

**The David and Barbara Pryor Center
for
Arkansas Oral and Visual History**

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Arkansas Memories Project

Berbon Silas "Bubba" Sullivan III

Interviewed by Scott Lunsford

October 24, 2012

Helena, Arkansas

Objective

Oral history is a collection of an individual's memories and opinions. As such, it is subject to the innate fallibility of memory and is susceptible to inaccuracy. All researchers using these interviews should be aware of this reality and are encouraged to seek corroborating documentation when using any oral history interview.

The Pryor Center's objective is to collect audio and video recordings of interviews along with scanned images of family photographs and documents. These donated materials are carefully preserved, catalogued, and deposited in the Special Collections Department, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville. The transcripts, audio files, video highlight clips, and photographs are made available on the Pryor Center website at <http://pryorcenter.uark.edu>. The Pryor Center recommends that researchers utilize the audio recordings and highlight clips, in addition to the transcripts, to enhance their connection with the interviewee.

Transcript Methodology

The Pryor Center recognizes that we cannot reproduce the spoken word in a written document; however, we strive to produce a transcript that represents the characteristics and unique qualities of the interviewee's speech pattern, style of speech, regional dialect, and personality. For the first twenty minutes of the interview, we attempt to transcribe verbatim all words and utterances that are spoken, such as uhs and ahs, false starts, and repetitions. Some of these elements are omitted after the first twenty minutes to improve readability.

The Pryor Center transcripts are prepared utilizing the *University of Arkansas Style Manual* for proper names, titles, and terms specific to the university. For all other style elements, we refer to the *Pryor Center Style Manual*, which is based primarily on *The Chicago Manual of Style 16th Edition*. We employ the following guidelines for consistency and readability:

- Em dashes separate repeated/false starts and incomplete/redirected sentences.
- Ellipses indicate the interruption of one speaker by another.
- Italics identify foreign words or terms and words emphasized by the speaker.
- Question marks enclose proper nouns for which we cannot verify the spelling and words that we cannot understand with certainty.

- Brackets enclose
 - italicized annotations of nonverbal sounds, such as laughter, and audible sounds, such as a doorbell ringing;
 - annotations for clarification and identification; and
 - standard English spelling of informal words.
- Commas are used in a conventional manner where possible to aid in readability.

Citation Information

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**Scott Lunsford interviewed Bubba Sullivan on October 24, 2012,
at Bubba's Blues Corner in Helena, Arkansas.**

[00:00:00]

Scott Lunsford: All right, Bubba Sullivan, I'm Scott Lunsford, and we're here with the Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History, here in your Blues Corner—uh—Record—is it a record shop, or is this Blues Corner—uh . . .

Bubba Sullivan: Blues Corner record—well, it's—uh—you know, just Blues Corner record store.

SL: Okay. Blues Corner Record Store in downtown Helena here on Cherry Street. Today's date is October 24, 2012. And—uh—we're gonna put you through your paces here with a Pryor Center interview talkin' about—uh—your life and your career. And—um—we're gonna record this in high-definition audio and video. Uh—eventually, we wanna be able to post all this stuff that we do today on the web, and we've got somebody—uh—around the corner. Bruce is—uh—scanning your family photos and your growin'-up photos, and—uh—we'll give you all this stuff back. We'll get you the raw footage of this interview and those images. And—uh—eventually you'll get a transcript of this interview. When we send you the—the raw footage of the interview, we're

gonna ask that you look at it. And if you find anything in there that you don't want the rest of the world to hear or see, you just tell us, and we take it out because that—that's what we're about. It's . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . it's your story the way you want it told, and—uh—we'll be good stewards for it. And once you're happy with all that, we'll—uh—post all the audio of the interview on our website. [00:01:34] We'll have some highlights of the interview that you'll get a disc of, as well, to approve. Um—we'll post the transcript in its entirety. And we will encourage—um—Arkansas public school students—uh—college students, graduate students, researchers, documentarians—we'll encourage them to use this in their research and in their work—uh—hopefully to—uh—broaden and deepen—uh—everyone's understanding of Arkansas history. And if you're okay with all that, then we'll just keep goin'. And—and if you've got any questions, you can—we can talk about it . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . now—uh—'cause I want you to feel good about what we're doin'. You—are you okay with this?

[00:02:22] BS: Oh, hell, I'm fine. I mean, you know, it's gonna be great. It's just—uh—get the word out, you know. [Laughs] I

mean, course, a lotta peo—I mean, I'm known around the world, probably, 'cause I've been doin' the festival for so many years. But—uh—you know, a lotta—a lotta young kids probably don't know a lotta stuff what we gonna be talkin' about, you know.

SL: Well, and that's . . .

Trey Marley: Scott, I've gotta stop for one second.

SL: Okay.

TM: I've gotta fix somethin'.

[Tape stopped]

[00:02:44] SL: We had to stop the tape just . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . for a moment to clean up some of the background. But—um—we were just talkin' about—uh—tryin' to be very careful and particular with everything that we do—uh—since we're gonna preserve this forever.

BS: Yeah.

SL: I forgot to tell you that one of the deals is is that we preserve this forever, and we'll give you as many copies as you want . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . for your family, and—and—uh—we'll—we'll be good stewards of this material. I think it'll be somethin' that we can all be proud of. Um—so we usually start with when and where you were born.

[00:03:23] BS: I was born in 1940.

SL: Uh-huh.

BS: I was livin' at—we lived at Wabash, a little community about twenty miles south of here.

SL: Uh-huh.

BS: But I was born at the Helena hospital here, and it is now a kinda re—retirement home/assisted-livin' thing.

SL: Uh-huh.

BS: And my mother is—uh—my dad passed away in [19]93.

SL: Yeah.

BS: [*Clears throat*] I had a younger sister that passed away in [19]95. She was about four years younger than I was.

SL: Mh-hmm.

BS: And then my mother's still livin', and she's, like, ninety-three. Uh—her mind's still sharp. She's—uh—[*clears throat*] you know, has to have a sitter with her and everything. But—uh—it's amazing that I go up and have Mother's Day and Christmas and Thanksgiving, and I'm eatin' lunch in the same buildin' that I was born in [*SL laughs*] seventy-two years ago. [*SL laughs*] You know, that's kinda—kinda strange [*laughs*], you know. But I've been in Phillips County seventy-two years, all my life. Like I said, grew up at—uh—Wabash and graduated from Elaine High School.

Then I went off to—uh—college in Conway. It was Arkansas State Teachers. 1958.

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:04:39] BS: Population of Conway was—uh—sixty-five hundred then. I think it's sixty-five thousand now.

SL: Yeah.

BS: And I member Silas D. Snow was the president there. And I was just one of those guys that wasn't the greatest college student in the world, you know, and he called me in his office towards the end of the semester and said—uh—"Mr. Sullivan, I don't think you're college material." [SL laughs] So you know, and I went to two or three other, you know, like, junior colleges and stuff and—uh . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:05:08] BS: But—uh—you know, some people are cut out to be real smart and real good students, and some people are not, you know. And I [laughs] was one of those . . .

SL: Well, there's lots . . .

BS: . . . you know . . .

SL: . . . of ways—uh—[BS clears throat] to become educated.

BS: Oh yes.

SL: And there's lots—there's lots of things to learn.

BS: I was street smart. I think you can put it . . .

SL: Yeah.

BS: . . . that way.

[00:05:23] SL: Yeah, yeah. Well, let's—I—I wanna get back to—um—
um—you wer—you were born here in Helena, but you were—you
were raised down . . .

BS: Raised at . . .

SL: . . . the road.

BS: . . . raised at Wabash there at—my dad worked for Howe Lumber
Company.

SL: Uh-huh.

BS: It was a farmin' community, you know, and—uh—so, my dad was
a farmer with them for, like, forty-four years. And when they
finally sold out to one of the bigger corporations, he had been with
'em, you know, longer than anybody.

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:05:55] BS: So I—I grew up there, and—uh—Wabash was a little,
small community, but we had a—uh—uh—you know, back then it
was—uh—they had a Boy Scout troop. Had—I think you had—we
had forty-three kids.

SL: Wow.

BS: Well, that's sma—uh—that's really—and you know, Elaine was a

town of probably—where I went to school—probably a town of 715. That's what it said on the sign outside, you know, when you go into town. And you know, I went to grade school and junior high and high school there.

[00:06:30] SL: Well, let's talk about your mom and dad and—and your grandparents. Now—now, did you—what, first of all, what was your father's name?

BS: My father's name was Berbon Sullivan.

SL: Berbon.

BS: Yeah.

SL: What a great name that is.

BS: Berbon Silas Sullivan.

SL: Okay.

BS: But they called him—uh—Junior. That was his nickname.

SL: Uh-huh.

BS: And then a lotta people called him Cacklebur 'cause that was his other nickname [*SL laughs*], you know, 'cause he was a farmer.

SL: Uh-huh.

BS: And—uh—so, he was from—uh—Huntsville, Alabama. That's where all his folks were from. And my mother was from Charleston, Mississippi.

[00:07:07] SL: And what was her maiden name?

BS: Her maiden name was Smith. Lucille Smith—Marjorie Smith and .
..

SL: Lucille Marjorie Smith.

BS: . . . I was just up there yesterday goin'—lookin' through some pictures and she graduated at Woodruff High School in Helena here in 1937.

SL: Okay.

[00:07:30] BS: And then my grandparents—uh—uh—my grandmother on my dad's side and my grandfather were like—uh—you know, I was real little when I knew them, and—uh—I member goin' over to my grandfather's house 'cause my mother and dad—we lived right across the road from 'em on the farm.

SL: Okay.

BS: And I would go over to—uh—he—I member he had an old tall radio, you know, like they used to have back in the days. Always smoked a pipe. You know, back then—uh—you know, he had—he had horses and mules on the farm—my granddad. And then my dad worked for him. And I member—uh—you know, I—we'd go over and eat meals, but they ate ever mornin'—breakfast at five thirty. It wasn't goin', you know—lunch was at eleven thirty. Supper was, like, at five or five thirty. I don't remember. But you know, the—it was really good food. Everything came, you know,

kinda outta the gardens back in those days, and I member in the fall they would kill hogs and everything so you'd have meat and everything to have during the winter months. But when Mother and Dad'd go somewhere, I'd go over and stay with him, and I member he had that old tall radio, you know, and he smoked that Prince Albert tobacco.

SL: Yeah.

[00:08:52] BS: And he had a—uh—I member, man, hell, he always had to listen to—to—uh—the Grand Ole Opry, you know. And I thought, "You know, when I get older, I'll probably be able to tell him what to do, you know." [*Laughs*] 'Cause back then that's all—that's all you could hear, you know, on the—on the radio and everything or—or mostly what you could hear. And I member he had—uh—uh—he was—uh—he loved baseball, and they had—they had the—uh—the Cotton States Leagues here.

SL: Now, you're talkin' about your dad.

BS: I'm talkin' about my granddad.

SL: Your granddad. Okay.

BS: Yeah. See, I would go over and listen to him.

SL: Uh-huh.

BS: So the music and everything—what—I would stay with him and—uh—so then we'd come—he had some [*clears throat*]*—he had*

somebody that would drive for him. We'd come up to the ballpark up here, and it was—it was out by—you know, over the levee out there where—where the old baseball park was, and they had the swimmin' pool and everything. But I member he—uh—I member we were up here one night. Man, it rained cats and dogs. I said, "Grandpa," I said, "man, they're not gonna play this game." But they burnt—you know, how the—they put fuel out there, and they burn around the mound [*coughs*], you know, to dry it out. He was one of those old guys that believed, you know, we stayed around. And so, they finally played baseball that night. [*SL laughs*]

[00:10:12] And I member he used to get me up early in the mornin', and he had a—a black guy that worked on the farm there that would g—they'd go fishin' at Old Town Lake. And so—uh—why, hell, he'd get me out there. I'd—I'd go to sleep in the boat, and I thought, "Yeah, man"—you know, I love to eat fish, but I wouldn't give you a nickel to go fishin', you know. I mean, I was just—I—I guess growin' up that way. And course—uh—they would always have—uh—you know, like, on Mother's Day and Father's Day, all the—everybody would come home, you know, and they would have—you know, we—w—we'd all eat and everything and—and so—uh—I—he and I were there at the house one Father's Day. I don't member what—I don't—even back—I

couldn't have been over, I don't know, nine or ten years old, you know.

SL: Mh-hmm.

[00:11:02] BS: I don't really remember the date. But I heard him up one night, and he was havin' a heart attack.

SL: Hmm.

BS: Course, I didn't know what that was, you know. So I had to go and get one of the farmhands, and course, they didn't have telephones back then, so—uh—that was kinda scary experience.

[00:11:23] And then my other grandfather and grandmother—now, see, I didn't deckelknow . . .

SL: Well, now, did your grandfather survive the heart attack?

BS: No. He pa . . .

SL: He passed that night.

BS: . . . he—he died—died that night. Yeah. But I hadn't—uh—I was with him, you know, and everything. But, like I said, I was young. Maybe ten years old.

[00:11:38] SL: And was your—uh—grandmother on your dad's side still alive?

BS: No, she—no, she had already passed away.

SL: She had already passed, so he was livin' there by himself.

BS: Yeah, he was livin' there. And so, they had a—uh—then they had

a—uh—my grandfather on my mother's side . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

BS: . . . and her mother and—and dad—well, uh—see, she was part Cherokee Indian. I didn't—I—she died when I was really young.

SL: Your—um—your mother's mom?

BS: My mother's mom.

[00:12:05] SL: And what was her—do you know what their—her maiden name was?

BS: No, I don't.

SL: Okay.

BS: And so, they had a—they lived—uh—they had a little store about two miles south of—uh—Wabash. And I think that's where she passed there, and then after she passed, well, my grandfather on my mother's side, he moved to Memphis and bought a house at 1393 Vinton. And see, my mother has—she's ninety-three. She's got a older brother that's ninety—he's ninety-six. She's got another brother that's ninety-four, and then she's got a younger sister that's eighty. And all of 'em are still livin'. Now, her two brothers are—have, like, dementia, you know.

SL: Mh-hmm.

[00:13:00] BS: Alzheimer's. But—uh—I mean, they're still livin'. I just hope I got those genes on that side of the family [*SL laughs*],

you know. And—uh—so, when he moved to—when he would go—when he lived in Memphis—on my mother's side—see, everybody else was—all my other grandparents were dead. And so I'd go stay with him in the summer, like, in 1950, [19]51.

SL: Yeah.

BS: And like I said, that's before they ever had—uh—they had—they played all the college football games at Crump Stadium in Memphis. Well, he was, like, about two blocks from Crump Stadium, and see, that's where Arkansas and Ole Miss used to play and—uh—old E. H. Crump, you know, he kinda—he was the boss of Memphis, and—uh—I member goin'—I'd go up on Thanksgivin' and stay with 'em—our parents would, and—and it would be—uh—they would have a high school football game. Well, back—I think Crump Stadium held, like, thirty thousand people or somethin', and that wasn't much for college. But I mean, you know, you just didn't have big places back then. And so, they had a—uh—he was—uh—I member he'd carry me to, like, a high school rivalry game, and it'd be twenty-five thousand people there. Well, old man Crump would come with all these young girls and everything, you know. I mean, he was, you know, he was the head man in Memphis and everything. But us kids would play in the streets up there. I mean, it wasn't any

traffic. Nobody locked their doors. Uh—there was two papers. It was, like, *Commercial Appeal* in the mornin'. They'd bring milk to your house—uh—to his house. There was—uh—uh—uh—like, a *Press-Scimitar* in the afternoon. I member he and I—they had a baseball park downtown then called Russwood Park. And that's where the Memphis Chicks played, and he and I would go. Uh—we'd catch a bus. We'd have to walk about three—two blocks down to crosstown and catch a bus . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

BS: . . . to go down to cr—there. And you know, nobody bothered you at night. I mean, us—uh—like I said, us kids played in the yard and everything, and so, it was just a different time and—and—uh—my mother's youngest sister, now, she was a airline stewardess. And he had a big old house that he rented out apartments to all the stewardesses and everything. Well, Sissy was a—uh—stewardess for Southern airlines. Now, that was before Delta became . . .

[00:15:14] SL: That's your grandfather's sister?

BS: That's my mother's sister, see. Yeah.

SL: Your mother's sister.

BS: And so, see, they would—uh—so all the stewardess would stay there. Then I member they'd come pick her up in a limousine, the

girls, and I member she would carry me out to the airport, and I got to go up on one of the planes one time, you know, before it ever took off or anything. But it was Southern Airways. And—uh—then the gospel group, The Blackwood Brothers, I member they lived next door to him, but you would see all these people—us kids'd be playin' out in the street. We'd take a—a fishing cork, and we'd tape it. Put tape on it, and then we'd take a broom handle and play corkball out in the street. And like I said, people back then, you know, they would get off from work at five o'clock. They'd come, and they'd sit on their front porches, and they would drink their little drinks, you know, and everything. [00:16:05] So it was a—it was a pretty good time growin' up. I mean, like I—and I would go stay with him in the summertime, you know, and it was just a—just a—got educated pretty good when I was young. You know, I g—I mean, I got to do a lotta things and see a lotta things. They had—they had stock car races, and we'd go out to the fairgrounds and, you know, catch a bus and go out there. And like I said, nobody locked doors or anything up there, so it was a—so growin' up, I not only grew up here, I got to spend a lotta time, you know, there.

SL: In Memphis.

BS: Yeah.

SL: Really, two—uh—completely different environments.

BS: Oh yeah.

