel like I have accomplished something by the end of the night.

After we finished that night, Hank suggested we have a jam session and play some of the old swing tunes. I had eight pieces and he had five. Talk about a jam session! We played until four o'clock in the morning. Then, Hank and I went over to my house to get some sleep. He had Chet Smith's radio show to do in Modesto that day, so I drove him there.

That night coming back into Fresno, he started writing a song. He threw it out, though, because if he couldn't get something going in five minutes he wouldn't mess with it. While we were still in the car, he wrote one that was to become a big hit. He was a genius when it came to writing songs. Lefty Frizzell was also a genius with his type of songs. They were a couple of great ones.

In Fresno, I became acquainted with and worked with many good entertainers and several great entertainers. Some of them had established careers then. Some were new in the business, at that time, and are big names in Country Western music today. Some performed at The Barn once or twice, others I booked a number of times. Some would stay over at my house when I booked them. I have special memories of good times shared with Jimmy Wakely and his wife, Inez, when they stayed with me. Others would stop by the house to visit when they were passing through town. Some entertainers I was able to get close to and some not, as far as friendship goes.

Marty Robbins was my very good friend and he worked with us quite a bit. I had first met him at a dance hall south of Bakersfield, about 1950, when he was a special guest appearing with *Noble's Melody Ranch Girls*. My sister, Judy, played in that band and also Jeanne Shepard, later of The Grand Ole Opry. That night I talked with him a little while. He only had one record out then. A couple of years later, his Nashville agent called me and asked if I wanted to buy Marty Robbins for The Barn. I said I'd take him for one night. I was doing quite a bit of radio, and I hadn't been getting many requests for the records that he had released. When he played The Barn, we started getting acquainted. After that, I booked him quite a bit. You couldn't help but like him, he was such a likeable fellow. There was no one in the business better than he was. He was a perfect entertainer and he had many fine qualities. He knew what he was doing at all times.

One time I did a couple of his songs, which you didn't do, to tease him. I told him I did them so they would be done right! He could take the teasing and he could dish it out, too. He was a lot of fun to be with and was quite a kidder. It didn't make any difference to him who he was kidding. I remember one night after finishing at The Barn we went into a cafe to get something to eat. There was a couple sitting near us having an argument. We could hear them real good, so Marty sat there egging them on. Finally, they got up and left. That cracked him up! I'd have most of the artists who performed at The Barn do guest spots on my radio shows. I'd interview them and play their records. The first time I interviewed Lefty Frizzell on the Sanger radio station, he walked in and said, "My God, I've seen every kind of radio station, but this is a first for me!"

The radio station itself was about twenty miles from my house, so a little room was rented for me at the Sequoia Hotel in Fresno to broadcast from. A table was put in the middle of the room with a microphone and a telephone cabled to the station. Everyday, the engineer had to pull all of the records and play them as I announced them. I'd line up the plays and then I'd call on the telephone to tell him the ones that I wanted. I'd listen to the radio, which is what I had for a monitor. Lefty said, "You know, I always figured you'd be a lazy guy, but not too lazy to drive out to a radio station!" He thought that was the height of laziness!

I have had memorable and valued experiences with the entertainers that I worked with in Fresno and around the San Joaquin Valley. Besides the ones mentioned already, there were others including the following:

Johnny Cash - Johnny was with us once, drew a big crowd, and really entertained them!

Ernest Tubb - He had a good little band from Texas and he was a worker. He didn't believe in taking more than three or four minute intermissions. The audiences always enjoyed him.

Lonzo and Oscar - The owners of The Barn laughed at me when I booked them, but I loaded the place over capacity with them. They were a good Nashville comedy act and had a filmed TV show every week. I bought them on the strength of that. They were funny. They sang crazy songs using silly versions and played instruments, too.

Judy Lynn - Judy and I were good friends. She worked with Lonzo and Oscar, and I booked her at the Fresno Auditorium with my band and some other acts. When she went to the Nevada circuit in later years, she called me and asked me to come there. She wanted me to organize a band or bring my Fresno band and join her.

Kitty Wells - Kitty, 'The Queen of Country Music', a living legend in the field was with us a few times. Johnny and Jack performed with her, and Roger Miller was her fiddle player at the time.

Merle Travis - The world's greatest guitar player! He was a guest star with us, as well as a good friend. He wrote *16 Tons, Smoke, Smoke, Smoke Those Cigarettes* and *So Round, So Firm, So Fully Packed*.

Red Foley - I brought Red to Fresno for one sit down show at the Fresno Memorial Auditorium. He was the master of ceremonies of the Opry at the time.

Gentleman Jim Reeves – Boy, did he like to jam after a show!

Tex Ritter - I booked Tex many times. We were good friends. My band would play back up for him and his bass player, who was the funniest guy I ever had at The Barn. He never said anything much. He just stood up by Tex and played his bass. He had a long gun with a crooked barrel that would stick out of his holster and point towards Tex every time he raised the holster. He'd stand there reading Roy Rogers or Gene Autry comic books, but never any of Tex's. He'd say that he didn't have the money to buy them. He was so funny!

Tex Williams - *Smoke, Smoke, Smoke Those Cigarettes!* He worked out of Los Angeles and had a fine eleven-piece Western Swing band called *The Western Caravan*. He didn't bring his band along when he performed at The Barn. He sang with us.

The Collins Kids - Lorrie was fifteen and Larry was twelve when I started booking them. They were great kids. They played guitars and sang duets with my band playing back up. At least once a month, I had them at The Barn and on Channel 47.

Joe and Rose Lee Maphis - Joe was the fastest guy I ever heard on guitar. He also sang and played the fiddle and banjo, while Rose played rhythm guitar. They worked out of Los Angeles. I booked them several times.

The Miller Brothers - This was a nine-piece Western Swing band out of Wichita Falls. Sam Gibbs' brother was the bandleader.

Tex Carmin - Tex played the guitar, which he held flat, with a steel bar. He also sang songs with our band backing him up. He was a funny guy!

Carl Smith - Carl is a great guy. He sang and played guitar. He was from The Grand Ole Opry, too.

Ray Price - Ray had quite a good Western Swing band named *The Cherokee Cowboys*. He played guitar and sang. Two of his big hits popular at The Barn were *For The Good Times* and *Crazy Arms*. He recorded with Columbia Records and asked me if I'd like to go on the Columbia label. I had just signed a recording contract with Decca, but I was pleased that he asked.

There were many others including Tom London, Johnny Horton, Webb Pierce,

Hank Snow, Farren Young, Wayne Rainy, Hank Locklin and Freddie Hart, Ferlin Husky, Wynn Stewart. I enjoyed working with all of the entertainers. It was always a real pleasure.

Fred Maddox

"The Fresno Barn was one of the big dance halls on the circuit, and it was awfully popular while Dave had his Western Swing band there during the 1950s. That band was good, there is nothing bad you could say. We performed at The Barn several times as a guest act for Dave and The Western Rhythmaires. All the big Country names performed there. We, *Maddox Brothers and Rose*, packed crowds in so that there wasn't much room left for dancing. During our show, there was a little dancing, but mostly the people watched to be entertained because there was always something going on up on the stage. It was a family show. Young people could see the performances. I run into people, who were kids then, who remember hearing us. I'd like to see it be like that again, a family show, as Dave would."