[00:16:38] SL: So—uh—all right, I wanna spend some time with the grandfathers here. The . . .

BS: Okay.

SL: . . . uh—the one—um—out in the country and he was at Wabash?

BS: Yes.

SL: Uh—so did he have electricity?

BS: Yes.

SL: Well, that's good. Uh . . .

BS: They . . .

SL: And then well water? Was it well water, or did he have . . .

BS: Well, they had—uh—I think—yeah, they had—they had—they had a well, but I think they had runnin' water, too.

SL: So they had . . .

BS: I meant, that—now, that's when I'm growin' up, you know.

SL: Right.

BS: Yeah.

[00:17:09] SL: So by the time that you were in that house . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . they had an indoor toilet and . . .

BS: Well, now, we did have to use the outdoor toilet. I member that,

now, in those days.

SL: Uh-huh.

BS: But I mean, they had indoor, you know . . .

SL: Water at the sink.

BS: Yeah. And I member—uh—I member the bathtubs. You know, they were funny lookin' old bathtubs back then. I mean, course—and—but it . . .

[00:17:32] SL: Were they the claw-foot with . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . porcelain . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: Yeah? And—uh—but—and did . . .

BS: Now—now, see . . .

SL: . . . and they . . .

BS: . . . now, see, he was a farmer, and my dad worked for him.

SL: Mh-hmm.

[00:17:42] BS: And some of the people that worked on the farm, some of the hands, the—the black men would tell me that—uh—that Papaw could ride a—he had an old horse they called Gold Dollar, and they said he could make that horse come up behind you in a cotton field and nudge you in the back, and you'd never know he was comin'. You know [*laughs*], he was . . .

SL: He—he knew how to . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . sneak up with it.

BS: Yeah. And [*SL laughs*]*—uh—so I—so I grew up on a—uh—grew up on the farm there, you know. And back then, you know, you didn't have—uh—you didn't have many kids to play with 'cause I lived, like, a mile and a half outta Wabash, see. And I member the first time that my dad bought me a bicycle. I was probably, oh, I don't know, twelve or thirteen. Somethin' like that. And I member—uh—I fi—I fell over a thousand times, but I finally learned how to ride it. And I member my dad sayin', "Hey, you know, you better quit ridin' that thing. You're gonna be so sore and raw and everything." Well, I—you know, a kid—they don't pay attention . . .*

SL: Right.

BS: . . . to stuff like that. Rode it all day, and man, I mean, I was just—I was raw as can [*laughs*] be, man. But you know, you learn your lessons, and then a lotta kids back then, they'd get bicycles and just put 'em together, and—and you know, we'd ride on an old dirt road and stuff, you know. So it was a—it was a interesting, you know, growin' up at that time. And the—and the thing about it was, like I said, the food was always good. They—

they had a cook, and man, he cooked. You know, it was just great food.

[00:19:14] SL: Now, this is your mom and . . .

BS: My g . . .

SL: . . . dad or . . .

BS: No, this is—this is my grandparents.

SL: Your grandfather.

BS: Yeah.

[00:19:19] SL: Your grandparents. Um—so did—did they have electricity in the house?

BS: Yeah.

SL: That's good. And—uh—how—how big was their house?

BS: It was a big—uh—it was a pretty big old house that they lived in. Now, the one that we lived in across the road that my mother and dad and my sister and I lived in, it—it wasn't, you know, it wasn't as big as the old farmhouse was.

[00:19:40] SL: Uh-huh. Did it—so was it—did it have two stories or . . .

BS: Yeah, it had—I member it had a stairs goin' upstairs.

SL: Uh-huh.

BS: And I member it was high off the ground 'cause, you know, back then they would—uh—they didn't let, you know, the ground—it

would just be dirt, like, you know, like out in the chicken yard and stuff. Everything—it was like—you know, there wasn't any grass growin' or anything. You know, they . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

BS: . . . they kept—they kept it pretty well down, you know.

[End of verbatim transcription]

[00:20:09] SL: So garden-fresh food, and . . .

BS: Oh yeah. See, ever . . .

SL: . . . you mentioned hogs.

BS: Yeah, see, everybody on the farm had—they—he made sure all the people that worked there, they had gardens. Everybody ate out of a garden. You know, and then you have—I mean, you'd go to the store. They had a country store 'cause, see, like, when I was, like, twelve or thirteen, my uncle worked for Howe Lumber Company, and he ran a store. Well, I went to work at the store, you know. And I member you would—we'd work, like, six days a week. Go to work at six in the mornin' and get off at six in the afternoon except on Saturday, and you worked till seven. And I member I was makin'—you get a paycheck every two weeks. I got forty-two dollars. Now, that's—they took out tax. You know, I don't even member what—how much the tax was back then.

SL: Right.

BS: But that figures out to you're makin', like, three dollars a day or somethin' like that, you know.

[00:21:07] SL: What about—now, what were your grandparents' names on your dad's side?

BS: His name was Berbon Silas Sullivan.

SL: Okay, now, so we got that, and your mom's grandmother's name was . . .

BS: I'm not sure.

SL: But she was half Cherokee?

BS: No, now, that's the ones—yeah, that's one on my mom's side, yeah. All right, his name was Gene Smith, and we called him Daddy Gene. Now . . .

SL: Okay.

BS: Now, she was a part Cherokee on my mother's side.

SL: Okay.

BS: Yeah.

SL: All right. And so, the—your . . .

BS: See, I never did know much about her.

SL: Okay.

BS: I just member they called her Mama Gene, and see, I called the one that I stayed with in Memphis—I called him Daddy Gene, see.

SL: Okay.

BS: And I called the one Papaw and Mamaw that was on my dad's side, you know.

[00:21:55] SL: So you did—you—did we—you don't know your grandmother's name? You don't remember.

BS: No, I don't.

SL: You just knew her as . . .

BS: I just don't remember. It's just been . . .

SL: [*Unclear word*].

BS: Yeah.

[00:22:02] SL: Okay. And I wanna get back to the—what about other livestock besides the hog day?

BS: Oh, they had hogs. They had mules. They had cows. You know, everything.

SL: Chickens.

BS: Yeah, oh, chickens were everywhere. And see, they would take the mules up—I don't member how many mules they had, but they had a big old mule barn, and course, you had labor back then, and they probably had sixty or seventy mules, you know.

[00:22:33] SL: And was the crop cotton?

BS: Cotton was the big crop back then. Yeah. I think they mighta grown some beans back then, but I think cotton was the . . .

SL: Cotton was . . .

BS: . . . was the big thing.

SL: . . . the cash crop.

BS: Yeah.

[00:22:48] SL: And so, there were—were your grandparents—were they considered sharecroppers? Or they worked for the . . .

BS: No, see, they . . .

SL: . . . Howe Lumber . . .

BS: . . . they worked for Howe Lumber Company, see.

SL: And that's . . .

BS: What they do—they divided stuff into about six farms, and my grandfather and them would be the manager of one's farm, and then somebody else'd be the manager of another farm. But Howe Lumber Company owned everything, see. And they would give you—eventually, when my dad was—after my grandfather died, my dad—they would give you a truck to work with, you know.

[00:23:22] And then you were in charge of all the labor, and then you'd turn all the time in for everybody, and if somebody got sick, you'd carry 'em to the doctor or whatever, you know. Back in those days I member somebody'd get sick. Well, Daddy'd get up two or three o'clock. Now, this is not my grandfather. This is my dad. And they'd—he'd get up two or three o'clock in the mornin' and, you know, carry 'em to the doctor. And course, you know,

back in those days they—you know, it's totally different than it is now. You know, I—what's the word they use now? Politically correct or whatever. [00:23:55] Well, you know, back then, you know, they would—there was names that they would call, but I mean, you know, I've seen my dad get up and g—carry 'em to the doctor 'cause they knew no matter what he said to 'em that they could get anything in the world they wanted to out of him. And when one of 'em died, they couldn't have a funeral without him bein' there. I mean, that's just—you know, times were different, and that's the way it was. And it was—I think people respected each other. Now, there was a lotta things that the blacks couldn't do, you know, that they can do now. But me just talkin' to some kids I grew up with, you know, black kids, they—we just—we had it—it was so much better. I mean, there was really probably the only thing that we didn't do with black kids was go to school with 'em. We just didn't know any better, I mean, you know.

SL: That's the way it was.

BS: Yeah, nobody ever told you any different.

SL: So . . .

BS: And the black schools that they had back then—hey, they were a lot better educated than some of 'em are now. I mean, you know, because they had parents. Discipline was a whole lot different

than it is now, you know.

[00:25:05] SL: Mh-hmm. Did the farmhands—did they have places on the farm? Did they . . .

BS: Yeah, they . . .

SL: . . . live on the farm?

BS: . . . had houses. Yeah. They had houses. They had gardens.

And when they killed the hogs, they got meat and everything, you know. And when I worked at the store, they would come to the store, and you know, it wasn't like you can go to [*clears throat*], excuse me, you can go to a store now and get stuff, you know, anytime you want it. You can just—you know, you ate—most people—they had a big old dinner bell that they rang, and at eleven thirty they would get out of the fields, and they would come. They'd have lunch pails, and they would eat. And they got a hour off. They'd go back to work. You know, they'd either play baseball or somethin', you know, to pass the time. But it was a—it's just a different world. I mean, I'm so thankful I grew up in that time. I mean, I'm so thankful I was a kid then because kids today have no idea what the world was like back then, you know.

[00:26:09] SL: Well, all the farm families, the workers—you played with their kids.

BS: Oh yeah. Go down to their house, everything. Yeah. Probably

one of the—you know, it was just a—like I said, it was a different time. I—and like one of my black friends—we grew up together, and he live—he now lives—he was up in Chicago. I think he was a policeman, or he worked for the city. And he came to see me about, oh, I don't know, three—ah, a couple months ago. He moved back to Southaven, Mississippi. And he was talkin' about how I had the baseball, and we'd all play, and you know, it was just—he tried—his wife was from Chicago, and he tried to explain to her how it was when we grew up, see. I mean, it was just—when I got old enough to drive, my dad would let me have the truck, and we could come up here on Saturday night or somethin', and of course, the streets were crowded. All the stores stayed open till twelve o'clock, you know. It was just ever—there was, like, three movie theaters on the street. There was, like, nine restaurants. Yeah, it was, you know, it was just a lot different.

[00:27:21] SL: You know, it is—there is—but really, when you got to be school age and your friendships became—they—it became segregated because they went to a different school . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . and you went to a different school.

BS: But when we got outta school, hell, we still played together.

[00:27:39] SL: Yeah, but didn't—did—as you got older and further

along in public schools, didn't those relationships start to change because now they were . . .

BS: Well, it was a little bit different, but their parents raised them, and our parents and their parents stayed close. And so, it was still—you were segregated, but yet you still played together. You were still friends. I mean, it was like—it wouldn't be—I mean, it was just—there was still that closeness there. I mean, 'cause we were all raised together. I knew their parents. Their parents knew me. When you'd go to their house—I mean, you know, it was just totally—I mean, I'm just thankful that I was—during that time. And now some of the friends that I grew up with come back to see each other, and we all talk about how bad it would be to be a kid now. They don't have that bond. Even though there was segregation, they don't have that bond that we have still today. I mean, like when this guy that came to see me—his name was Champ 'cause he always wanted to be a boxer. [00:29:06] And like I said, he—and when he came back here, he ju—he's brought his wife in here three or four times. And we just hug and carry on, and he said, "Oh, we just had the greatest time." I mean, it's still—see, he's—I'm, like, seventy-two. He's probably sixty-nine, and we're still very, very close. So I appreciate what my youth did for me in that, you know.

SL: Well, you know, those early years are the years that you . . .

BS: That's right.

SL: . . . you learn how to be a friend.

BS: That's exactly right.

SL: And you go through . . .

BS: And you learn how to respect people. Even though somebody was not the same color as you, you still respected them. And no matter whether you were white or black, in those days if anybody spoke to you, you better say, "Yes, sir," and "No, sir," and "Yes, ma'am," and "No, ma'am." 'Cause somebody's gonna tell your parents [*SL laughs*], whether you were white or black, and you're gonna get a whippin' when you got home.

[00:30:02] SL: Yeah, now there was that—also that . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . that the neighbors and—everyone knew what everyone was doin'.

BS: Everybody knew what ever . . .

SL: And there was a network of . . .

BS: It wasn't a t—it wasn't any telephones. It wasn't any way you could make communications, but somehow they knew. [*SL laughs*] Until this day I can't figure out how [*SL laughs*] it happened 'cause I know a bunch of us kids when we were goin' to

school, we'd get kicked off the school bus 'cause I had to ride a school bus, like, eight miles. Well, there wasn't any telephones, but my dad sure knew about it fore I got home. I mean, I don't know how they knew back in those days. But I think the respect and the friendship still holds today. And I think if I were a kid today, it wouldn't hold true as it did, you know, back when I was growin' up.

[00:30:53] SL: How close were y'all—was your all's farm to the river?

BS: Oh now, see, we were a pretty good ways from the river 'cause I—Wabash was—the Mississippi River was ?dammed?, but it was, like—now, there was Old Town Lake at Wabash but the river—we were a pretty good ways from the river, see.

[00:31:12] SL: Is Old Town Lake one of the oxbows that . . .

BS: Yeah, it's just a lake where—it's down around Lakeview and everything now, you know. And it's just a—but there was just so much to do, you know, back in those days. I mean, we—well, you made things to do. I member they had—in the stores they sold lard. I think little two-pound boxes, four-pound pails, eight-pound pails, sixteen-pound pails. Well, you would take the top—the tin top off of that. You'd nail it to—if you didn't have anything to do, you would nail it to a broom handle and roll it down a dirt road. I mean, you'd just race. That's what—I mean, you created stuff to

do. I mean, your imagination was good. See, when I was a kid and I didn't have anybody to play with, well, I'd take a football or a baseball, and I would play football and baseball against myself.

[00:32:15] I know that sounds crazy, but you can invent things to do . . .

SL: Sure.

BS: . . . you know, when you don't have anything else to do. You can do stuff like that. I don't think kids—they got no idea about that stuff now, you know. You created things. You know, I member one—in the Boy Scouts, we'd play kick the can. Well, hell, that was a big thing, you know.

SL: Sure.

BS: All that sorta stuff. So it was just a—so I mean, I had a great childhood, you know. And then, course, when I got in sch—went in—when I went to school at Elaine, I started playin' football, you know, in the seventh grade. And well . . .

[00:32:55] SL: Let's go—let's talk about your grandfather in Memphis . . .

BS: Okay.

SL: . . . and when you'd go spend time with him. First of all, how would you get to Memphis?

BS: Oh, my dad would carry me up there. See, there wasn't a—you

couldn't—they had a ferry here, and we would always go up the Arkansas side. See, like at Howe Lumber Company on Christmastime, well, my dad would always go—they had a United Methodist church—they had a—and it was Methodist like—Mellwood, Elaine, and Wabash, and the pastor would preach at all three churches. Well, the Howes had owned Howe Lumber Company. You know, we'd—they'd always have a Christmas play. Miss Harriet would do that, and you would s—I'd have to be Joseph, you know, and you'd have to sing in the choir, and you'd have to do this, and my dad would go get the—cut the Christmas tree—I mean, get the Christmas tree and it—we had a pretty nice-size church, and it was one of those old tall trees, you know, that they had back in those days. And then when my Daddy Gene lived in Memphis, see, well, every Christmas Eve night we would have to go to church at Wabash and then eat at my aunt's. And then you drove to Memphis, and I member we'd drive up the Arkansas side, and I always remember there was a gas station in West Memphis. You had to go through downtown West Memphis then to get over into Memphis. There wasn't an interstate or anything. [00:34:15] You'd go to Forrest City—Marianna, Forrest City—go that way. So they had a—and I member my dad used to always—they'd always have a gas war in West Memphis, like at—I

mean, gas would be anywhere from fifteen to nineteen cents. I know that sounds crazy, but . . .

SL: No.

BS: . . . you know, it was a . . .

SL: I remember that.

BS: Yeah. And we would go over at Daddy Gene's, and I never could figure out how Santa Claus could—we'd have Santa Claus there the [*laughs*] next mornin'. You couldn't figure out how all that stuff got up there. But my dad was pretty sneaky about things like that, you know. Him and my sister. And so, we would always spend, you know, Christmas up there with Daddy Gene, so it was a . . .

[00:34:54] SL: So what years are we talkin' about? Early [19]50s or . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . late [19]40s?

BS: Like, late [19]40s, early [19]50s, you know.

SL: Uh-huh. So there had to be a big difference between seein' your grandfather in Memphis and livin' across the road from your grandparents back in Wabash.

BS: Oh yes, totally different 'cause, see, he was—he used to work at Chicago Mill here when they lived in West Helena. And so, he had

a little shop—it was a big old house in Memphis. Fact, I've been by there a couple of times, and it's been renovated, and I think that's one of the old home houses up in Memphis, you know. And he had a—like I said, he rented it out to people, and most of the stewardess stayed there. And then he had a—he had all of his tools down in the basement, see. [00:35:54] He was—he could always do woodwork and all that kinda stuff, you know. And so, yeah, we would just—you know, we'd just get—and if we wanted to go somewhere, we'd just go. I mean, it—we'd just walk, you know. And like I said, it was—the—us kids just created stuff to play in the street, you know, and whatever, you know. And so, it was a great time. I mean, wherever I—you know, back then, wherever you wanted to go in Memphis, well, you know how grandpas were. They'd go, you know. [SL laughs] And we'd just go and do it.