National Attention

I had written and arranged a song titled *Yes Sir* when I had my first band, *The North Texas String Band* in the 1930s. The lyrics of the song were based on an old public domain blues song. When I wrote it, I knew it was Milton Brown's type of song. So one day, before his noon show, I took a copy of it to him at the radio station, KTAT, in Fort Worth. Milton liked the lyrics and the arrangement and was the first to record it. I felt good about that.

In 1955, I recorded *Yes Sir* with *The Western Rhythmaires* on the Joyce label. The flip side is called *Walkin' On Easy Street*, which someone else wrote. At that same time, I wrote and recorded a song titled *Oh, Sweet Mama*. The flip side, *Black Cat Stomp*, I co-wrote with Joe Holley. When we recorded *Black Cat*, Joe played the fiddle and I played the acoustic guitar because we couldn't find a guitar player who could do what we wanted. I had to do some practicing on the guitar because for years I had just been playing the fiddle.

Pee Wee King and Charlie Adams owned the Joyce Record Company, and they wrote a fine piece of publicity for those records when they were released in 1956. Pee Wee and I had been friends since he had performed with his Western Swing band in the Valley. He has always been willing to help a person no matter how much time it takes. He is a credit to the music business and the kind of fellow we will always need in the business.

Another friend of mine, Joe Johnson, a public relations man for Gene Autry, had introduced me to Charlie Adams the year before. Charlie was with us when we recorded the tape of the four songs. After the songs were released on records, Charlie took a copy of the tape to Jimmy Wakely to let him hear it.

I had first met Jimmy in Oklahoma in 1937 on WKY radio. Then, in the early 1950s had him play some engagements for me in Fresno. I had been in Hollywood

to see Jimmy, but he hadn't been in Fresno for about three years. He hadn't heard my band since then, either. He called me one night, after he heard the tape. He wanted to know where I had got that band, and said it was the closest thing to Milton Brown that he had ever heard. He said he didn't want what he was saying to go to my head, but that I had one hell of a band!

Well, I couldn't have been complimented better than that. It made me feel pretty good because I had worked so hard trying to get the sound we had. I wanted to carry on that Milton Brown sound that I loved, but using our own style. I didn't want to be a copy of Milton. Having always admired his type of band the most, I had patterned after him, but I wanted the Dave Stogner sound. Jimmy asked me if I wanted to go on Decca Records. I said 'Sure I want to go on Decca!' He said he'd get me there. So, he took my tape and flew to New York. He met with Paul Cohen, the Artist and Repertoire man for Decca. They listened to part of *Yes Sir*, and that was all Paul needed to hear. He said they would take it.

Jimmy also asked Paul about having my band play for the Decca Dance Party at the Disc Jockey Convention that is held every year in Nashville. Paul said that would be fine, if we were interested in playing the Dance Party. Jimmy told him we would be interested and to telephone me right then. Jimmy was a real booster of my band.

Paul got Marty Salkin, the general manager of Decca who was in Chicago, Owen Bradley, an A & R man with Decca in Nashville, and myself on the telephone on a round robin call. We talked for about an hour. They said we could come to Nashville and record an album, play the Decca Dance Party, be the guest stars on The Grand Ole Opry, and appear at several other places.

The first thing they wanted to know was how was our health. They asked if I thought we could do this. I told them we were fine, that we went everywhere we wanted to go and we played everywhere we wanted to play. Paul said he'd send a recording contract the next day, and I could send it back after I signed it. The contract was for seven years. Jimmy called me wanting to know if I was happy with the contract and asked, "How is that?" I told him, 'That is fine. You're great! Just the greatest!'

Once I signed the contract with Decca, we spent more time rehearsing and started taking our work a little more seriously. We left for Nashville on a Monday morning at about six o'clock with our instruments and luggage packed into our 1956 Ford station wagon. Schmitt wasn't able to go. Two of the other boys couldn't leave until Thursday, so they flew into Nashville. Six of us in the Ford drove straight through, arriving Wednesday morning at the Andrew Jackson Hotel. Decca already had a schedule for us. We were introduced to DJs, television personalities, and members of the cast and crew of The Grand Ole Opry.

Jimmy Wakely was going to go with us to Nashville, but he couldn't make it because of some business engagements that week. I always felt if there was any one guy that I wanted to be with me there, it was Jimmy because he had

arranged it all. While I was in Nashville, my good friend Marty Robbins was with me, though. He said, "Jimmy couldn't be with you and he set this up for you, didn't he?" I said, 'Yeah.' Then he said, "Well, I'm fillin' his part!" He'd always think of something to say. When you mention the greats in the Country Western field, he stands up with all of them.

Friday night, my band and I played for the Decca Dance Party. Pee Wee King spent practically the whole evening up on the bandstand with us, walking around and talking on the mike now and then. For four hours, Eddie Arnold and Roy Acuff stood right in front of the bandstand while everyone else was dancing around. I had never met Eddie Arnold, but I loved him as an entertainer. He is one of the finest in the business. When I took an intermission, I went down, introduced myself to him, and greeted Roy. They told me they wanted me to come out to Roy's showplace, Dunbar Cave, after the dance.

Marty had been standing at the end of the bandstand and was walking over to us. He said not to plan anything because I was going to Ralph Emery's radio show after the dance. Emery had sent word during the dance for me to come over afterwards. He had twenty-six radio stations broadcasting his show over the eastern part of the United States. Roy said I'd want to make that, and I did. While I was on Emery's show, he welcomed me to Nashville and interviewed me for a half-hour. I just talked about California, which was all right because that was what he wanted to hear.

Another person at the convention and dance, who had been a friend of mine for years, was Tex Ritter. He had come up after the dance and had said real slow, "Daaave, they can say what they want to back here. Y'all stood them on their ear didn't ya! You played a heck of a job and gave them somethin' in Nashville tonight that they'll never forget!"

I had worked many times with Tex. He said when we got back to California and started bringing in the artists again, he wanted to get back in the Valley and get to work with us. He said he missed us, and that I hadn't been bringing him in enough. I told him, 'We use you when we can, Tex!' He was a great guy.

There were several Country Western entertainers there for the convention that were acquaintances or close friends of mine, so I had a chance to visit with some of them. I made some new acquaintances, as well. One evening, Marty and I walked out into the lobby of the hotel after we had finished dinner and ran into Elvis Presley. We walked out of the hotel together as we talked. There was a jazz group performing on the sidewalk in the rain. Even though the three of us were dressed in suits, Elvis slapped me on the shoulder and said to come sit on the curb and watch because the group was funny! That was as well as I knew Elvis Presley.

The Decca representatives thought we sounded so much like *Milton Brown and The Musical Brownies* that they wanted us to do part of the album with his tunes. They couldn't have paid me any higher honor than ask me to do that. It was great

to be compared to Milton Brown, but I was not Milton. I knew in my mind I was not. My band had been handpicked from start to finish. I had them doing what I wanted, but we couldn't quite equal Milton's band. We were not close enough to ever make me 100% happy. Everyone else said, "You are a dead ringer!" *Milton Brown and The Musical Brownies* had something no other band had, and we couldn't find it. That special something was lost when Milton died.

We cut the album in Owen Bradley's studio, the Quonset Hut. He had all the finest equipment. Since Schmitt was unable to come with us, I used Owen as our piano player. It took us only forty-four minutes to cut the album. We knew what we were doing. This was nothing new to us. I came back later and did the vocal. We cut fourteen songs and twelve were used.

The title of the album is *Western Dance in Hi-Fi*. On side one of the album are the following titles:

1. *C Jam Blues*
(Recorded by Milton Brown) Duke Ellington
2. *When My Dreamboat Comes Home*
Friend/Franklin
3. *I Dreamed Of An Old Love Affair*
Bonnie Dodd et al
4. *Bandera Polka*
Owen Bradley
5. *Yes Sir*
(Recorded by Milton Brown) D. Stogner
6. *Texas Hambone Blues*
(Recorded by Milton Brown) W Jones

With the following titles on side two:

7. *Stardust*
Carmichael/Parish
8. *Woodchopper's Ball*
Bishop/Herman
9. *The Star*
(Recorded by Milton Brown, using another title) J. Holley
10. *You've Got Me Cryin' T.*
Atchison
11. *Cattle Call*
Tex Owens
12. *Tennessee Sweetheart J.*
Holley

When the album was released, I went on Jimmy Wakely's CBS radio show in Hollywood. He interviewed me and played two songs off the album. The album

turned out to be a bigger seller overseas than it was here. Over the next seven years, Decca released all the songs we had recorded in Nashville.

Decca wanted us to move to Nashville so they could handle us better. They wanted us to go on the road three weeks a month and be on The Grand Ole Opry one weekend a month. When we were leaving to return to California, Paul Cohen told me they would accept the band just as it was, which meant I'd be the first person to regularly take drums on The Opry. I told Paul I wasn't sure that I wanted to do all this because I had so many commitments in California.

I had The Barn, radio and television shows, and personal appearance contracts. I also owned four rental houses and two gas stations in Fresno. I felt they were interests I just couldn't walk away from. Also, there were many conditions I knew I wouldn't like in Nashville. I thought it might get to be a steady, boring grind. I knew I wouldn't be able to continue having the choice of doing things as I wanted to do them, and I was used to doing what I liked to do. I told my musicians about the offer later. Their decisions were the same as mine. They didn't care to stay. When we pulled out of Nashville on Sunday, they were happy to get going. I liked Nashville and I liked the entertainers, but I didn't want to leave California and go on The Grand Ole Opry circuit.

Hank Thompson had told me I'd have the nation's number one Western Swing band, if I'd travel the country. Maybe I would have, but we didn't return to Nashville. I chose that option because I had good contracts for good money in California, so I was satisfied with staying there.

Bob Wills said to me once after we played a double band dance at The Barn, "Joe Holley tells me you've been here nearly eight years. You know, that's a record. I was at Cains Academy seven years. This has to be a record. You may not know it, but you have to have more on the ball than just standin' up there tryin' to look like somethin'. You've got to be able to do somethin', and you've done it!"

Pee Wee King

"Dave Stogner's name should be synonymous with Western Swing, for he played the kind of music that made Swing popular in the 40s and 50s, along with Bob Wills, Spade Cooley, Hank Thompson and others. He always maintained a good band with some of the leading names of Western Swing as his sidemen. MY COWBOY HAT IS OFF TO SALUTE DAVE STOGNER!"

Radio and Television

I had continued at the Sanger radio station KSJV, for about three months after I had organized my band. KSJV was a 1000-watt station and had good coverage. While there, I had started getting my own sponsors. I was paid a commission for each one so I had got a little more serious in regards to them. From the beginning, I had a policy that I wouldn't advertise any product that I didn't believe was good. At first, I didn't know much about how to talk with people and I'd often draw a blank. I started with a bunch of minor sponsors, but I treated them just

like they were major. They were important to me, and I worked hard to sell their products. It must have worked because they stayed with me for a long time. As I got better known, I got bigger sponsors. I still treated the little ones the same, though.

When I left the KSJV show, I went to KFRE to do a two-hour show from 6:30 to 8:30 every weekday morning. This was a 50,000-watt station that broadcasted clear into Vancouver, Washington. On Saturday nights, the band also did a live radio show on KFRE from nine to ten o'clock at the dances at The Barn. I also did a live show from noon to one Monday through Friday using the whole band. I had guests who were appearing at The Barn on that show.

When I moved to KFRE, I took my sponsors with me and added more. After a couple of years, I stopped the live show on KFRE and went to KMJ as a disc jockey. That put me on CBS and NBC networks everyday, so I thought I'd just as well add the other network. I started a record show on KARM, the ABC network, one hour every afternoon beginning at two-thirty.

For KARM, I broadcasted from a front display window in an appliance store. My equipment was set up right there where everyone could come by to talk or request records. I liked that arrangement because I always liked to be out with the people. I was never one for performing and then slipping away. We couldn't have all the records on hand with that setup, so I couldn't always play the requests right when they were asked for. I had never been a great one for jumping up from the turntable to search for a record, anyway. I'd just come up with them the next day.

There were some advantages to a show having one sponsor, such as the appliance store. It gave me only one company to worry about for ads. Also, I didn't have to service them, which was seeing about accounts and merchandise or making sure they were happy with me. I didn't like to sell a whole show to one sponsor, though. During the day, there were blocked out segments for a variety of programs: half-hour transcriptions, soap operas, Glenn Miller, etc.

There might be only one or two blocked out for Country Western music. The radio stations in Fresno were always glad to have me do more than one segment, if I wanted to. With block programming, I could get more money for four spots in fifteen minutes than for fifteen or thirty-minute segments being bought by one sponsor. The company that sold Camel cigarettes wanted fifteen minutes, after they found out that everyone in my band smoked Camels. I told them that I'd sell one-minute spots and that was all, so they took one-minute spots. When they sponsored me, people in the audiences at our performances would throw Camel cigarettes up on the stage.

I got a lot of calls from people wanting to sponsor my shows. I'd say, 'I'll come to see you.' They would tell me anything in the world to get me to take them as sponsors. As I said before, I had to believe in a product before I'd advertise it. My fees were high. If the rate cards for national advertising were \$15.00, then my fee

was \$25.00. I could afford to be particular because the byword was "Dave Stogner". Sponsors would say, "Put Dave Stogner on your show and I'll buy time."

When you are on top you figure your worries and headaches are over, but they have just begun. You have to think not only of yourself, but of all the people you are involved with; sponsors as much as audiences. I had thought the audiences were more important, but people would tell me they ran side-by-side. You had to keep thinking of ways to keep them both happy.

Visiting with sponsors was one of the main ways to keep them happy. Some wanted me around so much that they practically demanded that I move in. They felt I needed to give them a good deal of my time. I was visiting almost everyday, driving around from one sponsor to another. Sometimes, it was to find out what they wanted to say in their ads, and sometimes it was just to say 'Hello.' I'd have to set my mind to it and do it right, or it would be a failure. They figured they were the ones keeping my name going by spreading it around, so I obliged them.