[00:36:30] SL: What about church? Were your parents avid churchgoers or . . .

BS: Yeah, we'd—oh yeah, you better go to church every Sunday, now, you know.

SL: You had a—did you have a separate set of clothes that were Sunday clothes that . . .

BS: They made you look nice on Sunday. It wasn't any of this stuff,

you know, like now. I don't know. I never was into ties, so I don't member. But I member you'd have to wear a little sport coat 'cause, you know, they—you know how moms were back in those days. They'd make you—you had to dress up, you know. There wasn't any such thing as goin' to church probably [*laughs*] like it is now, you know.

[00:37:09] SL: And you all belonged to the Methodist church?

BS: Methodist church. Yes.

SL: So Sunday morning you'd go to Sunday school and then the service?

BS: Sunday school and church at Wabash, yeah.

SL: And you . . .

BS: And then they—then I—and if I remember best, what did they—they have MYF.

SL: MYF.

BS: Have it at night. Yeah, we had to go—my sister and I'd go to that . . .

SL: On Sunday night.

BS: . . . once we, yeah, once we got older, you know. But yeah, you'd always go to church on Sunday. Now, I don't believe—they mighta had church on Wednesday night, but I don't remember, you know. But I know Sundays was church day, and then you

either went to your aunt's house or you went to somebody's house and ate. You know how it was back in those days. They had big lunch, and you stayed around all some—at some of your relatives' house on—or either at Grandpa's house on Sunday or somethin', you know.

[00:37:59] SL: Did the preacher ever come over for Sunday dinner or . . .

BS: No, I think that—I think the preacher lived in Elaine, and they would kind of—I'm sure somebody'd take care of him, but you know, I mean, they'd make in-home visits, but I don't ever remember one comin' and eatin'. I mean, it coulda happened, but I don't remember that.

[00:38:20] SL: Do you member havin' a Bible in the house?

BS: Oh yeah, my aunt gave me a Bible. I mean, I read the Bible every day now. It's just—I don't go to church now, but I read the Bible every day. Yeah, you know, to me, churches have gotten where—I don't know. They're—how do you explain it? I—it's not—you know, there's certain people that try to run certain churches. You know what I mean by that? [00:38:50] So I figure, you know, I'll read my Bible, and God has been good to me. I mean, I've had good health. Seventy-two, you know, and I give to the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. I think he is

probably the—one of the few preachers in this world that I would trust. I mean, you know, I think his organization does a lotta good work for a lotta people around the world. And I send so much money every week to—they have this thing called My Hope—TV deal that they send to these countries overseas and people—you know, that's how they convert Christians, so I give to that. And my wife and I give to a lotta charities, you know, so.

[00:39:38] SL: Were your mom and dad both equally engaged with the church? I mean, would—did they . . .

BS: Yeah. See, my dad used to be an alcoholic. He was a—I think him and his runnin' buddy, they would drink, like—I think he said two fifths a day . . .

SL: Wow!

BS: . . . back then. But he always provided. Mother and us never went hungry. I mean, the food and the clothes and stuff were always taken care of before the whiskey and that. And then he had a wreck one time, and he didn't get hurt, but he joined the A.A. club and just quit drinkin'. And when he passed away, he had been sober, like, I don't know, forty-four, forty-five years.

SL: Wow.

[00:40:26] BS: And see, him and Mother and them, they would go out and go dancin' and partyin' and stuff, and he would buy all—he'd

go buy all the liquor for everybody, and he'd mix the drinks and, you know, they would—people would ask him—said, "Man, how in the world you do that?" He said, "Hell, I'm not gonna feel bad tomorrow. You know, I done been down that road, you know." But now a lotta people that drink whiskey can't do that, you know. They can't be around it after they get sober, you know. I'm—I've seen him get a lotta—I member he was tryin' to get this kid sober one time, and I member the kid called him and said, "Man, I got a fifth of whiskey here. I gotta—I'm studyin' to go to nursin' school. I gotta take a test tomorrow." Said, "I need a drink so bad." And Daddy said, "The best thing you can do is take—go over and take the top off that bottle, pour it straight down the sink, and go back to studyin', you know." And so, then the—he always had trouble with this kid and he—Daddy said, "Look, I can carry you to Little Rock and put you in one of those things for thirty days. But the minute you get out, if there's a liquor store across the street, I cannot—you gotta make up your own mind to quit" . . .

SL: Right.

BS: . . . you know. And so, he just—when he decided to quit, he quit. Cold turkey.

[00:41:39] SL: So did you notice a big change?

BS: Oh yeah, it was a . . .

SL: How old were you when he quit?

BS: I—man, I was young.

SL: Really?

BS: I don't remember the—I member—but I member he always took care of the family first before any drinkin' came in. You know, and a lotta people when they get paid and stuff, they just go drinkin'. If you got family, well, family comes later.

SL: Right.

BS: But mine never was that way. And of course, Mother, she'd only have a drink or two. She never drank much. And my—I don't know if my dad's dad—I don't think he drank, and I know Mamaw didn't drink. And then the other grandparents—Daddy Gene might drink a little bit, but you know, there was nobody—I think my dad was probably the one that drank more than anybody.

SL: Yeah, that's a lot—that's a lot of alcohol a day . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . between two people. It's—well . . .

[00:42:40] BS: Well, but you know—now, when I was growin' up—now, you know, I member a lotta grown-ups drank, you know, like, at five o'clock. That was just . . .

SL: Sure.

BS: . . . you know, that was just . . .

SL: Well, hell, the—there were, you know, the three-martini lunch . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . when we were growin' up.

BS: Yeah.

SL: That was predominant. It was, again . . .

BS: I don't know . . .

SL: . . . it was part of the culture.

BS: Where—what I grew up in, I don't think martinis were ever around. [*SL laughs*] I think it was just strictly whiskey, you know.

SL: Yeah, well, I am saying . . .

BS: But I know what, yeah, I know . . .

SL: . . . that the lunch . . .

BS: . . . what you're talkin' about. Yeah.

SL: Yeah, it could start at lunch.

BS: Yeah, yeah.

[00:43:14] SL: So—all right, let's talk a little bit about your mom.

She was a how—homemaker.

BS: Homemaker. Housewife.

SL: And did you have brothers and sisters?

BS: Had a sister that was, like I say, was younger than I was. And then she passed away, like, she was gettin' ready to come to the

festival down here, like—I think it was in [19]95, and she just—
she had three kids, and her husband had some heart problems.
She was overweight, and she was taking care of the kids and
taking care of the—takin' care of everybody but herself.

SL: Yeah.

BS: And she just had a massive heart attack and passed away.

[00:43:52] SL: Hmm. Now, what was her name?

BS: Ginger.

SL: Ginger.

BS: Mary Virginia.

SL: Mary Virginia . . .

BS: Virginia Sullivan.

SL: . . . Sullivan.

BS: And they called her Ginger. And see, my real name was Berbon,
but she couldn't say Berbon, so she said Bubba, so that's how my
name got to be [*SL laughs*] that, you know.

[00:44:10] SL: Well, you know, Bubba's kind of an unusual name to
be called anyway, but I think Berbon is even more unusual, so . . .

BS: Oh, it is. Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

BS: Oh, I tell people, and they said, "Well, do you spell it like the
whiskey?" And I said, "No, you spell it *B-E-R-B-O-N*."

SL: Oh, okay.

BS: And it was, like . . .

SL: So that's . . .

BS: . . . it was . . .

SL: . . . a family name.

BS: Yeah, family name. Yeah.

SL: A family name.

BS: Yeah.

[00:44:31] SL: That's interesting. So what—your family—they trace back to what—I mean, they came here . . .

BS: I don't—my—all my dad's people, like I say, grew up in Alabama, Huntsville, Alabama. And then my mom's people were from Charleston, Mississippi. And then Daddy Gene, now, he grew up, like, in Helena here, you know. West Helena 'cause . . .

SL: Mh-hmm. 'Cause that's where the mills were for the lumber.

BS: Yeah, Chicago Mill.

SL: Lumberyard.

BS: Yeah, they lived on Fourth Street. [*SL laughs*] And so, it's a—yeah, I mean, you know, I was just—I've had a good life.

[00:45:18] SL: So how far were you from Elaine School?

BS: Well, I was about a mile and a half—the farm was a mile and a half from Wabash, and Wabash was six miles from Elaine.

SL: That's a pretty good . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . clip.

BS: So we rode a bus every day.

[00:45:36] SL: And you took your lunch to school?

BS: No. Now, that—when I was goin' to school . . .

SL: They had a lunch program?

BS: They had a lunch program. It seemed like to me it cost you a quarter to, you know, to—but now, in grade school I think we did have to carry our lunch in grade school, now. I think—they didn't get a cafeteria at Elaine High School till I was, like, in junior high or somethin', you know, like that. Yeah. But it was a . . .

[00:46:00] SL: Now, across the street your folks are havin' breakfast at five thirty, or is that when y'all . . .

BS: Oh, that's when Grandpa—I mean, they ate—I mean, if you're over at his house—now, they had the best food in the world
[laughs], but . . .

SL: Yeah.

BS: . . . you know, it wasn't any of this—they ate—grandparents, and especially on my dad's side, they—it was strictly certain times, three times a day.

SL: You didn't show, you didn't eat.

BS: You didn't eat. But they had—you know, and my mother and dad wasn't that strict, but when you was at Grandpa or Grandma's now—if you wanted the really good food—not that our food wasn't good at home . . .

SL: Right.

BS: . . . but you know, when you're a kid you always think it's better because Grandma and Grandpa cooked it, you know, or somebody cooked it for 'em.

SL: Right, right.

[00:46:47] BS: See, they had a guy named—a black gentleman named Joe, and they helped raise him. You know, I member when he got—after everybody had died and he got sick, my sister was goin' to school at Conway, and she'd go to the hospital to see him. And people in the hospital said, "What are you doin' seein' that guy?" She said, "Man, he raised me. He raised me and my brother, you know." So you know, it was just, like I said, different times back then. And see, they gave him a house, whatever he needed. You know, he just—all he had to do was—you know, he just cooked three meals a day.

[00:47:25] SL: There was a loyalty back then, wasn't there?

BS: Oh, loyalty that you don't have now. You know, nowadays it's how can somebody outfox somebody else. I mean, there's no

trust, you know. You know, back then you could—I mean, it was just—people were raised different back then. There was more family oriented—more parents, you know. It wasn't babies havin' babies, you know, like it is now.

[00:47:54] SL: Right. So you were born essentially during World War II.

BS: Yes.

SL: And so, you don't have any memory at all of the war 'cause you . . .

BS: No. See, I—my dad didn't have to go to the war because he was, you know, he was farmin' and he had to raise—now see, my uncle, now, he served in the air force, and I had a—Daddy had another—had a brother that was in the air force for like—oh, hell, I don't know. He retired from the air force. [00:48:30] And you know, so a lotta his [*car honks*]*—see, my dad had—he had a sister. She's dead now. He had a brother that him and his wife—I mean, he was a military guy, but he smoked all the time, just—cigarettes killed him. I mean, he got up pretty good in age, and then he had another brother that was a painter that, younger brother, that died at twenty-nine. He drank his self to death. Twenty-nine years old.*

[00:49:05] SL: So you didn't ever—did you ever get to know any of

your uncles on—this is on your dad's side?

BS: Oh now—well, I knew—now, I knew my aunt—I mean, my dad's sister 'cause she grew up at Wabash, and then they moved to West Memphis, and she worked there in West Memphis. And—but now, one of his other brothers—they lived in Colorado. Well, they lived all over 'cause he was in the air force. And then I never got to know the young one that died. Now, see, his wife, which would be my aunt, now, she just died here a couple of years ago in Texas. She's ninety-nine. And I member when she was eighty-two, she'd tell me, "Yeah, I gotta drive all these old women around, you know. They can't drive." They'd be eighty years old or whatever. And her daughter, which was my aunt, would be—she married the band director here, and their kids all moved down to Huntsville, Alabama, and they all are teachers down there and everything now, you know, so . . .

[00:50:14] SL: I guess—do you member any of your uncles' names—
aunts' and uncles' names?

BS: Yeah, my aunt's name was Josie, and she married a guy named Davi—Josie Davidson was her name, but you know, it used to be Sullivan, and then Paul was, like, Paul Sullivan, and then Gene was the one that drank his self to death, you know. So . . .

SL: And then . . .

BS: Oh, I was lucky. And then—and, see, I had a uncle and aunt—oh, now, my daddy had another sister, and she's in a nursin' home here. Lillian Deckelman. See, she married—that was her uncle that I worked for at Wabash. He was workin' for Howe Lumber Company. Now, he was the—he was a gunner in the air force, and course, he, cigarettes, he smoked, and it killed him. Now, she's a little younger than my mother. She's probably about eighty—eighty-eight or somethin', but I saw her son the other day, and they just put her in a nursin' home. Her name was, like, Lillian Deckelman, you know. So you know, we would always go to all our aunts' and uncles' that lived around—their houses, you know, and eat, and it was just, you know—family was real close.

[00:51:33] SL: So did you have any responsibilities around the house? Were you . . .

BS: No.

SL: You didn't have—they didn't give you chores that you had to get done before . . .

BS: Nah.

SL: . . . you went to school or when you came home?

BS: Kids—you just had to make good grades and kids just—we played. That's all we did. I mean, you know, it wasn't any like—I mean, you'd have to—you know, moms back then were totally different

than they are now. I mean, you—it was just—they looked out for you as long as you didn't screw up. [*Laughter*] You know what—you kinda know what I mean.

SL: Yeah.

[00:52:08] BS: But no, we had—I had no chores. I didn't have chores, like, "You know, I have to go do this" or "I have to go do that," you know.

SL: So you didn't make your bed in the morning . . .

BS: No.

SL: . . . or . . .

BS: I might have, but hell, I don't remember.

SL: Yeah. And . . .

BS: It wasn't somethin'—it must not been that important or I woulda remembered.

SL: You'd known.

BS: Yeah, I [*laughs*] woulda—I'd've known.

SL: You gotta get that . . .

BS: Remember how to do it.

SL: . . . done before . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . you leave the house kinda thing.

[00:52:31] BS: That's exactly right. But I member goin' to school.

Now, you always had to have clean clothes. Your shoes had to be
. . .

SL: Polished?

BS: . . . polished and everything, you know. It was just—your shirt
better have all the buttons on 'em and they better—you know,
you—you know, it wasn't . . .

SL: And . . .

BS: . . . any of this ragtag stuff, you know.

SL: Instilled some pride . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . is what they were doin'. Did—how much education did your
mom and dad have?

BS: I think probably just high school.

[00:53:01] SL: Mh-hmm. Did they help you at all with your
homework?

BS: Yeah. My dad never did. I mean, you know, he—that wasn't his
cup of tea, you know.

SL: Right.

BS: That—you know, back then they always thought that was a
mother's . . .

SL: Mother's chore.

BS: . . . job.

SL: Yeah.

BS: Chore, you know, so she always did, you know.

[00:53:26] SL: So you were—were you an okay student? Average student in grade school or . . .

BS: Yeah, probably a get-by student. I mean, you know, I could've been better.

SL: Yeah.

BS: But you didn't—you weren't really bad, either. You were kinda in the middle, you know. And I member—see, when I had to go to school at Elaine, well, Sissy, my aunt, that's when her and Daddy Gene had a little store about a mile and a half from Wabash, see. So I'd have to—I'd go there and catch the school bus. Well, Sissy was a senior, like, at Elaine, so she took care of me, you know. And I remember me and this boy, we were in, like, the second grade. Had this teacher named Miss Stewart, and course, back then, you know, you pick up words and everything. And I don't know. We were—we'd picked up words [*laughs*] on the farm, and we were cussin'. Man, I member Miss Stewart, she got us, and she carried us in the bathroom. Man, we were in second grade. She got that Ivory soap, man. [*Laughs*]

SL: Uh-oh.

[00:54:26] BS: She washed our mouth out. Course, that made us

quit usin' foul language out in public, but you know, you still—it . . .

.

SL: Sure.

BS: . . . she didn't break you, but she made you think about it, you know. You know, they could whip you back in school then, but I—you know, it just—I guess it never hurt 'cause we're all doin' good now, you know.

[00:54:46] SL: So they'd take the—would they use a ruler or something on your hands or what . . .

BS: No. Now, you know . . .

SL: . . . what kind of physical punishment . . .

BS: It was . . .

SL: . . . was it?

BS: . . . like a paddle back then. Now, when I got in the sixth grade, there was a—we had a teacher named—I think her name was Miss Ruth Davis or somethin'. Now, she'd walk up behind you. You'd be sittin' in school, and she had a ruler, man, and she'd just pop you across the back, you know. Get your attention, I mean, right quick, you know.

SL: Well, yeah.

[00:55:18] BS: But it was just—yeah, it was—but you know how kids are. They were mis—I mean, they weren't bad. We were just

bein' mischievous back in those days, you know.

SL: Yeah. Get away with what you could.

BS: Yeah, get away with what you could, you know. But I mean . . .

SL: If you got caught, you . . .

BS: If you got caught, you . . .

SL: The consequences were . . .

BS: . . . you paid the consequences. That's exactly right. [*SL laughs*]

So I mean, you know, it was . . .

SL: Fair is fair.

BS: Yeah, fair is fair. [*Laughter*] That's right. Yeah, it was . . .

SL: You had it comin'.

BS: Yeah.

[00:55:49] SL: [*Laughs*] Well, I mean, still, when you started goin' to public schools, that was—that's a big change. I mean . . .

BS: Oh yeah.

SL: . . . were you—how—do you remember your first day—first grade?

Or did you go to kindergarten?

BS: No, wasn't no kindergartens back in those days, man.

SL: Yeah.

BS: I remember that—like I said, my aunt—see, I would go—she made sure I got on the bus at Wabash. When I first started to school, they thought it'd be better, her bein' a senior in school, that I go

to Daddy Gene's and catch a bus there 'cause Sissy could watch me on the bus or whatever.

SL: Yeah.

[00:56:27] BS: Oh, I member I didn't wanna go to school. I mean, hell, I just—you know, first grade . . .

SL: Yeah.

BS: . . . you just don't wanna do those things.

SL: Well, it's scary.

BS: Yeah, it is.

SL: You're out there by yourself, really . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . for the first time.

BS: You are. You're on a bus with a bunch of kids, and then I member this teacher, my first grade teacher, she probably—I think she'd been teachin', like, fifty years before I [*laughter*] ever got there, you know. And so, it was a—and she was kind of an older lady, you know, and you know how—she'd look at you like, "What in the world are you doin' here," [*laughs*] you know. You know, stuff like that. You know, stuff goes through a kid's mind, you know, when you're young. But I really enjoyed school once we got up—I mean, you know, once you got outta—yeah, grade school wasn't bad. I don't remember a whole—I mean, you just—things you

have to go through. But once you got in junior high and senior high, it was totally different, you know.

[00:57:27] SL: 'Cause of athletics and girls . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . probably.

BS: Athletics and girls and, you know, you just thought you could do things that—get away with stuff that—you know, I member back then, you know, everybody kinda smoked, but we wouldn't—well, now, I think we smoked those old grapevines.

SL: Yeah. [*Laughs*]

BS: God, that's probably—you know, that's terr—I mean, you think about . . .

SL: That's the worst thing you can do.

BS: Yeah, that's the worst thing you can do. You think about that now. But think about unfiltered cigarettes, and hell, there you are smokin' grapevines.

SL: Yeah.

[00:57:55] BS: And when I would go stay—like, when I was—before I got in junior high, I'd go stay with Daddy Gene in Memphis. And I member he had these old cigarettes, Herbert Tareyton. I don't even know if they still make 'em. They were in a . . .

SL: Tareytons.

BS: . . . white package. It was a long old cigarette.

SL: Yeah.

BS: I'd steal his cigarettes and sneak around the house outside and smoke 'em. And you know, just to say you could do it, I guess that's the only reason you did it back then. I never did like cigarettes. Then when I got in junior high and they started runnin' you and everything, I just said, "Well, you know [*laughs*], me and these cigarettes, we gotta depart." But that's probably one of the best things I ever did was not smoke, you know . . .

SL: Sure.

BS: . . . growin' up and everything. So it was a—but you know, bein' young, you have try everything, you know.

[00:58:44] SL: Did you have a favorite teacher in grade school?

BS: Yeah, Miss Stewart, the one that [*laughs*] washed my [*SL laughs*] mouth out with soap 'cause her son and I were the same age. And we got—you know, and through the years she just—she was just one of my favorites, you know. I mean, she was probably the hardest on me, but she was one that—she had that motherly, you know—I mean, you—she was one of those teachers that you just knew you could trust, you know. And I guess her son bein' in school with me, that made some difference, too, you know.

[00:59:24] SL: Yeah, you knew that . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . she could relate.

BS: Yeah.

SL: And so, were you close to her son?

BS: Oh yeah, we went through high school all the way together, and then he had cancer, and he died, like, oh, I don't know, a couple years after we got outta high school.

SL: Really!

BS: Died young. Yeah.

SL: That's young.

BS: But see, he was one—he and another guy that I was in school with, they had cars in the ninth grade. I mean, the kids just didn't have cars back then.

SL: No.

BS: But one of these kids was adopted, and the other one was Miss Stewart's son, Bond. And like I said, he used to drink those little six-ounce Coca-Colas every day. [SL laughs] And course, he smoked from the time he was young, you know. And then when he was in the ninth grade, he had a date with this girl, and they were on their way to I think a stock car race in West Memphis.

SL: Yeah.

[01:00:17] BS: And they were up the other side between Marianna

and Hughes. They were at, like, at Brickeys. Somebody pulled out in front, and she got killed. Now, she was, like, fifteen . . .

SL: Oh!

BS: . . . and he was, like, a senior, so you know, I'm sure that didn't help him or anything, you know. And so, it was just a . . .

SL: That's tough.

BS: Yeah, tough. But we had, like, twenty-seven people, I think, in our class.

[01:00:41] SL: Did y'all have a radio in your house?

Trey Marley: Scott, we need to change tapes.

SL: Hmm?

TM: We need to change tapes.

SL: Oh, okay.

[Tape stopped]

[01:00:46] SL: All right, we're startin' our second hour, and you're doin' pretty good [*BS coughs*], Bubba. You're—you know, we're still talkin' about your childhood growin' up in . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . Elaine. And we talked a little bit about how your playmates were African Americans as much as anyone else growin' up. And you kinda made games up and made things up to do, you know, around the farm in Wabash and . . .

BS: Yeah.

[01:01:15] SL: When did you—did—was it—not until you started—
until you entered Elaine Public Schools that you started playing
organized sports or were there baseball games out on the farm
and . . .

BS: Well, we would—now, it was when we went to Memphis. I mean,
we played, like, corkball, and stuff like that when I was visitin'
Daddy Gene up there. But it was a—you know, we would have—
me and some of the guys on the farm, we would—I'd have the bat
and baseball, so we'd play, you know, on the farm. But you
know, didn't get into organized sports, you know, till I got in
junior high.

[01:01:53] SL: What about football?

BS: Football was the same way.

SL: And those . . .

BS: And see, then I got into [*clears throat*]
—I played on—I played in the first Little League up here. They had it out at the old ballpark. To hit a home run, they cut the grass back so far, like, 180 feet. [*SL laughs*] Bill Gray was nine years old. He was the pitcher for us. His dad, on account of the Tri-County League and Richard playin' with my dad, that Mr. Gray kinda recruited me to play Little League ball up here. And course, the people in Helena got

upset because I'm an outsider. So they drew boundary lines from Helena to Walnut Corner, to Walnut Corner to Old Town Lake, to Old Town Lake back to Helena . . .

SL: Just to keep you out.

BS: . . . just to keep me out, see.

SL: You were the ringer. [*Laughs*]

BS: Now, what—do they call that discrimination or whatever, but that happened in—back in the [19]50s.

SL: Yeah.

BS: So I mean, you know, you could—but it—that's just the way things happened, but I got to play up here, you know. And then I played Pony League ball up here, and my dad was a manager of one of the teams. And I played American Legion, and you saw that [*laughs*] thing—I forgot that I had to sign a thing to play American Legion. Course, it was by the Richard L. Kitchens Post—whatever—you know, American Legion post. But I member we were playin'—I was up here, and my best friend were the Galloway boys, and Captain Galloway was a—he was head of the state police of eastern Arkansas.

SL: Yeah.

[01:03:35] BS: So he—so I'd go out to the ballpark. I was workin' at Howe Lumber Company at the store with my uncle, and so, I

came up here one time, and Captain Galloway came up to me one time, and he said, "Bubba," he said, "you work at Wabash, don't you?" I said, "Yes, sir." And he said, "Well, you don't have time to come up here and take a driver's test, do you?" And I said, "Well, now, Captain, that's up to you, you know." And so, I said, "I'm—I have to work every day, and I was dri—and then my parents bring me up here at night." And so, I go out to the ballpark one time. Captain Galloway said—he said, "Here's your driver's license." Well, Ray and Tommy, two of the sons, said, "Daddy, why does Bubba get—don't have to take a driver's test and we do?" And he said, "Well, y'all are my sons. Y'all are gonna be drivin' my car [*laughs*], you know." So [*clears throat*]—and then, you know, once we got outta high school and we got to be—I don't think I had a drink till I was twenty-one, and then we started drinkin'. And course, Captain Galloway, he would always tell you, "Now, if you get to drinkin', you come, you stay at the house here. Don't you drive to Wabash," you know. But back then, you know, it's totally different than it is now. I mean, the state troopers looked out for you.

SL: Right.

[01:04:46] BS: And it was like I member him tellin' Ray and I. He said, "Now, you boys are gonna get caught, now, even though

you're my son." And he said, "There's two things you always do that you can get out of a ticket." And we'd say, "What is that, Captain?" And he'd say, "Yes, sir," and "No, sir."

SL: You bet.

BS: He said, "If you say that"—and he said, "If they ask you how many beers you had, don't ever tell 'em two." You know, he said, "That's the biggest giveaway you can have." But you know, I played all my baseball up here, and it was good and, like, I had—I member in high school, see, Jimmy Webster was my high school coach, and he had just graduated at ASTC, Arkansas State Teachers College. And he had hired on to coach at Central out here. Well, he decided to go to Elaine, you know. So he came down, and he was my high school coach all the way through school, and he married Peggy Howe from here, and they had their first child down there, you know, and it was just—you know, she could, in little Elaine, she could bring him—bring the child down to football practice and everything, and so, I member one time in basketball. You know, your parents always had to come pick you up from practice and stuff like that. And I member we were playin' Barton, and that was kind of a big rival, you know.

[01:06:05] And so, Barton beat us in basketball, and I member Coach Webster, man. We—it's a little old bitty gym, but he told

all the parents—he said, "Y'all go out and get in your cars." He locked the doors to the gym. He got [*laughs*] out in the middle of the floor, and they only had stands on one side, you know. And I don't member how high up they were. And he said, "All right, boys, y'all start runnin'. Anybody get beat by Barton, it's a disgrace. Y'all start runnin'." We said, "Coach, how long we gonna have to run?" He said, "Till I get tired." I don't member how long we ran, but Barton never beat us again. [*Laughs*] But . . .

SL: It was effective.

BS: Yeah, it was a good—but he was a good coach, and you know, it was just a—those were good times back in those days.

[01:06:48] SL: Well, let's go back to the home in Wabash. Did y'all have your own radio?

BS: Yeah.

SL: And were you listening to—what kinda sports programs were you listening to?

BS: Now, you know, that's strange because I started workin' at Howe Lumber Company Store when I was, like, thirteen.

SL: Yeah.

BS: Well, back then they had a radio in the store, and they had an old black gentleman workin' there. He was the meat cutter back

there.

SL: Yeah.

BS: And there was a older white man that worked back there in the meat department but they had—back then they had the game of the day. Dizzy Dean and them were on . . .

SL: You bet.

BS: . . . the ?thing?. Falstaff beer. "Choicest product of the brewer's art."

SL: That's right.

[01:07:32] BS: You know, they advertised that on—and so, they had a game of the day on, you know, and Chicago Cubs didn't have a night—I mean, they didn't have lights, so they got—they played most of the time, and then, course, ever station in Arkansas, you know, carried the Cardinals. And so, it was just a—so I had radio at home, but we listened to—every day, man, we'd always—even though we were workin' in the store, we listened to the game of the day, you know. That was a big deal back in those days. And I member I'd have to work on Saturdays, and I member the radio would come on, and they'd—talkin' about the Razorbacks. I think Bob Cheyne—was that the guy's name?

SL: You bet.

BS: He was one of the guys . . .

SL: Voice of the Razorbacks.

[01:08:19] BS: Yeah.

SL: That's right.

BS: Voice of the Razorbacks. And after him I think Bud Campbell.

SL: That's right.

BS: And so, you know, Bud Campbell—I mem—we'd be listenin' to it, and he would tell about how the sun is setting over the stadium in Fayetteville or whatever, you know.

SL: Now, Wally Ingalls also . . .

BS: I didn't remember him, now.

SL: . . . was a radio—okay, all right.

BS: But I member Bob Cheyne, and I member—what's the guy's name you just said? Bud . . .

SL: Bud Campbell.

BS: Bud Campbell. [01:08:44] And they had—you know, and he could just—made it sound so real, you know, on the TV—I mean, on the radio. And even today, you know, they have the games on TV?

SL: You listen to the radio.

BS: But hell, I'd much rather listen to the radio.

SL: Right.

BS: That goes back to you use—you gotta use your imagination, you

know. And that's what these kids don't understand. They—like somebody said while ago, everything's instant, you know. But yeah, we listened, and then when I was in, like, high school, we would go out, have a date, and then, you know, it's alongside the dirt road. They called it turnrows then. That's where you carried your date, you know, to go parkin' or whatever the hell you did, you know. And so, it was, like, a—and you couldn't pick up—I mean, there wasn't a whole lotta radio stations back then, and there was this radio station outta Gallatin, Tennessee, called WLAC. [01:09:40] They had "Hossman" Allen and three or four other guys, and I always thought those guys were black, but they were white. But they would play John Lee Hooker. They would play Muddy Waters. They would play all that. And you could order, like, a record, and they'd send you a record for, like, \$3.98, and you got a bottle of Hadacol or somethin'. They'd send you some kinda little deal.

SL: [*Unclear words*].

BS: Or baby chickens. I mean, this might sound crazy, but they used to ship chickens through the mail, you know. You'd go to the post office, and there'd be little chickens just [*laughter*] chirpin' away. I mean, I can't see that happenin' today, you know. But it was a—so [*SL laughs*] I think all the guys died that did that LA—WLAC

program. But man, you know, the satellite—I mean, it was just so clear. And we were doin' a benefit up in Nashville, Tennessee, and this girl that put it together—she said, "Hey," she said, "what would you like—if you had a wish, what would you like for me to help you with here in Nashville?" I said, "I would love to meet Hossman Allen." So then they had closed down the studios in Gallatin, Tennessee, and moved 'em to Nashville. And it was kind of a gospel station. And so, he came down, and he was really old, and it was noisy in the club. He said, "Hey, let's go down to the studios." So he—his legs—he had to have braces on his legs, you know, and he was just gettin' up in age. And so, we sat down and talked, and he taped this in Nashville, you know. We were down there for, like, about three hours. And he said—I said, "Sir," I said, "I wa—you got me into music. You don't know that." I said, "Years ago when I was in high school, we could—yours was the only station we could pick up." And I said, "It was just clear as a bell, you know." And I said, "Why is that?" And he said, "Well, my mother lived in Florida." And said, "It was like a—you know, there wasn't any satellites in the air."

SL: That's right.

[01:11:37] BS: And so, we sat and talked, and he said—you know, I was tellin' him bout me growin' up and everything, and he said,

"Well, let me explain all this to you." I said, "I always thought you guys were black," 'cause they sounded black on the radio. But they were white just playin' the black man's music. Well, you know, he said, "Now, Bubba, how it worked—they would come out to the station. They would bring you a pint of whiskey and a 45. It was called payola."

SL: You bet.

BS: And said, "We d—that's what we did. And that's how, you know, that's how things worked back in those days." But it was a—he was so interesting, and I was so in awe that I was sittin' talkin' to this guy, you know. And so, he passed away not long after that, and I asked—I got ahold of his wife about six months later after the death, and I said, "Look," I said, "your husband interviewed me in Nashville." And I said, "Man, I would pay you for it. I would just love to have the tape," 'cause he was gonna write a book and everything. I said, "I'd just love to have a tape of what was said, you know, and everything." She said, "Bubba, the radio station—even though my husband worked for 'em for years and years, they would not release anything to me." And I thought that was kinda strange. And that's one of the big disappointments I had in my life 'cause I would really love to have . . .

[01:13:00] SL: Did you ever pursue that with the radio station?

BS: Yeah, and they just wouldn't ever do anything, so I just . . .

SL: Yeah.

BS: . . . kinda dropped it after a while.

SL: They probably recorded . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . over it.

BS: Yeah.

[01:13:10] SL: That's interesting. So in the home, were you listening to that stuff in the home, or was that . . .

BS: Well, when you got a transistor radio—you know, you got that later on. You would listen to it 'cause your parents kinda listened to other stuff like . . .

SL: Right.

BS: . . . the Grand Ole Opry or . . .

SL: Right.

BS: . . . whatever else was on or Lawrence Welk or whoever, you know, whatever.

SL: Right. So there was a generational . . .

BS: Yeah, yeah.

SL: . . . thing goin' on there.

[01:13:32] BS: And so, I just—and see, when me and the Galloway boys grew up together, I member where I was over at their house

one day, and he had a—Ray had a older brother named Don. Well, we go out to get in the car. Well, Don's got the radio station set on WDIA in Memphis. Course, hell, we'd never heard WDIA, and course, it was a black radio station that played—course, Ray's older brother, he knew—he worked for the Arkansas State Highway Department, and he knew where all the eatin' places was. He could carry you places, and he knew where all the radio stations [*laughs*] were. He knew everything. [01:14:08] And I member Captain Galloway—we were inside the house one morning, and they had one of those radios set up like that, you know. And Don had that on, and Captain came in. He said, "What the hell you boys doin' listenin' to that rump-jumpin' music [*laughter*], you know." You can just imagine a captain of the state police and here are all us kids, you know. Well, we were, you know, up in the—I mean, we were outta high school then. But it was a . . .

SL: Rump jumpin'.

BS: Yeah, rump-jumpin' music. [*SL laughs*] That's what Captain Galloway called it. Yeah. So we didn't ever argue with him.

SL: No, of course not.