One of my pet peeves of radio was when I'd get to rolling along just fine, with mail coming in, with a nice program director, with a solid operation, and then the station owner would come in and want me to start changing a little to suit him. Radio definitely had some headaches involved. There were times when I really felt let down. In Fresno, there were more good times than hard, but before then it had been hit and miss. In fact, in Fresno it was quite a thrill because everything went so well. I always listened to my producers and directors and I did whatever I had to do. I didn't want to give them any problems. We had a mutual respect for each other.

With KFRE, KMJ and KARM, the radio business was pretty serious. Everything was done right down the line. Their live shows were a little different from the live shows I had done in my earlier radio days. There weren't any live chickens held up to the mike or instruments hidden away by some station pranksters right before it was time to go on the air.

It was nothing like the times when I was on the Tulare radio station, KCOK. There, we'd have two announcers to read the commercials. One of them came in to do the show one day dressed in a "gym" suit. I kidded him a little. Then, when he started reading the commercials on the air, I walked up behind him and pulled down his pants! Of course, he just had to stand there in front of the mike and continue to read the ads!

For another station announcer, we exchanged his commercial papers with some we typed with old newscast off the teletypewriter. He started reading on the air, then suddenly said, "Hell! This ain't commercials!" The receptionist had held back his papers, so she brought them out then. For another announcer we wrote up a new commercial for a brand of flour he was advertising. It went from being about flour to being about rat poison. He just read it on the air, unaware of what he was actually going to be saying. Practical jokes were common with those live shows. I go along remembering those times and often wish radio could be back with live

programming like that again.

I loved radio, but it never got easy. I did all my shows live, everything but records. It was the late 1950s before we could even tape a commercial, but with the Country Western audiences taped commercials didn't sell the products the way live commercials did. They wanted it spontaneous. They would buy a sponsor's product because of the fun they had listening to a DJ being humorous with the ad. A Country Western DJ did his show with humor in it. He'd read part of a sponsor's ad and ad-lib part.

Sponsors would just send me notes because I'd make up the ads myself. They got a kick out of this and felt it was good for business. With me, I never knew how the ad would come out. I didn't spend much time rehearsing. I wasn't a trained radio announcer, so it was liable to come out any way. It was decided early in my career that I wouldn't have any scriptwriters, because I'd never follow a script. I had to watch everything I said when it came to any profanity, though. There were high standards about what words could not be used on the air.

I had the three radio shows and on October 5, 1953, I started *The Dave Stogner Show* on Channel 47, KJEO-TV. I used only four of us from the band for the television show - Jack Ansel, Delbert Keplinger, Bruce Pillow (fondly called 'Elsiebud Presswood' on the show) and myself. We played five nights a week, prime Country music time, 6:30 to 7:00. We also played live from The Barn on Saturday evenings from eight to nine o'clock. We'd have guest stars appear on the show. I visited my TV sponsors, but ad salesmen did most of the work since it was their job to stop in at the stores. I just had to say 'Hello' when I went by, occasionally.

When we first started the television show, one of my sponsors was a plumbing company. They brought a bunch of bathtubs into the studio for one of their commercials. When I started that commercial, I slipped and fell into one of the tubs. It hurt me when I fell, and I thought I was about to die! The camera crew said it was so funny and it was done so well that it looked rehearsed. They wouldn't take the cameras off me, so I had to lay there and finish the commercial! It was live TV, not being filmed or taped. It went out over the air and there was no taking it back. For TV, we had to be very careful.

Another of our sponsors was Asher Brothers Shoes. They wanted to do something that would tie my name in with the product. I suggested having a Dave Stogner boot, so we decided to have a boot made for kids with my signature on it. The agreement was that it had to be made to a standard that would look good on a child's foot, and be of good quality. Acme Boot Company made the boot and it sold well. I got royalties from every boot that sold. Everybody was buying their kids Dave Stogner Boots. When we played towns that sold Asher Brothers' shoes, I'd stop by and do a little PR work talking with the sales people in the stores. I was proud of that boot.

Not long after that, The Coca-Cola Company bought two spot announcements.

Then, within three weeks, they took the whole show. All of the sponsors had to move out. Camel Cigarette and Granny Goose Potato Chip companies had sent orders through, but Coca-Cola wouldn't let go. I thought to myself, 'This is big! Because, this company never does anything small.' They paid top dollar for publicity, and always did everything first class. They did it their way, and it always worked. They even provided an office for me at the company. I told them I didn't know anything about having an office. In fact, I told Bob Morgan, the general manager and a great man, 'I'm goin' to school and try to learn to talk a little better.' He said, "Yeah, and we will fire you if you do!"

When Coca-Cola became our sponsor, I added Leon Carter and Joe Holley to my TV band, and used Schmitty and Pat Marchese, occasionally. We had been playing Country Western music, but then we played more Western Swing on the show. Other than Coca-Cola not wanting me to have guest stars, I continued to plan the format of the show, and just took orders from them regarding personal appearances and advertising for the show.

They also sponsored one spot on my KFRE radio show. Being under contract with Coca-Cola meant we were primarily obligated to them. We belonged to them, so to speak. If we could work anything else in between, fine. (Which we did, but it wasn't easy!) Besides the scheduled appearances, there were occasions such as all night company parties. Bob Morgan would call my house and leave messages telling us when we got in to come out and play for a party. You couldn't make excuses, as you had to be there. There were many nights when we'd throw our boots under one side of the bed, roll over, catch them on the other side when they came through, and go right out to play. That would be all the sleep we'd get those nights!

As I said, Coca-Cola was big on publicity. They did several promotions while I was with them. Twice a year, on the TV show, we'd give away five Shetland ponies. We'd give three away one week, then two the next. To win a pony, a person had to write a slogan about why they liked Coca-Cola and have it chosen. The winner would come to the station and get their pony. One time, one of the winners was a young boy. Someone set him up on the pony and the pony took off into the traffic. We almost lost that winner!

The ponies had to be brought out to the station everyday for the commercials, then taken back to the corral after the show. Somehow, Joe Holley and I fell heir to going out to the corral each day, rounding up the ponies, and bringing them by trailer to the station. I liked it much better when we gave away bicycles or Wonder Bars, the small electric coolers!

Another of the giveaways was called "Shower of Silver." When a representative came to your door, he'd pay you one silver dollar for every bottle of Coca-Cola you had in your refrigerator. Homes were picked at random. I rode along four or five times and stayed in the car. Once, when I went along with representative Ed Dodd, a lady came to the door. Ed asked her if she had any Coca-Cola. She told him, "Yes! When Dave Stogner comes on TV at night he would expect us to have it here!" When Ed told her I was in the car and that she could meet me, she about

tore her front door off to get out there to see me!