[01:14:37] BS: I mean, he's head of the state police, you know, and that was his house and everything. But we just listened to—that's

how we got into a lotta music. You know, we listened to some of the stations, you know, that nobody else would listen to. I don't know what everybody was listenin' to. And see, back then, you know, they had these FM stations, and there was one in Memphis, FM 100. And what you could do—Ray and I would get to drinkin' at night, and we would be babysittin' with his little daughter that was born, you know, and so, we would call the radio station in Memphis. And she'd say, "Okay, we're gonna play this twenty-minute song by the Allman Brothers if you wanna put your tape recorders." You know, they don't do any of that stuff now. And it was just, you know, it was just a different time. So we got to hear some really good music, and you know, as I got older, you know, we would—there used to be such a big music scene in Little Rock, you know, with clubs and stuff. And even around here and everything. But it's just all totally different now, you know.

SL: Well . . .

[01:15:48] BS: And I'm jumpin' a little ahead of time but . . .

SL: That's all right. We—there's no real rule here.

BS: Yeah. [*Laughs*]

SL: We can jump all over the place we want to but . . .

BS: Yeah.

[01:15:57] SL: Back at the home, growin' up, did—was there a

musical instrument in the home?

BS: Nope.

SL: Nobody . . .

BS: I—when I got—well, now, my sister, she took piano lessons, and so, Dad bought her a B-3 Hammond organ. I remember that.

SL: Oh, really?

BS: Yeah.

SL: Man!

BS: Well, you know, daughters could get next to fathers. You know how that works.

SL: Yeah.

BS: And so, she was a—she was pretty good.

SL: Was it a full B-3, or was it a Porta B or . . .

BS: Oh, it was full—I mean, it was a Porta B, but it was still—had that . . .

SL: One Leslie? Two?

BS: Yeah. One.

SL: One. Yeah.

BS: So it had that good sound to it.

SL: You bet it did.

[01:16:40] BS: And then when I got older, we would—they had this place out in the back of Wabash called Albert Vogel's place. He

was a white guy that—he was out of the navy. One of these old rough, tough guys and he had a little old—had some land out there and had a shotgun house in the middle of a cotton field. And he went and bought a set of drums. Well, he had a black guy that worked for him called Big Jim. And Mr. Albert would—some of the King Biscuit entertainers and C.W. Gatlin and some of those guys would all go out there and play. And when I got old enough, and the blacks wanted to go out there, well, Daddy would let—if I went with 'em in the truck, they could carry the truck out there, you know. And so, that's how I really got into, after WLAC, listenin' to music and stuff. And we'd go out there, man, and you know, we didn't really know what the hell we were listenin' to, but it sounded good, you know.

SL: Yeah.

[01:17:42] BS: And that's where Sonny Boy and some of 'em would play out there and everything. And they had, like—I member it was just an old juke joint, and he ruled everything. And I member they had Mexicans that came in to pick cotton, you know, in the fall from Texas. Well, hell, when we'd go out there, the Mexicans'd have to stay outta sight. He wouldn't let them come inside. Now, they could serve 'em beer. Now, the black, if you was a musician, the black and whites could play together, and

they had a big old long bar. Him and Big Jim in the middle of the floor. Well, hell, the blacks'd dance on one side and the whites on the other. But hell, you know, wasn't nothin' separatin' you but thin air. I mean, that was [*laughs*] back in the [19]50s. And they had—it was really funny. And if a fight started, Mr. Albert would just—him and Jim would get back to back, and they'd just clean house, man [*laughter*], you know.

SL: They . . .

[01:18:31] BS: Yeah, and it was a—it was just an old joint, and I read in a lotta these books, blues books, but I don't ever see Albert Vogel's name in there. But he was just a guy that retired outta the navy and was just—I mean, he'd fight you at the drop of a hat and him and Big Jim—and they'd just—the law would never come out there. He would come to town, and he would buy, like, a hundred cases of beer and go back. You know, he—the law would just tell him, you know, "You are the law." Back in those days, that's the way they did things. But I got exposed to a lotta stuff, you know, that way.

[01:19:05] SL: So how old were you when you were . . .

BS: Oh, bout—hell, I was probably about, I don't know, about nineteen or twenty. So then I . . .

SL: You were . . .

BS: Those drums—I . . .

SL: . . . prime time.

BS: Yeah, I'd sit on the drums out there, and so, I bought a set of dru—I mean, my dad bought me a set of drums. And it was a guy here named Chris Letterman, and he would come down to my sis—to our house and he could play the B-3 Hammond organ. We had a guy named Bo Wilkerson from out at Barton, and he had a brother named Miller, and we put this little band together. I don't even remember what we were called, but we'd play at, like, Teen Club at Elaine. [01:19:47] Well, we . . .

SL: Sure.

BS: . . . we couldn't have been any good. But I mean, you know, the kids thought we were decent, you know. And so, I played drums for two or three years, and then I met Sam Carr, and course, he was a great blues drummer, you know. And after I saw him play, I said [*SL laughs*], "Hell, I'm givin' these drums up." So I sold 'em and just—and then got into this kind of business and, you know—but it was a . . .

[01:20:13] SL: So did you ever move your sister's Porta B down to the juke joint or . . .

BS: No, it was ju—that thing was big and heavy. They just kept it there at the house. And I—and you know, to this day I don't ever

know what happened to it.

SL: Man.

BS: I really don't. I don't know.

SL: That'd be worth trackin' down.

BS: Oh yeah. It would. I don't know if it got—I just don't know what ever happened to it, you know.

SL: It's—I wonder if it's in some church somewhere.

BS: It could be.

SL: There's a lotta—sometimes they'd end up . . .

BS: You know, those things like that happen.

SL: People just give it to a church.

BS: Yeah, just give it away, you know.

SL: Yeah.

BS: Yeah. So it was a . . .

[01:20:45] SL: Boy, that's somethin' else.

BS: Oh yeah.

SL: And that's . . .

BS: Oh, I . . .

SL: . . . that's in the—is—that's in the—toward the end of the [19]50s.

BS: Yeah.

SL: [Nineteen] sixties. Early [19]60s.

BS: And I notice at the King Biscuit—I think—I don't know how many it was this year, but last year it was, like, fifteen bands had a B-3 Hammond. I mean . . .

SL: Nothin' like 'em.

BS: . . . they just make that great sound.

SL: Nothin' like 'em.

BS: See, like this year—we do this thing on Wednesday night called—it's just kind of a jam session is what it is, and they're gonna name it the Michael Burks Memorial Jam next year on—from here on out on Wednesday. But the guy that does the sound from Illinois, he came up to me, and he said—see, I kept seein' this white lady walk around, and a black guy had his—he had his hand on her shoulder, and he was blind.

SL: Yeah.

[01:21:35] BS: And, she knew me from—you know, I meet so many people that I didn't know who . . .

SL: Yeah.

BS: . . . it was, and so, we started talkin'. And she introduced me. She said that this guy's name is—his name was Ellis somethin'. I don't member his last name. And she said, "I want you to"—and so, I shook his hand and everything. [01:21:52] Well, Mike Grimm came up to me, and he said, "Hey," he said, "I know that

guy right there." Said, "He used to be the lead singer for Tower of Power" . . .

SL: Wow!

BS: . . . "and the keyboard player." And said, "We're gonna hook this B-3 up." So I stood behind him. He took his hands, and he measured, bein' blind, measured, I guess where the keys were and everything. I never seen a—I mean, I just couldn't believe a blind man [*SL laughs*] could play an organ like that. And you know, Tower of Power was a hit band, you know, and everything, and so . . .

SL: You bet they were.

BS: . . . so he—oh yeah, he played, and it was just amazing. But like you said, the B-3 Hammond is just—that's an incredible instrument, you know, to have people to play 'em and stuff.

SL: Well, and the Porta B was—I mean . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . I've moved both. [*Laughs*] But when the—when we got the Porta B, that made a big difference in how we were movin' around and . . .

BS: Oh yeah, I mean it's just—you know, and so, it's a—so when I—and you know, in high school and they had—we'd have dances, you know, when you're—what is it? Junior/senior prom or

whatever?

SL: Mh-hmm.

[01:23:02] BS: Well, see, back then—that was in [19]57, but we would all go to Schwab's up in Memphis. That's where Elvis, you know, where Elvis bought his clothes and everything. So we'd go, and we'd buy, you know, red hats and red britches and . . .

SL: That was mainly an African American . . .

BS: Yeah, it was.

SL: . . . clothing store.

BS: Yeah. But it was, like, you know, that's where Elvis bought his clothes, so . . .

SL: Yes.

BS: . . . that's where—we all thought we had to follow in his footsteps, you know, and—I mean, to dress up, you know, like that.

SL: Right. Right.

BS: You know, I'm sure if you look back on it now, we probably looked [*laughs*] like a bunch of fools.

SL: [*Laughs*] Well . . .

BS: But we thought we were pretty cool back then, you know.

SL: You were cool back then.

BS: Yeah.

SL: And it's still probably pretty cool that you . . .

BS: Well, and . . .

SL: . . . did that.

BS: . . . you know, back then they—when I was growin' up and—I mean, goin' to school at Elaine, they had—we had the football team and everything, and course, we had a guy—he had a barbershop called Fido's Barbershop. I remember—you know, in a small town you could find out anything—you could hear anything in a barbershop, you know. [01:24:05] So us kids would get our hair cut, and course, everybody had—they would kinda like just shave your head, you know.

SL: Right. [*Laughs*]

BS: Thirty-five cents . . .

SL: Butch.

BS: . . . you know, whatever. Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

BS: Yeah, just cut it back. And I member a guy tellin' a story. He said after he graduated from high school, he said he was out in California, and said he saw this guy walkin' down the other side of the street, and said when the traffic light changed, he walked over, and he said, "Hey, man," he said, "I bet I know where you're from." And the guy said, "Man, you don't know where I'm from." He said, "Yeah, I do." He said, "I bet you're from

Arkansas." And the guy said, "Well, how'd you know that?" And he said, "I bet I can tell you what town you're from." [*Laughs*] And the guy said, "Where?" And he said, "Elaine." And he said, "How you know?" He said, "'Cause you got one of those Fido Hodge haircuts, you know." [*SL laughs*] And this guy tells this for a true story. Now, whether it ever happened or not, I don't know. [01:24:52] But see, when I was goin' to school at Elaine, they had a thing called the mule races 'cause all the farms had mules. And the American Legion put it on. And it would be like—we started football practice, I think back then, on August the twentieth. So they had—it was during football sea—I mean, you know, while football season was goin' on. Well, the different farms, Howe Lumber Company and all the farmers down below Elaine, they got their mules. Now, they even had a little old bettin' booth made outta wood, you know, down there, and that was—the American Legion put it on, and course, they tell me—I mean, now that I've gotten older—that all the Legion people could drink 'cause their wives let them drink that night. You know, that was their one time a year . . .

SL: Big . . .

BS: . . . that whether you . . .

SL: . . . extravaganza.

BS: Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

BS: . . . whether you did or not. [01:25:40] But the funny thing about it was, like, I was tellin' you about my friend out in California. They had, the first year, they had Mary Ann Mobley here from Mississippi. She was Miss Mississippi.

SL: Yeah.

BS: Now, who'd ever thought that Miss Mississippi would be at a damn mule race in Elaine, Arkansas? But I promise you, she was. The next year was Lynda Lee Mead won Miss America, and she was—I mean, both these girls won Miss America back to back from Mississippi. And they were both [*laughs*] at the Elaine mule races, you know. So that's a—I thought that was—and I tell people today—I said, "Yeah, man, they had a mule race." "Oh, man, they didn't"—you know, and they'd have people ride 'em. There wasn't no saddle, you know, and it was just, I guess, it was just somethin' somebody thought up that was fun times, you know.

[01:26:24] SL: So what was it? Like a—I mean . . .

BS: All the . . .

SL: . . . how long was the race?

BS: Oh, that—they raced 'em around the football field.

SL: Ah! [*Laughs*]

BS: Yeah, see, it was down on the football field. And then we had to go practice, and I don't member who cleaned up all that mess, you know. *[SL laughs]* But I member us havin' to practice football the, you know, the next week and everything. But it was on the football field. That's where they *[SL laughs]* raced 'em down there. So . . .

[01:26:49] SL: Well, were their favorite mules?

BS: Oh yeah, you know, there'd be a brown mule, or there might be a—two white mules, and everybody'd say, "Well, I know that mule's gonna win," or whatever, you know. I mean, it was just—and I—and to think that they had little bettin' booths. You'd just go up, and they had, oh, the little wooden thing there, you know, and they'd say, "I wanna bet on"—I think they put numbers on 'em, like number—the white horse on number seven or whatever, you know.

SL: Right, right.

BS: So you know, you tell people about that today, and they think you're crazy, but it was a . . .

SL: It was a big turnout, wasn't it?

BS: Oh, a big—it was a big deal. You know how the small towns—they used to have—when they'd mark off the city streets? Cakewalks.

SL: You know, I went to Elaine last time I was here, and they still

have that on the street, and I . . .

BS: Do they?

SL: . . . and I asked some ladies about that 'cause I had never seen that before. And it was a cakewalk. It's a circle that's got . . .

BS: Yeah!

SL: . . . numbers . . .

BS: . . . got numbers on it. That's right.

SL: All the way around.

BS: That's exactly right.

[01:27:46] SL: And it's right down there on the main . . .

BS: Yeah, they had it . . .

SL: . . . drag of town.

BS: . . . they had it when I was in high school. Yeah, and you walk around, and you think—and you look back now, and you say, "Well, man, how crazy can you be?" You're walkin' in a circle, and they got numbers on it, and they call out a number. I guess it's like playin' bingo or somethin', you know, really, if you think about it. But man. You got . . .

[01:28:06] SL: And so, they didn't really go into the details of how that worked. But so people were actually on—walking . . .

BS: I think the way that it—I think that the way it works—I think Kiwanis or some ladies' church club or somethin' does it. And I

think you have to pay, like, fifty cents a square or somethin' like that. And it goes to a donation and then if you—if your number comes up . . .

SL: You get a cake.

BS: . . . you get a cake. [*SL laughs*] But, I mean, you know, that's . . .

SL: It's a big circle. I mean, it's not a . . .

BS: Oh yeah, it is.

SL: I mean, there're . . .

BS: Hey, you're right. Yeah.

SL: . . . there may be forty or fifty numbers on that thing.

[01:28:41] BS: Well you know, people eat big in the South, so some pretty good-size ladies—I mean, pretty good-size people. I better put it that way. [*Laughter*] That way they're walkin', you know.

SL: Yeah, yeah.

BS: So—yeah, so . . .

SL: That's funny.

[01:28:50] BS: Yeah, so it's a lot. And you know, when I was a—they had a movie theater in Elaine when I was growin' up, see. I think it was, like, twelve cents to get in, I think is what it was. And then you have popcorn and Coke or, like, I don't know, like—it wasn't much—fifteen cents or somethin' for both of 'em. But I

member they had movies, and they would have, like on Friday and Saturday, they would have westerns, and then we would all go on Sunday night, and I think they'd have people like June Allyson, and you know, some of those people that were movie stars.

[01:29:30] SL: Did the theater have a balcony?

BS: I don't believe it did.

SL: Did they allow the blacks to . . .

BS: No.

SL: . . . in the theater?

BS: If they did, the blacks were upstairs. You know, I just—I don't remember that.

SL: That's kinda the way it was in . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . Fayetteville.

[01:29:47] BS: Yeah. And see, they even had a movie theater below Elaine at a little place called Ferguson. The guy had a store down there that had a bus line from—Beith Bus Line ran from Helena down to there, and they'd pick people up, you know. I mean, it—you know, and then you had the ferry over here and everything, you know. And so, it was a—but the ferry closed down. You know, it ran, like, from six in the mornin' till midnight. And if you

got caught on the other side or over here, you just didn't get to go anywhere.

[01:30:24] SL: Is that the car ferry?

BS: Yeah. Yeah, car ferry.

SL: 'Cause I just learned . . .

BS: I think I. . .

SL: . . . about a train ferry last night.

BS: Well, now, they, yeah, they had that here. Now, that was a—I was a little bitty kid when that happened. But see, the ferry had Conway Twitty's daddy. Mr. Jenkins was the cat that ran that ferry, see. [*SL laughs*] I mean, old man Jenkins—that's—you know, that's—he ran it. Now, see, they did have—now, the train station over here—they had a thing called the doodlebug. And it would go down to McGehee, I believe, is far as it'd go, and it would come back up. And I member they would bring the mail to Wabash. Like, if you mailed a letter—and what was a letter? Two cents back then or whatever—it was very cheap—or three cents. I mean, if you mailed it, you—it got quicker to where it was goin' than it does today. I mean, 'cause they—you know, the train would drop the mail bags off in these little small towns like Wabash and Elaine and so and so, you know, on down. But I member my mother and I, we rode that, and my sister, we rode

that train to Memphis. It had a engine and two cars
and . . .

[01:31:41] SL: You talkin' the doodlebug?

BS: Yeah.

SL: Yeah, gasoline-powered engine.

BS: Yeah, and they even had a guy where—they served meals on there. And you'd go to the big main train station—I don't even know—they might've fixed it back up in Memphis, but yeah. I mean, that's a—but we'd go ride a train up to see my grandfather. I mean, it was, man, it was—I mean, kids had a—I mean, it was a big deal. You know, there was trains everywhere back then, you know.

SL: Yeah.

BS: You know, they would, I member, they would haul coal down to Wabash, you know. You know, everybody used coal back in those days. Or a lotta the people did. Yeah, I mean, there was just—there were so many things—see, these kids today, they probably don't even know what a train is, I mean, if you think about that. You know, a lot of 'em don't.

[01:32:29] SL: They think metro . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . you know.

BS: Yeah, and so, we had . . .

SL: Passenger.

BS: . . . you know, we had all this, and we had trains, and you know, it was just a—it was great bein' a kid. In Phillips County, you know, the town here, it was—like Mr. Gist was tellin' me. I was down visitin' with him after—this was right before Christmas, and he said—no, this was right after Christmas last year. And he said, "You know, it seems kinda strange at Christmas. We used to stay open till midnight on Christmas Eve," he said, "'cause there was so much business. Every store." You know, like, where we are in this room was the Busy Bee Cafe, see. And the other room over there is—was C. E. Mayer. They had four—you had C. E. Mayer here. You had Lazar's. You had Wallace Fields. You had . . .

[01:33:27] SL: Now, C. E. Mayer, was that a clothing store or . . .

BS: Clothin' store.

SL: And then there was, course, there was the—there was another—the Solomons had a . . .

BS: Yeah, they had a store.

SL: . . . department store.

[01:33:39] BS: Yeah, it was—see, C. E. Mayer—I member when Kathy and I bought the building from Jimmy Mayer. His granddad and his great-granddad put a business in here instead of goin' to

Memphis. I mean, it was just that much business in this area. And when we bought this buildin', he told me that in 1960 his—not his gross, but his profit was a million bucks. Nineteen sixty. You think about that.

SL: That's—those are real dollars.

BS: Those are real dollars. But when we bought this building, we found books. He had everybody that ever bought here. He had books. Your birthday, your dad's shirt size, pant size, whatever—had all—everything. The way I understood it, they would call everybody on—when they had a birthday—somebody in their family—tell 'em, "Hey, it's your mom's birthday. She wears this size so-and-so." [01:34:37] And they had all the customers 'cause I remember a guy—he just passed away here recently. He graduated at Ole Miss, and he came here to teach. He told me he walked into C. E. Mayer's store, and he said, "Mr. Mayer," he said, "I need to get some clothes." And Mr. Mayer said, "What are you doin' in town, son?" And he said, "Sir, I'm gonna teach at the high school." And back then if you taught in high school, you had to wear a coat and tie or a coat, anyway you know, back in those days. And when Mr. Mayer—Jimmy told me that when his dad knew that he had a job with the school system—instant credit, whatever you want, you know. And this guy told me he shopped

with 'em till they went outta business. So they knew—you know, they had a great customer base.

SL: Yeah.

BS: Really, really good.

SL: Real service.

BS: Real service. They did. And I member Jimmy tellin' me one time, when they did the boycott here—you know, they were boycottin' stores, you know, back—what was that? [Nineteen] seventies or whenever it was.

SL: The—yeah.

BS: Yeah. And so . . .

SL: It was goin' on in Marianna . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . as well. Civil rights . . .

BS: So he . . .

SL: . . . kinda stuff.

[01:35:42] BS: Yeah. So see, he said, "There's two guys out front."

They were boycottin' the front of his store. Now, Jimmy told me this, and he said, "Look. I went out there, and I said, 'Look, you need to come in and talk to me.'" The two guys did. He said, "Your family, both your families, all your kids, they all bought clothes here. We gave you credit. We took care of your kids

when you didn't have money. We took care of everything." Said, "Now, you think about that when you're out here protesting in front of my store." So Jimmy said they thought about it, and they left. They went to other stores, but they didn't do his. So you know, they knew how to treat people, and that goes back to what I was sayin' when I grew up. You know, you were just in a different—people were different back then, you know.

SL: Different mindset.

BS: Different—totally different mindset. Yeah.

SL: Well, you know, it's just good business, too.

BS: Yeah, good business.

SL: It's good business.

BS: Yeah.

SL: It's not greed business. It's based on good things.

[01:36:46] BS: You know, in this business right here I had—two years ago we had a storm or somethin', and my phones went out. Well, my credit card wouldn't work, so I had people from outta town and I—one was from Iowa, one from—was from Ohio, and one, I think, was from Seattle. And their bills was, like, almost \$200 apiece, and I said, "Look," I said, "you know, my credit card machine's out." I said, "You guys take the merchandise. Send me the money back when you get home. Check, whatever, you

know." And they just couldn't believe I'd do that, and they asked me—said, "Why're you doin' this?" And I said, "Well, hey, man, you're spendin' almost \$200 with me. I mean, the way I look at it, if I lose that \$200, so what? But you've enjoyed bein' in here. You're gonna go tell somebody about this store."

SL: Exactly.

[01:37:40] BS: "You send me that check back." And that's—I think that's the reason my business is so good, you know. See, for a long time a lotta people didn't shop with me in here—I mean, out-of-town people do, but I'm talkin' about local people. And they'd say, "Well, you know, your price is too high." And I said, "I'll tell you what. You go to Walmart," 'cause I knew they couldn't find it. And I said, "Then you go fill your tank up with gas, and you drive to Memphis." But I won those customers over. It took a while, but I got 'em back, you know. So I've—in this business I've always wanted it to be like a—like, I don't lock anything up. Course, I don't sell heavy metal or rap or anything, but I want it—John Lodge of the Moody Blues came in, and he said, "Man, I just can't believe that you—there's nothin' locked up in here." And I said, "John, I don't sell anything that they would steal." I said, "I've always decided [*SL laughs*] when I did this record store that I want it to be like you're in your livin' room. You feel at home

[*laughs*], you know."

SL: Yeah.

BS: And so, I think that's one of the reasons that this business has been so good, you know.

[01:38:50] SL: So back in your home, growin' up, when you—who was the disciplinarian? Was it your dad, or was it your mom, or did they . . .

BS: Oh, it was my mom.

SL: Your mom.

BS: Now, things got outta hand, and your dad was always there.

SL: Yeah.

BS: But he hardly ever—Mother. You know, mamas have a way of doin' things [*SL laughs*], you know.

SL: Yeah, they do.

[01:39:21] BS: I member one time me and—she had a bunch of chickens, and she had eggs that she sold to make a little money on the side. Well, me and a bunch of the guys that I grew up with, we got them eggs, and we startin' bustin' them eggs. Man! I don't know how many—we probably broke two dozen or somethin'. I don't even member now. But anyway, we had a peach tree out in the yard. She went and got a peach tree limb and made me take my clothes off down to your underwear, and

oh man, you know, they could make blood come up on your legs,
you know.

SL: Did she do the back of your legs?

BS: Yeah, back of the legs.

SL: Yeah.

[01:40:07] BS: But . . .

SL: Switch.

BS: I didn't ever—I hadn't broken a damn egg since then, I promise
you. I mean, you know . . .

SL: It stings.

BS: Yeah, so . . .

[01:40:15] SL: And you know—but that's the way they were brought
up.

BS: That's exactly right. Yeah.

SL: Take a switch.

BS: Take a switch. And man, you think a switch don't hurt, now? [*SL
laughs*] You know, off a peach tree limb I can promise you it does
[*SL laughs*], you know. But it's a—but you know, Mother was the
discipline one, you know.

SL: Yeah, but she's also the one you turned to when you were sick.

BS: Oh yeah, when . . .

SL: And when you needed help, you . . .

BS: Yeah, when you needed . . .

SL: . . . went to her first.

BS: . . . help. Yeah. I member one time I was a kid and I had—man, I somehow—they say it's lack of iron or somethin' that you get all these—you know, when you're growin' up as a kid, you get all these boils on you, you know. And man, I mean, they were just—you know, and course, she said, "Well, we're gonna do what your grandmother'd do," and they'd put some kinda concoction they had, you know. And hell, it—you know, everything worked out, you know.

SL: You bet.

BS: Yeah. Yeah, a mother's hand can—you know, they can heal a lotta wounds, you know, that you think you got somethin' wrong with you. [01:41:17] And I member when we used to go to school, me and my sister. Some day we—some—one day I played sick. Well, that didn't go over too big 'cause my mama said, "Okay, you're sick, huh?" Castor oil. Well, I was in school the next day, man. [SL laughs] Let me tell you. And you know, you—I tell some of these kids . . .

SL: There's remedies, and then there's remedies.

BS: Yeah, there's remedies. That's right. [SL laughs] And there's a way to—there's an effective way to do things, and there's a not

effective way. But it—you know—but you know, all those things you remember, like the washin' your mouth out with soap. I mean, those—you tell—I tell some of the young kids that worked here. I'd tell them about that—"Oh, that didn't actually happen." "Yeah," I said, "you just—you're growin' in a different generation, you know." But yeah, there was discipline, but there was, you know, there was a lotta love, too. And you respected—and like I said, it's that "Yes, sir," and "No, sir." I mean, I still say that to people today that are probably younger than I am.

SL: Oh, I do, too. Absolutely.

BS: And I say, "Well, that's the way I was born—I was raised, you know. You were raised to do that stuff." You know, it's a . . .

[01:42:32] SL: Well, it's not only just respect for the—it serves one well to show respect.

BS: Oh yes.

SL: It's not just the person receiving the respect, but it makes you feel better that you do re—that you show respect.

BS: Yeah.

SL: It's a internal thing.

BS: And you know, I see people today and they just—I mean, even grown people—you know, they just—they don't have that—they go—to me, they go about things in a different way, you know. I

mean, that wasn't the way I was raised, you know, to get their point across.

[01:43:16] SL: You know, you were—you grew up in a great time for this part of the country. It was—things were really hummin' pretty well here in Helena, and . . .

BS: Oh.

SL: . . . you know, Elaine had its own school then, and I've seen the album, the yearbook and . . .

BS: And they . . .

SL: You know . . .

BS: And they had—and even in Elaine they had a movie theater. They had stores, you know, restaurants. Little cafes is really what they were. I member I had a good friend. He's passed away now, but his dad—well, his dad is, too—but he had a furniture store in Elaine. And Bo was, like, ten or eleven and Cooter, his little brother was, like, about eight. [*SL laughs*] Well, on Saturday night, you know, Elaine would just be packed with people. I mean, they—I mean, it was—back in those days ever little town was doin' really good, you know. And so they had a—so I member Mr. Sam—he would—he'd have trouble gettin' people in his furniture store. So he put Bo and Cooter in the window in boxing gloves. [*SL laughs*] And they'd box, and man, he started

sellin' furniture like crazy. I mean, you know, people—they talk about entrepreneurs today. [01:44:37] You know, people used common sense to do things that would really, you know, really work, you know. And course, back then, you know, you didn't do anything because like you said, some—everybody knew your parents, and man, believe me, word would get back, you know, if you did somethin' wrong or whatever. But it was just—it's a—I tell some of my friends now—we look back and say, "You know, we grew up at the greatest time in the world—really think so." [01:45:11] 'Cause see, Helena was, like, Robert Lockwood used to tell me—Helena was like little Chicago, you know. I mean, man, they had—I mean, it was businesses everywhere. And the way I understand it through him and some other people that there weren't a lot—there wasn't a lotta money around. But see, they worked in the fields every day, but they paid every day. You might not make much money, but you know, when money's in circulation, you know, everybody's gettin' a little . . .

SL: Everybody's happy.

BS: Everybody's gettin' a little piece of the pie. Well, the way I understand it, that what Robert Lockwood would tell me—he said, "Oh man," he said, "everbody could make money." And I said, "Well, what about the"—he said, "You had to pay the police, you

know, the sheriff and them." And I said, "What about people that—what about the crime and stuff?" He said, "Well, we just"—he said—old Robert told me—him and my dad grew up together—he said, "Let's go about it this way. Say there's a guy in town named George." And said, "George got into some trouble—maybe stole somethin' or stole some money or shot somebody or whatever." And he said, "All of a sudden, next week, you'd look around, and you'd say, 'Well, I haven't seen George in a while.'" Now, Robert said, "Nobody asked any questions. Nobody knew whatever happened to George, but everybody was happy." 'Cause they wasn't gonna let one guy mess up everybody makin' money, you know. So yeah, he just said it was good times. [01:46:36] And you know, I thought—and I think you probably talked to Sonny Payne, too. It was just a . . .

SL: Oh yeah.

BS: . . . different world, you know.

SL: Yeah. A little earlier there were, you know—there was gamblin' . . .

BS: Oh.

SL: . . . goin' on and . . .

BS: Gamblin' wide open.

SL: Yeah.

BS: Now, Robert Lockwood told me, and I don't know if this is true or not, but he said they had a place here in town that you could—I don't know what kinda business it was, but he said, "You get on the inside, you could push a button, and it was like bein' in Las Vegas." I mean, you know, inside the wall. And course, then Mr. Etoch had the gamblin' place down here. See, he had those—what was that movie where they do the horse races and stuff on the backboard and everything?

SL: Yeah. Yeah, like *The Sting*.

[01:47:25] BS: Yeah, yeah, he had stuff like that, you know. But Dad—I member my dad tellin' me that he had a pool hall and all that stuff goin' on. But he said—Daddy said he was in there one night, and there was a guy gamblin', and the guy lost, I don't know, three or four hundred dollars, all his paycheck. And said Mr. Etoch told him—he said, "Now, have your kids been fed and your wife and everybody?" And somebody—he come to find out later on that the guy had just gambled the money away. Well, Mr. Etoch made sure—they tell me that he went to the—found out who the wife was. Carried her the money, you know. You know, they took money back in those days, but they were good about makin' sure that, you know, stuff was okay at home.

SL: Yeah, and . . .

BS: And I . . .

SL: . . . I've heard that he would actually send people home . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . to—if it looked like they were . . .

BS: That's exactly right.

SL: . . . goin' under.

BS: Yeah.

[01:48:21] SL: He'd say, you know, "You're done" . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . "for a while."

BS: "You're outta here."

SL: Yeah.

BS: That's right.

SL: Yeah.

BS: Yeah, I mean, so you look back, and I'm sure there was different instances, but you look back, and they ran the gamblin' joints, but they didn't let the kids and the wives suffer for somebody's gamblin' problem, I mean, in most cases. You know, I'm sure there was some that it was that way. [01:48:47] But yeah, it was just a—you know, I member when I was a kid, I'd come up here, and I would just be amazed at the people you'd see on Saturday night, you know. I mean, even in Elaine. I'd go down to

Elaine on Saturday night, and there was people and—course, there were some—back then I think it was, like, a 140 stores in the little—in Phillips County. Well, you know, Phillips County at one time—you know, they used to put the license—the number on the license plate of how . . .

SL: Was . . .

BS: . . . big the county was. And Phillips County was tenth at one time—with population and everything.

[01:49:23] SL: Well, I think Helena at one time was seventh . . .

BS: It coulda been.

SL: . . . largest town . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . in the state.

BS: Yeah. I mean, this was—I mean, it was just—it was really, really good, and you know, everything was just different back then.

There's—and I was talkin' to Jesse over at the liquor store and I—you know, we were talkin' about crime and everything, and he said, "Bubba," he said, "back then you had snitches." [*SL laughs*]

He said—I mean, and he said—and they—that's how you kept a lotta stuff under control, you know. I member I was a—I worked for my uncle at Wabash at the store there, and the store kept gettin' broken into, you know. And Mr. Frank Lawhorn was the

law here then, or one of the lawmen. He'd come down, and he'd tell my uncle—he'd say, "Now, Johnny, we gonna—I'm gonna catch 'em, you know." And so, sure enough, after about a month—and he caught 'em. It was some guys out in the backwood. And my uncle said, "How'd you catch 'em?" And he said, "I got ways," [*SL laughs*] you know. But that's—you know, they never—we never had another break-in. That's just the way that they—things were done back then, you know.

SL: Folks watchin' out for each other.

BS: Folks watchin' out for each other. Yeah, it's a . . .

[01:50:49] SL: So I guess we oughta get you to talk a little bit about Elaine School. How big was the school? I mean, I know that . . .

BS: We . . .

SL: . . . later on it got bigger, didn't it? Or were you a part of the newer school?

BS: No, I was—see, I graduated in [19]58, so we had twenty—I think it was twenty-three people in our class or twenty-seven. I don't remember.

SL: High school class.

BS: High school class. So we weren't—see, it wasn't a big school then because football and basketball, we were 6A. All right, so we

played, like—and schools were spread out, you know. We—it was Elaine, Marvell, Barton in the county, and course, Central was a little higher up than we were. [01:51:47] And then we played Hughes. We played Parkin. We played Gillett. We played Holly Grove and Clarendon. And that was kind of our district back then, you know. And course, I think they—they've changed everything now. I mean, you know, even before they closed the school in Elaine, you know, they'd—it had gotten bigger. But it wasn't very big when—'cause we only had, like—God, what—high school teachers, maybe ten or somethin'. Ten or twelve. Wasn't . . .

SL: Yeah.

BS: . . . yeah, it wasn't much.

[01:52:24] SL: Were the blacks going to their own school at the time

. . .

BS: Yes.

SL: . . . that you were in high school?

BS: Yeah.

SL: Was their school smaller, or were there . . .

BS: See . . .

SL: . . . actually more black students than white students in Elaine?

BS: I don't know. Their school was down at the crossin' there at

Elaine, but see, at Wabash they had a little small school for, like,

the first through the fourth grade for—and they'd bring two black teachers in from Texas, and they would have a little schoolhouse down there. But they—I guarantee they ruled it with a iron fist, you know. And then when my sister—when she started to school, they had a little school there at Wabash. It was, like, four grades, and probably wasn't twenty people went to school. It was some of the kids out at the farm or whatever, you know, there. And then she went to Elaine from then on. But it was a—I don't member how many people were in the black school. Course, a lotta blacks didn't go to school. You know, they were just—they worked and everything. I mean, I think . . .

SL: They didn't go past junior high or somethin'.