My band and I were doing so much, including the dances and personal appearances. We played at United Cerebral Palsy telethons three years in a row. We appeared at places for Coca-Cola, such as supermarkets. For radio sponsors, we appeared at plumbing supply, jewelry, and furniture stores, etc. We traveled all over the Valley, usually in a new Mercury station wagon, the nine-passenger model. We'd also go to other towns including San Jose, Hollister and Bakersfield.

We'd get into the station wagon and get out a deck of cards. We had constructed a little table in the back seat area so we could play poker. We'd head down the highway at about sixty miles per hour for a starting speed, pulling our instrument trailer. We always had tight time schedules. We also had "4-60" air conditioning in the car, which meant we had to roll down all four windows and drive at least 60 miles per hour down the road to cool off! We got several speeding tickets, but we earned every one that we got!

One time, a CHP officer who stopped us helped us out. We had just finished a TV show, loaded up our equipment, got the cards ready, and hit Highway 99 heading for a Sadie Hawkins dance in Hollister. I was driving and we had gone about a mile when the officer pulled us over. I thought to myself, 'Boy, I can't stand too many more tickets, not this year!'

The officer asked me, "How long have you had those tires on that trailer?" I told him I'd had them since the trailer was new. He said, "They don't look like they are worn any. They must not be touching the ground too often!" I just said, 'Well, I don't imagine they do!' He asked where we were going. I told him I had a contract in the glove compartment and that we had to be in Hollister, set up, and ready to play by nine o'clock. He was nice about it. He said he'd help us get there, so he led us to Los Banos. Then, he had a buddy take us on over Pacheco Pass. After that, he started coming out to the TV show and would come along with us to where ever we had to go, but not as a police escort. He'd be off shift and would ride in the back playing cards with us. He said, "Man, you guys have more fun than anybody driving up and down the road!"

We didn't have to worry about speeding tickets the times we had Schmitt drive. When he drove, it took all night and part of the next day to get home! He had night blindness and drove about thirty-five to forty miles per hour. One night coming home from performing in Paso Robles, all of a sudden we heard Schmitt say, "My Lord!" He was pointing at the road ahead. We looked out and saw chickens sitting right in the middle of the road. What was amazing was that there were chickens on the white line every quarter mile, or so. This went on for about five miles. With him driving, we never caught up to the truck that must have been losing them. Schmitt was always sorry we didn't stop and pick them up. He thought we missed out on a lot of nice chicken dinners!

For two or three summers, on Sundays, we played concerts at Oakwoods Park in Kingsburg. It was a large park covered with grass with the Kings River flowing

through the back of it. There were shade trees to sit under and bleachers in front of a bandstand. About twenty feet away from the bandstand, I owned a Coca-Cola concession stand. The Company sent a truck down every Sunday morning with my delivery. I had items to sell, such as Coke bottle shaped cigarette lighters, miniature Coke radios which were replicas of the chest cooler radios, records, photographs of myself and the band, along with other souvenirs. We also sold 6-ounce bottles of Coca-Cola for fifteen cents a bottle. We charged a dollar admission to the park, and the fellow who owned the park took only a small percentage.

Bakersfield's Herb Hensen, of *The Cousin Herb Show* on Channel 10, played the park with us. No one could quite figure out what style his band was. Herb played piano. He'd have a bass player, fiddles, steel guitar and singers. He might have them all one Sunday, and not the next. He had his regulars from The Trading Post Gang - Bill Woods, Lewis Talley, Fuzzy Owen, Bonnie Owens and Roy Nichols. Needless to say, these were all fine musicians. Then, he'd fill out with other musicians. We were good friends, and I always liked kidding him about his band. We drew six thousand people every Sunday, so the whole park would be full. We'd start at ten o'clock in the morning and go all day.

I was doing so many things and each one was earning money. I figured I'd never be broke again. I was making money and I was spending it. There were some matters I may not have handled as well as I could have. Once Coca-Cola sponsored me, I had more hours of work than I felt I could stand up to. I had to drop something. I didn't pay much attention to the potential of the boot deal, so I let it go. The shoe company had wanted to continue it. I told them to go ahead, but I didn't have the time to spend that it would require. It eventually drifted out. I'm sorry I ever gave up the boot, but that was something I could only see later.

I wrote some jingles and lyrics for Coca-Cola that they used for some of their big advertising for several years. At the time, I did them for fun. They had all the rights to them because I was in their employ, so there were no royalties from them or credit for them for me. This was something else I could see later that maybe I didn't handle quite as well as I should have. I don't have any regrets when it comes to the years I spent with them, though.

When I was advertising for them they started making the twelve-ounce Coke bottle. I was the first person in the world to advertise that size bottle on television and radio. I was also the first to advertise the quart-size bottle. It's memories like these that mean so much to me, and I carry them right along with me.

While I was working for this company, I had no money worries and most of my activities seemed to fall into place with no difficulties. I could go anywhere in the Valley to play, have big audiences, and "usually" come back home at night. I had The Fresno Barn and the kind of Western Swing band that I had always wanted.

Lefty Frizzell said to me once, "I don't see how you can stay here week in and week out, year in and year out in one spot, and make it as well as you do. There

are a thousand guys out on the road who would sure like to have your setup!" I often thought to myself, 'Boy, you've been awfully lucky. You're goin' to stay with that dream right on through. You're goin' to ride the tide as far as you can.'

The Dave Stogner Show had been sponsored by Coca-Cola for four years on Channel 47, KJEO. The show was going strong and had increased sales in six counties. Then, some changes started taking place. Channel 47 had the ABC network and the lineup of programs was rescheduled. They wanted to put kid shows on in my time slot. At the same time, they switched to a new advertising agency that wanted to do spot announcements, rather than sponsor an entire show. They wanted the same time slot that Channel 47 was going to change to kid shows.

In addition to all of this, there was a dispute over guest stars appearing on my show. I knew they didn't want guest stars, but I put Bob Wills on once when he was in the area. They told me they were selling Dave Stogner and they didn't want anyone else on the show. After that, the show continued for a few more months until the sponsorship was canceled. My time slot changed, as well.

Twice, during that past year, KMJ-TV had offered me a show on Channel 24, but I had turned down the offer both times. The third time they offered, I knew that Channel 24's time slot would be better for reaching more people than the slot I'd be moved to on Channel 47. I accepted KMJ's offer and began a daily show using my same TV band on Monday through Friday evenings from six-thirty to seven o'clock sponsored by Bogart Furniture Company. KMJ had the NBC network, so my show was followed by a good line-up of shows all week. Friday night, we were on right before Gillette Boxing. On both channels, I had the highest local show ratings, but the ratings were higher on KMJ. I had a 28.5 rating each show, the same as *I Love Lucy*.

There is one time that always comes to mind when I think of KMJ. One night I got off the air and walked out with the station manager to go down the street for a bite to eat. We exited out the side door onto the sidewalk, and I walked face-to-face into a tall, stout woman. She was startled, but blurted out, "Why, Stave Gardner! I'd know you anywhere!" From then on, I was often "fondly" called Stave Gardner!