[01:53:33] BS: No, I don't think they—but I was just tellin' her, you know, Eliza Miller here in Helena, the black school here, they used to have a reunion here. I guess they still do. And they were just—you know, they were lawyers; they were doctors; they were just really professional people. And they'd tell me they were so happy that they went to school when they did and at a black school because the teachers—course, everybody—the family made sure things happened then. [01:54:01] I mean, it was—everything was more family-oriented than it is now. And there was a—you know, they just said, "You know, I don't know what

we'd've done if we hadn't've gone—if we'd had to go to school like they go now." And you tell people and—you know, just because you think everybody oughta go to a certain school, well, that don't mean they're gonna be smarter, you know. It's—you gotta . . .

SL: That's still up to the . . .

BS: Yeah, still up to individual. Still up to the parents. And I promise you, these teachers that they had were—they were disciplined, you know. I mean, I member talkin' to some of 'em. So it, you know, it was just—education is totally different now.

[01:54:46] SL: Well, I know that you were into sports once you hit . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . Elaine schools. Were there black teams, as well, in the area?

BS: Now, see, when I was goin' to school at Elaine, they did not have a black football team.

SL: Okay.

BS: Now, they did at Central. Well, they didn't at Central. It was Eliza Miller. But now, they had a couple of guys that went on to play at Michigan State and some—I mean, I think one of 'em was All-American. I think one went to Nebraska. You know, you gotta—say, you come out of a high school and go to Nebraska back in those days—you know, Nebraska was kinda the kingpin.

SL: Right.

[01:55:27] BS: So see, I don't think Barton had a—they might—they mighta had ba—I don't even think they had basketball then, you know. It was just—I don't think they had sports in school that I remember.

[01:55:42] SL: Yeah. Well, I've just—I've had some talks with folks that—you know, if the school—if the town was large enough to have both black and white teams . . .

BS: Yeah, I think they would . . .

SL: . . . that the athletes—you know, the white athletes would go watch the . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . black games and . . .

BS: Now, that . . .

SL: . . . the black athletes would come watch the white games . . .

BS: . . . now, that's . . .

SL: . . . 'cause it was the sport, and . . .

BS: . . . now, that . . .

SL: . . . it was athletes.

BS: . . . now, that's the way it was with Central and Eliza Miller. Yeah.

SL: I mean, they wouldn't sit in the stands but . . .

BS: No.

SL: . . . you know, along the fence and . . .

BS: See, it's just like . . .

SL: . . . kinda . . .

[01:56:17] BS: I think in 1960 here—somewhere in there—there were probably fifteen bands here in town—white and blacks playin' music together. You know, back before all this other stuff happened.

SL: Yeah.

BS: I mean, it was like—I mean, it was some really good—course, they had a black band director, Chester Guydon, who was just a magnificent musician, and course, he would go—and I was talkin' to a guy that played in a band here. He's passed away now. He was a black guy. A good friend of mine. And they would go, like, to Memphis, University of Arkansas, Ole Miss, and play. And I mean, they got good money back then. [01:57:08] I mean, you know, that's what most of the fraternities and sororities in schools, colleges, like Ole Miss and Mississippi State and University of Arkansas and probably some more that, you know, they hired black bands back in those days for fraternity parties and paid 'em good money.

SL: Yeah. Well, they were great bands . . .

BS: Oh, they were.

SL: . . . for one thing.

BS: Great musicians.

SL: The—you know, you'd get horns.

BS: [*Coughs*] Horn section.

SL: Yeah.

BS: You're exactly right, man.

SL: Yeah. [*Laughs*]

BS: Horns were the big deal.

SL: They were.

BS: And that's what Chester Guydon—he was a horn man, so they had a—and I think Eliza Miller went on to, you know, play, like, at some of the bowl games because they were sorta like the band at UAPB was for a while, you know, and everthing.

SL: Right. Uh-huh.

[01:58:00] BS: So it's a—you know, music was a way to get lotta things that you couldn't get otherwise. And you know, I had a couple of kids in here during the festival, and they were talkin' about they didn't like school and everthing. And I said, "Look. Let me tell you a story. [*SL laughs*] There's a guy"—you know, they have this Entertainers Hall of Fame, and I had to go accept an award up in Hot Springs for Sonny Boy. Well—oh, God—one of the Memphis Horns, the one that's livin'—I can't think of his name

now. But they gave him an award. [01:58:39] The other one had just passed away. And he got up, and he told a story. He said, "Look." He said, "I graduated at West Memphis High School." Said, "I hated high school. I was no good in high school—classes or nothin'." Said, "When I was in the seventh or eighth grade, I told my dad I would like to have a trumpet." So he bought him a trumpet, and he said then the band director kinda took him under his wing, and what he's sayin'—he said, "To go to school, you don't have to like school. You don't have to be— if you don't like it there's a—there's other ways. You can study stuff, you know, besides books to get smart." He said, "Lucky enough, I got to playin' the trumpet." And he said, "Now I've been on fifty gold records." [01:59:28] I mean, course, he backed everybody with Stax, you know, Al Green and Otis and all those guys. But he almost had tears in his eyes when he told the story because what he was tryin' to relate to people in the audience—that there's a . . .

SL: There's a way.

BS: There's a way. If you wanna make it, it's a way to do things, you know. So I tell a lotta people that, you know, music can get you a lotta places that, you know, you would never think. [02:00:00] I had a kid that used to come in here. He drowned in Hot Springs a

couple years ago. Good kid. He was, like, nineteen. Just—but he would come in h—he would visit me and Mr. Gist. [*SL laughs*]
And he was buyin' Woody Guthrie on LP when he was, like, fifteen years old. Now, how damn many fifteen-year-old kids were into Woody Guthrie and that folk music. You know, that kinda stuff.

SL: Zero. Not many.

[02:00:27] BS: Yeah, zero. That's exactly right. And I remember after the—after his funeral that day, it was a girl and two kids came in—two guys came in here, and they were part of his band that he had put together. And they were gonna buy DVD—I mean, a CD and go down by the river and listen and think about him, you know. And so one of these guys—this kid walked in here about a year ago, and he said, "Mr. Bubba, you don't remember me, do you?" And I said, "Well, you look familiar," but I just didn't know. He said, "Well, I was part of what's-his-name's" . . .

SL: Band.

BS: . . . "band." And he said, "I just couldn't handle it after he died—after he drowned." He said, "So I went in the army for two years." And said, "Now I'm back, and I'm doin' some recording in Memphis." So I mean, you know, these kids—they—I mean, music can get 'em a long way.

TM: Scott, we need to change tapes.

SL: Okay.

[Tape stopped]

[02:01:39] SL: All right. We're startin' our third tape, Bubba.

BS: Right.

SL: We've had a big old, fat lunch around the corner here at the . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . Mexican place. And I've got my cup of coffee.

BS: Do we have to speak Spanish in this deal?

SL: No.

BS: All right. [*Laughs*]

SL: We don't. But we can say that it was a good lunch.

BS: It was a good lunch.

SL: It was a good lunch. You know, we're—first couple hours we've done kind of forward and backward and kinda all over the map on our . . .

BS: Oh yeah. [*Laughs*]

SL: . . . timeline. But we've been talkin' about, roughly, your childhood growing up.

BS: Yeah.

SL: We really haven't gotten to your career or anything like that. But you know, when I was here a couple months ago and we got introduced to each other, you were talkin' about a baseball league

that it—was it your father that was involved with that
or . . .

[02:02:35] BS: Now, see, that—those pictures that are over there—
they had a thing called the Tri-County League. It was teams
from, like, Elaine, Wabash, Helena, Marianna, Marvell, Trenton—
some of those small communities, you know.

TM: What was that?

BS: And they would get together and play on Sunday. It was just a—
and . . .

TM: Hang on a second. What is that sound?

[Tape stopped]

[02:03:02] SL: So anyway, we had some noise that we wanted to
track down just a second ago. But we were talkin' about a
baseball league, and you called it a Tri-County League.

BS: Yeah, they called it the Tri-County League.

SL: Now, what are the—what's the age group for this baseball league?

BS: Oh, this was—most people were—there mighta been a couple of
high school players, but most of 'em were, like, you know, goin'
off to college and older men, you know.

SL: Okay. All right.

BS: It was just kinda—it kinda gave the older folks somethin' to do,
you know. They were kinda relivin' their youth. You know, still

tryin' to hang on and play. They played one day a week. They played on Sunday. Yeah. And my dad managed the team in Wabash called the Wabash Cannonballs.

SL: And so . . .

BS: I was the b . . .

SL: It's fascinating to me that . . .

BS: I was the batboy.

SL: Yeah.

BS: Yeah.

[02:04:00] SL: So you got to go every Sunday to a . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . different place and . . .

BS: Different little old town ever Sunday, whether they played in Wabash or whether they played, you know, like in Marvell or somewhere. And then they had a—after the game—you know, like it'd be at Wabash, well, Dad and Mother would have everybody out to the house, and everybody drank Falstaff beer then. See, that was the big deal. So you know, it just—it gave the—you don't have those things now, but it was like goin' on a community picnic. You just had stuff for people to do—people to go to the baseball games, and Elaine and Wabash were six miles apart, and they were big rivals, you know. Hell, when they played each

other they wouldn't speak to each other for a week after the game was over, you know. So I mean—you know, it's just—grown people bein'—tryin' to be young again. I guess that was the whole deal of it, you know.

[02:04:57] SL: But it was popular.

BS: Oh, it was popular, yeah.

SL: I mean . . .

BS: Well, baseball was popular back then. Like I said, the game of the day was on, and you know, everybody was a big Cardinal fan. You could hear that on the radio, and so it was just a—yeah, it was good times.

[02:05:14] SL: So—but I mean, there wasn't any admission or any . . .

BS: No, what they'd do . . .

SL: . . . pay or . . .

BS: . . . they'd pass a hat.

SL: Oh, they'd pass the hat.

BS: Pass the hat to take up . . .

SL: Do the travel expenses and . . .

BS: Yeah, to pay for the balls and bats. And see, they would come—they—when you wore a uniform, you would go to a business, like, in town—see, there was a place here called Armour Star Lard.

And my dad was pretty heavy, so they sponsored him. And they would have Wabash Cannonballs on the front and the team—I mean, the place that would sponsor you, like Coca-Cola or somethin' on the back, see. *[SL laughs]* So—but I mean, they paid for the uniforms.

SL: Yeah.

[02:05:56] BS: Now, what I remember was the old uniforms—I think I got one at home—wool—100 percent wool, man. And you know, they played doubleheaders sometime, and you're talkin' about guys that are thirty-five, forty—I mean, they're out there for, you know, all afternoon in the hot sun. I mean, it was wool uniforms. I mean, they were heavy, and they were sticky. I member *[laughs]* that.

SL: Golly, I wonder why they used wool.

BS: Well, I guess back then that was probably the only thing around, I guess . . .

SL: Yeah.

BS: . . . you know.

[02:06:27] SL: So what years were this? If you were a batboy, you were probably . . .

BS: I was batboy. I was probably twelve or thirteen, so it'd have to be [19]52, [19]53. Somewhere in that area. They probably had

the league up till [19]55 or—'cause I think they had it while I was in high school, you know, [19]56, somewhere in there.

[02:06:52] SL: You know, about that time—well, in [19]57 there was this integration/desegregation crisis in Little Rock. Do you . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . remember much talk about it?

BS: I just—you know, back then when you're in high school, you don't pay attention to things like that. And the teachers never brought it up. I mean, I'm—you know, what were there—I don't even know if there was color TVs then. I remember it was black-and-white TVs. So you would see stuff—you know. But me growin' up, I didn't—I'm—my age, I'm not payin' attention to that. It's not like it is now, you know.

SL: Yeah.

BS: Now everything is instant, and you know, eight-year-old kids knows what's goin' on in Iran. Back then, hell, we didn't know what was goin' on in Little Rock, and probably didn't care. I mean, you know, that's just—you had family focus, and you were focused on your town and your school. You know, it's just . . .

[02:07:55] SL: Do you remember how many years after that

desegregation hit Helena?

BS: I think it was, like—what'd the Voting Rights Acts pass—[19]64?

SL: Sounds about right.

BS: I member they boycotted here in town, like, in—probably
sometime in the late [19]60s, you know. I just member 'em
boycottin' some of the places here, you know.

[02:08:26] SL: But you were well—you were out of high school by
then, right?

BS: Oh yeah, I was . . .

SL: You graduated in . . .

BS: [Nineteen] fifty-eight.

SL: [Nineteen] fifty-eight.

BS: Yeah.

SL: So . . .

[02:08:35] BS: I was makin' a college tour with not good grades. Just
[*SL laughs*] kinda—I was like a merry-go-round going to school to
school, you know.

SL: Is that right?

BS: Yeah.

SL: Where all'd you go?

BS: Oh, well, like I said, I started out at ASTC, and like I said, the
chancellor there, the president, he just said, "I don't think you

and college are cut out for each other, you know." And so then I went to—I think I went to ASU Beebe. I went to Delta State. I think I went to Arkansas A&M. I was kind of a traveler, you know.

SL: Yeah.

[02:09:17] BS: Now see, back before they started the Cotton States League—I mean, the Tri-County League—they had a semipro deal here in Helena, see?

SL: Well, let's talk about that.

BS: Yeah, the Cotton States League. See, they . . .

SL: Okay.

BS: There was a team from Helena. There was a team from Pine Bluff. There was a team from Hot Springs. And I think that was all in Arkansas, and then they had a team from Clarksdale. They had a team from Monroe, Louisiana. They had a team from Greenwood and Greenville, Mississippi. I member that. And they played out at the ballpark, and there was some pretty good—fact, one of the guys I remember—I was young—my grandfather used to bring me to the games. One of the guys that pitched in Helena was Billy Muffett. Now, Billy Muffett was a guy that wound up pitchin' for the New York Yankees, and you know, there was some pretty good player—I mean, that was—I think it's class—like, Class D baseball. But it was a pretty—you know, back then there

wasn't things to do, so that's what everybody did—went to ball games, you know.

[02:10:22] SL: Well, were those teams integrated?

BS: I don't remember 'em bein' then. They coulda been, but I—you know, they're—if they were, there mighta been—now, there was a lot of Italian kids playin' 'cause I member there was a guy from—he used to play in Helena, and they'd traded him to Clarksdale, and then he came back and beat Helena. His name was ?Dominic Cioli?, so they had those kinda guys. And they had a place down where the statue is at the end of the street—they had a place called the Green Hat, and that's where all the players would go drink, you know, after the ball games and everthing.

SL: Well, so . . .

BS: And I was young, but I member my dad and granddad carryin' me in there. I thought I was a big wheel, you know.

SL: [*Laughs*] Well, you probably were. You just . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . didn't know it yet, really. So how did your dad—did he just volunteer to be manager of this Tri-County . . .

BS: Oh yeah, see . . .

SL: . . . team.

BS: . . . they—yeah, he was the manager, and then he would go out

and get the players, see. [02:11:33] And so like I said, Bill Gray's older brother was playin'. He was goin' to school at Ole Miss. He was—and he was a good baseball player, so he'd come home and pitch for my dad, and they'd bring a couple of players from Ole Miss. And then Charlie Whitworth was playin' football at the University of Arkansas, and he'd come down and play. And you know, then they had friends, and there was just—and course, Richard wound up goin' to—he played in the—down in the league down in Florida and they brought him up to Memphis at the end of the season. And I member Mr. Gray carried Bill and I and Jim to see him, and one of his buddies that played with him was Tom Tresh, who played with the Yankees. So it was a pretty interesting time. You got to meet some interesting people, you know.

[02:12:24] SL: So did you ever finish up a college degree?

BS: No.

SL: So after your college tours you just came back home, or what happened with you?

BS: Yeah, I came back and went in the army. Went in the National Guard. Stayed in there. And when the National Guard back then—all we did was protect—that's when they were havin' marches and everthing, like, from Forrest City.

SL: Right. Civil rights movement.

BS: Yeah, civil rights movement. And we would just get called to do those kinda things, you know. Then after I got out of service, I went to work for this guy sellin'—oh, we sold—there was a bunch of little country stores, so we sold, like, knickknacks and all that stuff. Wasn't makin' much money. Worked five days a week and then party on the weekend, you know, or whatever. And so then after that got over, then I got into farmin' with my dad for about four or five years. And I knew that wasn't gonna be my cup of tea, and then—so while I was farmin' with my dad, I came by here one time. My wife—I'd gotten married in [19]79 and so my wife—we had a little antique shop down at Wabash, and so, we decided to get this buildin' here. And we had a buildin' over on Porter Street for the first festival in [19]86, and then we bought this building. [02:13:54] Well, in the meantime, I came by here one day, and we'd just bought this building from Jimmy Mayer, and two guys walked in. They'd been eating at the restaurant across the street, and they said—he said, "Oh, the lady just told me that you were gonna open a blues record shop." And I said, "Yeah, I was thinkin' about it." So he said—this one guy said, "Let me go out to my car and get you—I might have some information to help you." Well, I—it's summertime. Hell, I didn't think anything

about it. So I asked the guy—I said, "I didn't catch that guy's name." He said, "Well, he didn't tell you." And it was Billy Gibbons of ZZ Top. [*SL laughs*] So Billy comes back in, and he said, "There—you need to call this number in California tomorrow, and if you can't get this"—they had a video on Sonny Boy. He asked me did I have it, and I said, "No." And he said, "Well, most us musicians like me and Bob Dylan and some of those guys—we can pick 'em up overseas." So they did that, and so Billy gave me a bunch of addresses, you know. [02:14:57] So the next mornin' I called out to this California number, and this little girl answered the phone, and she said, "Warner Bros. Records." And I said, "Young lady, you got no idea who I am. [*Laughs*] My name is Bubba Sullivan, and I'm in Helena, Arkansas," but I said, "Billy Gibbons gave me this number." And she said, "Oh, Billy Gibbons." So [*SL laughs*] she punched a button, and the next guy [*laughs*] picks up the phone, and he said, "This is so-and-so, Warner Bros. Records." Vice president, you know. I don't remember his name. And he said, "I guess you're callin' about that video." And I said, "Yeah." And he said, "Well, did they give you that number in Little Rock?" And I said, "Yes." So I kept callin' the guy in Little Rock—I mean—not Little Rock—New York. Kept callin' the guy in New York, you know, and he said—could never get a hold of

anybody for about three weeks. Finally, this guy named ?Al Grabowski?—finally got a hold of him, and he said, "Yeah," he said, "we got that video. I'm gonna send it to you. You make two copies; one to look at yourself and one to put in a safety deposit box," 'cause, said, "You know"—said, "This video comes compliments of Bob Dylan," 'cause see, this guy was workin' for Bob Dylan at the time. And he said, "You know, that's how things operate." And I just said, "Yes, sir." And so then—so Billy helped me get this started, you know.