I stayed with KMJ for about five years, until they went with all network programming. I had guest stars on my show, including several that were from The Grand Ole Opry. I always enjoyed those folks so much. When I left, I moved to KFRE-TV, Channel 30 and was on three days during the week and Saturday afternoons with my TV band. I also did another DJ show, which was on KEAP radio. A good friend of mine named Barney Lee had built and owned the station. It was the first radio station to go to all Country Western music.

By 1962 the Western Swing era in California was near its end, and I ended my long run in Fresno. It had been a big town for Country Western and Western Swing music. The management of the stations where I had worked had always

been very cooperative, and they had helped sell the Western Swing sound.

I wondered what had happened to something that had been so successful and so popular. I didn't know, even though I was there and probably should have known. The Big Fresno Barn was taken over by new owners, and not long after that the attendance started dropping down to between 800 and 1000 people.

I thought, 'Why keep this up. I better quit while I'm ahead.' I felt kind of bad about this, but also felt it was the thing to do. By then, the rock and roll era was in full swing, so I turned it over to them.

Mrs. Davis had run The Barn as a family place. Kids could come out there with their parents. I'd see them lie down on the benches and fall asleep before the end of the dance. During the years I spent there, I saw many of those kids grow up. I'd see some of them get married and come right back to The Barn on their wedding night. That was being faithful. We played for a bunch of loving people there.

On the last Saturday night we played, we had a regular dance. Lefty Frizzell had been the last guest act we had there a few months prior to this. I just told the crew we were leaving and thanked them all. I had eleven years of enjoyment there. When you play a spot out, you have to look for new territory. I was looking for new territory, but I didn't want to leave California. I still wanted to do television shows, but I wasn't looking for too much performing.

At this time, I was asked by Dee Kilpatrick to come to Nashville again. He wanted me to organize a band there, tour, and appear on The Grand Ole Opry. I turned this offer down again. I thought if I accepted I'd be beating my head against a wall. People were more familiar with Country and Blue Grass music there. Western Swing was always more popular from the state of Texas west. I thought a Western Swing band would have been too large for their type of entertainment. I could have been wrong. It might have been a big hit.

By not being connected to The Grand Ole Opry, my name wasn't as "big" as it could have been. In Fresno, though, I had bought acts from them for less money than I was making. So, maybe I was "big time" doing what I was doing, and where I was doing it. Actually, I don't think I ever wanted to be "big" as far as being connected to The Opry. I just preferred to go on a different route than them. I'm proud of what I have achieved in my career and I don't have any complaints. I accomplished what I wanted to accomplish and my name is still known.

A person can be "big time" for three or four years, then be forgotten. My way, I have gone along year after year playing and doing what I like to do, and have made money doing it. A "big name" always has certain expectations to live up to, sometimes exceeding that person's limits. I never felt I was big enough to have to live up to anybody's expectations, but my own.

My everyday life was the way I lived it and I was pretty religious about the music business. I wasn't out there to be a superstar; I was out there to entertain the people. I just hope my name will be remembered as a person who had a part with so many fine people in the development, the playing, and the enjoyment of a style of music that will always be known as Western Swing.

Al Radka

"Dave is truly a nice guy and most deserving of a book covering his career. I always remember Dave as being the first real TV personality when television came to Fresno. KMJ-TV, Channel 24 was the first to get on the air, and they put Dave and his great band to work right at the onset. I was on KFRE radio at the time, and our station was in litigation with KARM as to who would get the one VHF channel assigned to Fresno, Channel 12, so I didn't get on the tube until about a year later when the FCC granted Channel 12 to KFRE. (Eventually, the FCC made Fresno an all UHF market, and 12 became Channel 30.)

When I started TV, I used a format similar to Dave's, working with a band known as *The Buddies*, with Don Gross on clarinet, George Luft on accordion, Pete Eastman on bass and Billy Manzo on guitar. They were working at a Fresno nightclub and I remember getting a specific sponsor for each musician, so our TV management wouldn't have to worry about paying for the band. The show was called *Al Radka's Open House*. Fortunately, it was on a different time than *The Dave Stogner Show* on Channel 24, so Dave and I were never in direct competition for the viewing audience.

I remember Dave also used to pack 'em in at The Barn on Shields Avenue. Dave gained instant fame as soon as TV came to Fresno. He enjoyed the best of two worlds, and rightfully so. I have never known a more honest performer on television than Dave Stogner. Always being himself and playing the music he loved. Truly a great Country Western performer, that's Dave. His warm singing style and musical ability was never topped by any other Country Western performer in the Fresno area. Just like he was 'first' to get on TV in Fresno, he remained 'first' in his chosen field. Dave Stogner and his Western Rhythmaires will always remain number one in the annals of Country music in Fresno, that's for sure."

Jack Hall

"I was the director for Dave's television show on KMJ-TV, Channel 24 in Fresno. Pleasantness was the keynote to describe working with Dave Stogner. It was a genuinely warm and friendly time. Dave was always personable and exceedingly cooperative. He did not like problems. If anything came up with the band, he would just take care of it and dismiss it without much notice by anyone else. Any hassles that went on, he took in stride. He was exceptional as a problem solver. He never talked much about himself or his personal life or background. He seldom bragged about himself.

I really enjoyed Dave and his band, and their whole approach. Even though I wasn't a Country Western music fan, it was natural for me to like Dave's style of music because I had cut my teeth on Country and Gospel singer Stuart Hamblin in

Los Angeles, and had liked him so much. For me, Dave's music was the most pleasant to listen to of Country Western music."

Bob Long

"I was a fan of Dave's when television first came to the San Joaquin Valley. Dave's program was the Valley's top local TV program. He conveyed his happy-go-lucky attitude to his audiences, and watching his program was like going to a party or dropping by to visit good friends. Dave Stogner was a good friend whether you knew him or not. Some years later when we celebrated KMJ's 20th anniversary, I was in charge of organizing a special show, so I contacted Dave and had him recreate a portion of one of his old programs. It was as much fun to put on that program as to watch it. Dave is considered a highlight of the station's decades. He kept up the tradition of Western Swing and was number one in the area. After the anniversary show, we had batches of phone calls from people inquiring about Dave and saying how glad they were to see him again.

Movin' On

When I had worked at KMJ-TV the sales manager was Dave Maxwell. Dave had moved to Bakersfield and was working for KLYD-TV, Channel 17. He had contacted me before about working there, but I couldn't at the time. Now I could, and Bakersfield was a Country Western music town. So, I decided to sell everything that I owned in Fresno, move there, and go to work for KLYD-TV.

I organized a new band and I named it *The Western Rhythmaires*. I had Red Simpson on piano, my son Daryl on bass, Sonny O'Brien on drums, Ray Salter on rhythm guitar, Norman Hamlet on steel guitar, Pat Rush, Kay Adams and myself. Dennis Payne filled in on rhythm guitar when I needed him. I used a variety of fiddle players. Our show, KLYD Kountry Korner, was on five days a week for forty-five minutes. I had guest stars appear on the show including Roger Miller, Dottie West, Eddie Dean, Jerry Wallace, Johnny Bond, Ray Price and Connie Smith.

On Thursdays, I interviewed wrestlers on the TV show. On Wednesdays, I interviewed Roller Derby stars. I also went to the roller rink every Wednesday night, stood out in the center of the rink, and started the derby. Now this was a lot of fun for me. I also took a DJ show on KLYD-radio, Monday through Friday mornings at eleven o'clock. Most memorable of anything I did with KLYD was a joint venture with the United States Marine Corps. In 1965 Marine Corps Major Steve Kenyon wrote:

"A dream came true for Channel 17's Dave Stogner when he recently teamed up with Marine Corps Major "Steve" Kenyon to produce live Country and Western radio shows for members of the armed forces of the United States in Vietnam and all the duty stations overseas. With the staunch support of general manager Dave Maxwell, and the generous help of Dave Welch and his Brundage Land Recording Studio, an audition tape was prepared for submission to the Department of Defense's Armed Forces Radio and Television Service

in Hollywood. Praising the quality of the audition tape, the Armed Forces' service requested they be allowed to program a weekly twenty-five minute show for distribution to over two hundred and fifty radio stations throughout the world. Meeting this challenge head on, the old professional, Dave Stogner, and the new comer to "show biz", Major Kenyon, have to date come up with seven shows that they consider "hard to beat". The backbone of the new show is the Dave Stogner band with Dave on the fiddle, Norman Hamlet at the steel guitar, Daryl, "chip off the ol' block," Stogner strumming the bass guitar, and Sonny O'Brien at the drums. Announcing is the Jim Hayden-trained man, "Steve Kenyon". Each show features at least one guest recording artist. Everyone involved with the show is doing so as a gesture of gratitude to all the guys and gals in uniform. Many name CW recording stars are slated for guest appearances in the future. Just a few are Buck Owens, Del and Sue Smart, Bobby Durham and Jeannie O'Neal, Tommy Collins, Merle Haggard and Bonnie Owens. Surveyed by the AFRTS indicate a possible listening audience of between two and three million military and civil service workers overseas. But, even more breathtaking is the total number of possible listeners that includes the civilians who listen to the network in their own native country---in excess of two hundred million—more than the present population of the United States of America."

Red Simpson had started recording with Capitol and had gone on his own. He had been Buck Owens' songwriter. We cut twenty-six shows for this. It's something I'm very proud of having done. I was given an award of recognition from the US Marine Corps, as well.

While I was in Bakersfield, I renewed an old friendship with Bill Woods. When I had first moved there he was doing a radio show on KWAC. I went out to the station to see him and to tell him I was in town. He interviewed me on the show and played one of my records. We started doing personal appearances together at clubs, dances, rodeos, fairs, etc.

Once, when we were working a four-piece band at the Flamingo Club in East Bakersfield, we talked about hiring Merle Haggard who was a friend of Bill's. He had records out, but didn't have his big band yet. We didn't know if we could afford him, but we asked the club owner. He hired Merle for two nights to sing with our band. After that, Merle guest starred with our band at some of the other clubs in Bakersfield.

Lewis Talley and Fuzzy Owen had been friends of mine for a long time. They were managing Merle then. They had first introduced me to him one Sunday in Oakwoods Park in the 1950s. At that time I didn't hear Merle sing. I wish I had, I would have hired him. I have heard a whole lot of singers in my day, and he is one of the very best. The first time I did hear him was at a place called the Lucky Spot in Bakersfield. It was a couple of years later that we hired him for the Flamingo Club. Roy Nichols, who sometimes worked on the TV show with me, and

Norman Hamlet, my steel player, went right off to work with Merle. During the 1970s, Bill played with *Merle Haggard and The Strangers*, Merle's big band. Bakersfield was the kind of town where all the entertainers crossed paths. Merle and I bumped

into each other often and we became good friends. I have always been proud to know him, and to know a little part of his way of operating. He developed his own style of performing and he hasn't changed it. He is one who can switch quick and easy to Western Swing, the way his band is set up. He can play fiddle and has two of his musicians playing fiddle. During his concerts he has spots for Western Swing, and *Merle Haggard and The Strangers* play it well!

In 1965, I released once again the first song I recorded, *Jukebox Love*, through Mosrite Records. I wanted to see what it might do on the record market. The flip side titled *Night Winds A Blowin'* was written by Dave Maxwell and was a good tune. The record sold, but not well. Not long after that, I got to feeling the more I was in Bakersfield the more it wasn't the place for me. Maybe I was more ready to retire than anything else. I knew I wasn't going to quit playing the fiddle, but I wasn't going to make a profession of it anymore. I had memories of so many of the good times in my life. I knew now it was time to rest. I wouldn't perform regularly, but maybe enough to keep my fiddle tuned!

I left Bakersfield in 1966 and traveled for a while, doing some general messing around. The next year I moved out to the desert to Ridgecrest. This is where I crossed paths again with my old friend Lefty Frizzell. He was booked at J.D.'s Club where I had played a number of times since I moved there. I hadn't been in contact with him since I left Fresno, so he didn't know I was there. One evening, I walked into the club office where Lefty was seated on the couch.

He jumped up, grabbed me and asked, "Where have you been?" He told me to get my fiddle and play the show with him. We played for the rest of the evening. His brother, David, was with him on that tour. David and his other brother, Allen, were young boys when I first met them. The bandleader was Lewis Talley that night. We always had fun together, and we had a ball there that night! Lefty wanted me to put together a little band and join him on the road. I told him I had already paid my dues on the road and I felt I didn't belong out there anymore.

In California, Western Swing and dance halls kind of drifted away. I had a pipe dream that big band Western Swing could and would come back. Knowing that everything goes in a cycle. I figured one day it would get started again, and I hoped it would be real soon! I know my biggest dream has been to be able to keep Western Swing alive and I have always thought of the possibilities for it. I think there are states in the Midwest that will always have dance halls. In places like Texas, where I came from, the audiences at dance halls always had so much fun they never knew when to quit! I have thought of going back there, but that is as far as that idea has gone.

I have my memories of Texas, memories that aren't easily forgotten. Besides the

musical aspect, I can close my eyes and still see miles and miles of pretty countryside; especially the Blue Bonnets in the springtime. Even though I have spent most of my life in California, Texas left its mark on me. No one ever doubts I'm from Texas. Someone described themselves as being "of Texas" and that is a pretty good way to describe it. Being a Texan is something that always remains a part of a person....

Judy Stogner Adamson

"I was the youngest of the nine children in our family, so I was in a position to watch all of the older ones' accomplishments as well as their disappointments. Dave accomplished his success by hard work and perseverance. We were very close growing up. When he really got to swinging and moving, he was away from home and I missed him. I was so proud of him I could hardly stand it. It was a plain case of hero worship in its most advanced stages. He has an outstanding personality as well as being friendly as a puppy. To me, he is grand."

Orville Stogner

"Dave went to work for a chicken hatchery in Waurika, Oklahoma, where our parents had moved. At night, he and a few fellows would play at country dances that were popular in those days. This, of course, helped him get more developed in music that he sure enjoyed. Then he went to playing regular programs on radio station KWFT in Fort Worth early each morning. Since his radio show, he has gone on up the musical ladder. We are all real proud of Dave and his musical talent."

Merle Stogner Williamson

"Dave has played fiddle for as long as I can remember, but he doesn't only play fiddle. He also plays guitar, trombone, clarinet, and most any other instrument. Music has always been his first love, and I must say I think he is very good at it. I am proud of my brother for all his accomplishments."

Daryl Stogner

"My memories can take me back to when I was very young. Life was never boring back then, even before television. I remember Dad listening to records and learning songs. He'd play his fiddle and guitar, listening intently and then practicing what he had just heard on a record. I knew even then that he was a musician, but I had no idea what extent music would play in our family in the years to come.

The Barn was a perfect place for Country music. The place was always packed. The dirt parking lot was bumper to bumper, row after row of cars. The people filled the dance floor, and the seating was still full. Lots of folks had to stand or dance. They would crowd up to the bandstand to just watch Dad and the band sing and play. It was something like you would see at any show put on by Nashville stars, or popular recording artists. The walls inside The Barn were lined with photos of the entertainers who performed there. I mostly remember the entertainers from Nashville coming to our house to spend the night. To me they

were just friends of the family. I had no idea they were the stars of the day. They were just regular folks coming for a visit. They all seemed real nice.

As the years went by, I recall going to the radio stations with Dad. When local TV came to town, he was there, too. He had a TV show for the ABC affiliate, KJEO. For some reason, he would always ask me if I wanted to go to the TV station with him. I always jumped at the chance to see the entire TV setup -cameras, props and happenings. I got to see the guys in the band and I would sit across the studio listening to them play their music. Dad always did a lot of talking into the microphone doing commercials, introducing performers, etc. It appeared to me that he was having a great time.

I can recall being at different TV stations, getting to see the productions of not only Dad's shows, but other shows as well. It was something totally fascinating to me. Once in a while, he would let me sit on hay bales during the show right next to the band. I loved being that close to the music and getting to see myself on TV. It was always fun hanging out with Dad.

As I reached thirteen, he asked me if I wanted to learn how to play the mandolin. I jumped at that chance, too. He began teaching me the basic chords, and how to pick lead. He must have been thinking ahead for me. It wasn't long before he brought home an old Dan Electro bass and taught me how to play bass, as well. By fifteen, I was playing bass in his band in Bakersfield. I was up on stage with him and I was having as much fun as he was entertaining the folks.

Being a new musician, I felt the others were far superior in their skills to me. I concentrated on the basics and producing quality music, mostly learning as I went along. Dad and I were pretty close during my teen years. We spent a lot of time playing on TV and radio, or going to personal appearances, studio recordings and concerts. We didn't talk much while we worked. I was just another member of the band. It was after we finished and were traveling home that we spent time talking about that night or the music business in general.

I had been playing in his band in Bakersfield for about a year or so. There were always guests that were local talent that would come on the show. I was only sixteen years old, and hadn't really ever had a girlfriend. Anyway, there was a little gal that started coming on the show that was a year or two older than I was. She would sing a song or two, one or two days a week. Well, apparently she was interested in me and she made it obvious. I wasn't interested in her, though. One of my friends used to come to the TV station with me once in a while and we were trying to figure out how to handle this gal without hurting her feelings. We decided to tell her that I was only 15 and my parents wouldn't allow me to date for another year. Good idea, right? Not quite.

A week or so after we talked to her, we drove up to my house and there she was walking out of the front door with my dad. She got in her car, waved and left. Dad explained to me that the gal didn't realize he was my father. She had come to ask him to talk my strict parents into allowing me to date her. I was never so

embarrassed in my life. He certainly got a laugh from that experience. I referred to him as being too strict with me every once in a while, just to get a chuckle out of him!

On the TV show, I never sang. I just played bass. Well, some viewer wrote in complimenting Dad on his show, and told him how much she enjoyed it. Then she got to me. The viewer asked, "Who is the wallflower in the background? He never does anything except smile." Did I get razzed about that from everyone! So, Dad sat me down one evening and told me it would be a good idea if I did something more than just play bass. I agreed, however I was not yet ready to sing on TV.

During those days, Red Simpson was playing piano on the show. He used to put on silly outfits and wigs then sing funny songs or pantomime a song. So, I opted to do just that. I got into Red's box of duds, dressed up, and pantomimed a Ray Steven's song called the *Rockin' Boppin' Waltz*. It must have come off all right, as the guys in the band were laughing pretty hard. Either that or I looked like a real fool! The outcome was no more wallflower letters, and I soon started singing in public. I got my feet wet singing harmony. I'll guarantee you that there is no way I would have put on that get-up and stood before TV cameras singing that silly song, if Dad hadn't nudged me to step up to the plate!

I have always missed those days playing and watching Dad doing his best to please the crowds of people that came to dance and to see him. He was the professional that I loved to work with. He had rules for band members to work by, and he wanted and got the very best out of us. His band members knew the skills of each other, and each made up for the others weak areas. Those weak areas were few, though. You would find it hard to spot any of them. There was the work, travel, lousy clubs, and sometimes fights in the crowds. But, it was what he and the rest of us wanted. We wanted to entertain, and have fun doing it. And, Boy we did, too!

I did play on all of the Armed Forces Radio shows for Vietnam. We'd finish the TV show, pack up, and drive across town to a small studio. For me it was a great way to get more studio experience, and do something for the guys overseas. Dad and I played together up to 1970, when I went away to Vietnam.

When it was my turn to serve, I joined the Army. I did my basic training at Fort Ord, then I was off to Fort Gordon, Georgia where I went to Military Police school. I was first stationed in a place on the coast of Vietnam, CamRahn Bay. They had a little enlisted men's club, and one evening there was a Korean Band playing Rock and Roll and Country music. When the band took a break, several GIs got up and started playing Country music. I went up and asked the Korean bass player if I could play his bass. He was kind enough to say yes, so I played several songs with these guys. All the other GIs and I quickly introduced ourselves. I found that a couple of them were from Bakersfield, and they knew my Dad! Then, they recognized me from the TV show days. Talk about a small world. We played several more songs until the Korean band members came back up on stage. I didn't play in a band again for five years.

The army kept me busy, then I started my career as a Deputy Sheriff in El Centro. The next time I played was when Dad was playing a club in Coarsegold. He got me up on stage to play a few songs, and that was the way I finished my music career. I missed those days of playing music but my career was advancing and I decided to stay with it. I kept the music with me by writing songs. My songbook is still filled with those songs, memories of days gone past.

As Dad got older and his voice weakened and his bow wasn't quite as strong and sweet sounding as it used to be, I could still hear the sweet melodies of songs like Faded Love or the Westphalia Waltz that I must have heard him play a thousand times. One thing always stood out for me about him. Whether he was playing in front of 500 people or 25 people, he gave them his best music and they left knowing they had seen a true entertainer."

Once Bethany had started reading she had easily gotten caught up into her grandfather's past. She wanted the story to go on. It made her feel so close to him. She handed the last pages to Jeff, then leaned back in her chair. She was so pleased that her Papa had thought to write this chronicle of his career. When Jeff finished reading, they sat there for a while longer and talked about her grandparents. She certainly was wondering about what her grandmother was planning to tell her.