[02:16:13] SL: How did this idea come up? I mean, all of a sudden—you've done . . .

BS: Well, no . . .

SL: You've done the college tour.

BS: . . . I. Yeah, and I'd done everthing, and we had started the festival. In [19]86. And back then you could not find any blues records. I'd go to Little Rock, and I'd go to flea markets, and I'd go to Memphis and, you know, you just—the blues records just weren't around in [19]86, [19]87—you know, stores and everthing. So I just decided to—"Well," I said, "Well, hell, I'll just open a record store." And it just—and course, Billy Gibson—I mean when Billy Gibbons came by, that just kinda put icing on the cake . . .

SL: Yeah.

BS: . . . you know. He [*laughs*] gets you . . .

SL: Pretty serendipitous.

BS: You know, he gets you goin' and everthing. And so then it's just kinda been a—well, if anybody told me today—twenty-seven years later and twenty-six on the shop—that it would—it and the festival would be what it is today, I'd told 'em they's crazy as hell. I never would—you know, you'd never think anything would last. But look what it's amounted to now. So . . .

[02:17:21] SL: So—but when did—how did you come about decidin' to get into the festival business. I mean, that . . .

BS: Well, all right . . .

SL: Doing a festival . . .

BS: Well, doin' the festival was—we used to do summer cookout—all us guys. We had a thing called Sin City Productions, and we would—we had this guy that had this—some farm ground out in a field, and Captain Dwight Galloway was head of the state police, so everything was covered as far as the state police went. He told us—he said, "I don't care what you do out there, just do not sell any liquor. If a fourteen-year-old kid ?comes with? liquor, you didn't get it for him. So everthing"—and see, the state troopers would take care of everything back in those days. So we had—

yeah, we had, like, Jimi Jamison—"Eye of the Tiger." Gave him his first gig outta Memphis. Had a group called Oil Can Harry, and Jo Billingsley was the singer for it. And she wound up bein' a backup singer for Lynyrd Skynyrd. And you member Tommy Riggs band outta Little Rock?

SL: Mh-hmm.

[02:18:36] BS: Well, Tommy and them—they would play at a bar here, but he—Tommy never played out there. But Linda, the girl that sang, and all the ?Marquis? boys and all those guys outta Little Rock—they would come out and play, see. And so it just got to be a good thing. What we would do at Sin City—five of us guys lived together. We'd cook barbecue for a week, shot dice, gambled, drank, whatever. [SL laughs] Everybody was involved. And then on Saturday we would have the cookout, and we would serve it—you pay ten dollars for a ticket, and you bring all you could drink, and you got to eat all the barbecue for ten dollars. And we furnished the bands. And so that went on for about four, five, six years, and then, you know, Ray Galloway and a couple other guys—we were all sittin' around, and course, Levon was back and forth from Woodstock then, you know, and so the University of Mississippi said, "You know, they're doin' some blues festivals. Y'all need—you got *King Biscuit Time* here, the longest-

running radio show." [02:19:47] So we'd just—they'd just hired Main Street Arkansas, a guy—I don't remember his name—Jim somethin' I think. And so, Main Street kinda got involved and the University of Mississippi over at Oxford—you know, they furnished—you know, they put out some ads and stuff for us and everything, you know, and so the first festival started 1986. We borrowed a little stage from a preacher that was—paid twenty-five dollars for and set it up out there. And we had all the artists and then at—that night we went out to the college and charged ten dollars. We had James Cotton and Bobby Blue Bland. Well, that was a big mistake. You find—you know, you don't move things from one venue to another.

SL: Right.

[02:20:39] BS: And so, you know, we're out there the first time and I—this guy walked—we hear this guy talkin', and he says—you know, we could tell he had an accent, and I said, "Man," I said, "where are you from?" He said, "London, England." [Laughs] Me and Jerry Pillow asked him—said, "What the hell you doin' in Helena, Arkansas?" And he said, "Man, this is where all the music started." So then we figured we were onto somethin' good and then it just kinda—the next two or three years it just . . .

SL: Grew.

BS: . . . grew. And now, you know, back then, what we would do—we would just try to make enough money to have it the next year. It wasn't about chargin' or anything, you know. We were just—and the artists would come, and I member the first act we ever had was CeDell Davis. You know, the guy that's got—

SL: I know CeDell. I've . . .

BS: . . . who's got polio, and you know, he used to play on the streets here in Helena. [02:21:28] So he was on the first act, so this guy walked onstage with him about halfway through the act. Well, it was Robert Palmer. You member the writer outta Little Rock? And he was the editor—or I mean the music editor for the *New York Times*. Well hell, about three weeks after our festival, there is a—he got up and played with CeDell 'cause he said CeDell played with him in New York. And I think he played a clarinet.

SL: Kay.

BS: And they did a thing, and so about two or three weeks later, we get in about a quarter-page write-up in the *New York Times*. And that's what kinda set everything goin', you know. And I know Robert Palmer wrote some books and everthing, and I member he came in here one time, and I said, "Man, that's a really good book you wrote." And he said, "Hell, nobody ever buys that." And that's when he was kinda playin' with a young band, you know,

long haired and everthing. But he was really a nice guy, and he was very, very smart. You know, he just—I think he had—I don't know—I don't know what happened to him. But anyway, he got a disease or somethin' or whatever.

SL: Yeah.

[02:22:33] BS: But you know, that's how it all got started, and it was just a—and I remember the—not the first year, [19]86, but [19]87—Channel 7 came with *Good Morning Arkansas*, and the guy that was here was the guy that does the ads for the windows. I can't think of his name, and you see him on Channel 7 in Little Rock. Oh, I can—my God, I can't remember what his name was. But anyway, that—you know, we were all in here, and they filmed it in here that mornin'. We just thought we were top dog.

[Laughs]

SL: Big dogs. Yeah.

BS: Yeah. Well, we really didn't know.

SL: Yeah.

BS: But it just—and you know, it just grew and grew and grew, and so it's just—you know, look what it is today. And I met some wonderful people along the way, you know. It's been—I member Robert Lockwood. He was—uh—the first—I member when he got up to play the first festival, he said, "Man, I grew up here. What

in the hell took y'all so long to invite me back?" you know. And so after a couple years, we knew we were onto somethin' really, really good, and now, look, you know, it's one of the—probably one of the biggest festivals in the world—or in the South, anyway. I'll put it that way.

[02:23:47] SL: Well, it's certainly the biggest [*TM coughs*] [*unclear word*] that happens in Helena, now.

BS: Oh yeah. Yeah, anytime—like, we just—this was the twenty-seventh year. Well see, now—this year they hooked up with Leland, Mississippi, the Mississippi tourism, the Tennessee tourism and Arkansas tourism—Beale Street to Leland to Helena—it's kind of a three-way little thing here. So they did their festival a week before ours. Then you have all these people in Clarksdale, and you have Beale Street doin' stuff. The vendors come in on Tuesday. They start sellin' on Wednesday. We do a blues jam on Wednesday, and next year it'll be the Michael Burks Memorial Blues Jam. And it just—you know, you—they're here for, like, a week now. I mean, it's just . . .

SL: Hmm.

[02:24:37] BS: This little town changes, you know, from—and a lotta people come back here just to see what it's like when it's not a festival goin' on, you know. "I can't believe it's so quiet." I say,

"Well [*laughs*], you know." But it's been really, really good. I mean, it's been good for me. My business has been good. I met some wonderful people from around the world. You know, people come here from all over. And you know, now when Morgan Freeman—course, he doesn't have money invested in Clarksdale anymore, but you know, when he invested a lotta money, that brought some people into Clarksdale, and it's just—you know, I—bein' in this business—people overseas are fascinated by the South. The customs, the food, the music. [02:25:26] You know, they wanna know where things happen. I think the biggest disappointment is they come now, and they read about all the juke joints that used to be, and now they're not there anymore, you know. But you know, they're—I had a guy come here one time, and I saw him takin' pictures around town. Had a big, old, long camera, you know, and so he came in the shop, like, on Tuesday. And so I said, "Man, didn't I see you around takin' pictures?" And he said, "Yeah." And his name—his last name was Miller, and he was from Australia. [02:25:59] And he said, "Yeah." He said, "You know, I'm from Israel." Said, "I grew up in—I spend a lot—I'm now down in Australia, but I go down to Cuba." And he showed me pictures of all the fancy—you know, the cars, the vintage cars they have down there and everthing.

And so he said, "Look, I'm gonna do a radio show down in Cuba."
And he said, "I want you to help me get Sam Carr and some of these Delta guys to a festival down there." Said, "I'll pay for everthing and everthing." And he said, "I'm gonna do a radio show that goes to half of Australia, and the music will go from, like, midnight to six in the mornin'." And said, "I'm gonna buy all my records from you and promote your shop." And that's all I had to do was just get him some musicians down to—to go to Australia. He was gonna pay for everthing. And so, he did, and it just—you know, and I remember we were walkin' around, and he said, "I know you're from here, and I know you can't hear this," but he said, "I can hear that music bubblin' on the ground 'cause this is where it come from." And you know, I never thought about that. And even when Kim Wilson came one time and gave us some money years ago when he was with the Thunderbirds—and he still is—and The Kentucky Headhunters. I member Greg Martin. He told Sonny Payne—he said, "Man," he said, "when I walk down the street, hair stands up on the back of my head." Well, us growin' up here don't realize that.

SL: Right.

[02:27:27] BS: And you got one of the hot country bands in the country. You know, those kinda guys—they know and—you know,

like so many musicians have been in here, like Robert Plant. You know, he's been—oh, I don't know—we've become really good friends. And John Lodge of the Moody Blues—he's the only guy I know in the Moody Blues, but he's the bass player. And you know, he came in here one time, and he said, "I just wanna—wanted to see where Sonny Boy was." Said, "You know, he was our big hero overseas." And so he invited me up to—they were playin' in a concert at the casino and since then, you know, I just—I saw 'em do their forty-five—forty-fifth anniversary show. Amazed—I'm seventy-two. I go to this concert. We're sittin' right down front. People on walkers and everthing. [SL laughs] And they're up dancin', and they're [SL laughs] singin' ever song. And I go back to their dressin' room, and John says, "Man, you know, this is forty-five years for three of us in the band." And he said, "We—you know," said, "we sold out ever venue we play. I mean, and they sang every note, every word to every song." You know, that kinda stuff just amazes you.

SL: Yeah, yeah.

[02:28:36] BS: And course, one of the nicest guys I ever met was John Kay of Steppenwolf. He was—you know, they're off the road now, but they were on the road for over forty years, you know. He retired. He was livin' in Franklin, Tennessee, and sold his land.

SL: Yeah.

BS: Moved to Vancouver, British Columbia, and you know, he was tellin' me—said he was born behind the Iron Curtain, and ever time that I saw him play, I would always go backstage with him. He would always—even up till the end—he would do a protest song. But he was—I had to—I had the privilege of bein' backstage with him, and this old hippy brought a guy backstage. And you could tell this guy—one of them real hippies from way back.

SL: Yeah.

[02:29:21] BS: He said—and the guy was dressed in a sport coat, and he said, "John, I want you to meet—this guy wants to meet you." And so, John said, "Okay." And I don't member the guy's name, but the guy told him—he said, "Hey, I was in Vietnam in a foxhole. Your music saved my life." So you know, John goes to—he does a—he did a lotta stuff for veterans, even though he did protest songs, you know. And just amazing—he told me that the story—he said, "You know, Albert King used to open for us when Steppenwolf was hot." "Born to be Wild" and "Magic Carpet Ride." And he said, "I could never"—said, "We were all on drugs." And said, "When I got off drugs, and we got off the road, I thought, 'Man, we shoulda been openin' for Albert King, not him openin' for us.'" But he said after he got off the road and they got off drugs,

he said they had a—two of the guys in the band went back out on the road and used Steppenwolf's name. Well, John had written most of the songs. [02:30:25] So he had to go to court for, like, two years. He said, "Man, I could become a lawyer." But he's got everything in his name. You know, ever time you hear "Magic Carpet Ride" in a ad or "Born to be Wild," he's gettin' money off of it. So . . .

SL: As he should.

BS: As he should. That's right. So he lived a—like I said, he can't drive. He has something wrong with his eyes. But just the nicest guy in the world and just—I woulda never thought—he was tellin' me a story that when he came to the States, he said, "You know, before Steppenwolf I was a—I played in coffee houses in California." Now, I cannot picture—if you see a Steppenwolf show [SL laughs] you could not picture him doin' that.

SL: Right.

[02:31:07] BS: But he is just a good friend of mine and a wonderful guy, you know. And then I was lucky enough to—one time it was 1988, and it was late in the afternoon. And there was—these two people walk in, and the guy had on leather pants, you know. And I said, "Hey, man," I said, "you know, it's a"— [SL laughs] I didn't know who he was. I knew he was a

musician. Long hair, good-lookin' little old girl—she was from India, and it was his wife. And that's when they had microminis. I mean, partner, it wasn't [*SL laughs*—a belt was about—you know.

SL: Right.

BS: But she was so good-lookin'. She was a model and everthing. And so, he was in here maybe for ten minutes, and I asked him—I said—I had an old blue bandana with a King Biscuit Blues Festival and Blues Corner on there. So this was in [19]88, and I just gave it to him. And like I said, he was just in and out. He was talkin' about Sonny Boy, and so, they left. Well, two years later he's playin' in Memphis. Well, I get a call one mornin' about ten o'clock, and he says, "Bubba!" And I said, "Yes." And he said, "This is Robert Plant." I said, "Who?" [*SL laughs*] He said, "Robert Plant." And course, then I thought about them playin' in Memphis. And—'cause see, the time we met before, it was just short, real short, you know.

SL: Yeah.

BS: And he said, "Well, I couldn't remember your name. I member you gave me that bandana," and said, "do you member the woman I had with me?" And I said, "Yes." He said, "Well, we're divorced now." Said, "I had to call her overseas, and she said,

'His name is Bubba Sullivan.' Said, 'I got his address and his phone number and everything.' Said, 'He gave you that bandana, you know.'" And so, he said, "Look, I'm playin' at Mud Island in Memphis."

SL: Yeah.

[02:32:59] BS: "And I wanna" . . .

SL: I remember that.

BS: "And I'm down in Alabama tonight," and said, "it'll be a couple a days, but I want you to set up a trip down through Mississippi, and I'll come over to your shop, and you know, we'll"—so I mean, we talked, like, forty-five minutes, and hell, I'd only met him, like, for, you know, just a—but we got to be kinda—and he said, "Now, when you call the hotel in Memphis, the Peabody, you ask for Robert Cullis." Said, "That's the name that I'm usin'." So—"Okay." And this was, like, in—it was before Thanksgiving 'cause we had the antique shop and had all these young girls workin' here. Well, him and part of the crew had—they'd had a couple beers, you know, fore they got here.

SL: Yeah.

[02:33:45] BS: And they walk in the door, and they say—these little girls are at the front door, and Robert Plant comes walkin' in Helena, [*laughs*] Arkansas, and says, "Where's Bubba?" And so,

they said, "Over here." And then he comes and bear-hugs me like we're long, lost friends, you know. And course, these little old girls probably just about to mess in their pants, you know [*SL laughs*], with Robert Plant bein' [*laughs*] here in Helena, Arkansas. So Robert and I became, you know, good friends after that. And then we—and every—he was with Atlantic Records then, and ever time that he—they had this lady that worked at Atlantic Records in New York, and when they played Arkansas, Tennessee, or Mississippi, she would call me and say, "Hey, Robert's gonna be in your area. You'll wanna go see him." So I would always go and see him play. And I know he was playin' at Robinson Auditorium—not—no, what's the place where they hold the fair. The Coliseum, Barton Coliseum.

SL: Yeah.

[02:34:35] BS: He was playin' there one year, and this was when he had that band from India, and him and Jimmy Page had just got back together. Well, he had his son-in-law with him that played bass, and he had his manager with him. So they came in here and, you know, bought, I don't know, four, five, six hundred dollars worth of stuff, and they said—and when Robert travels like that, he likes to go the back roads. He doesn't like to use the interstate, you know. So he gets—he said, "Hey, what are you

doin' tonight?" And I said, "Nothin'." He said, "Well, bring you and your wife, and y'all get another couple, and won't y'all come to the show in Little Rock." So I said, "Okay." So we go, and he said, "Just ask for the tickets at the will call window." And so in the meantime, he—his son-in-law called me back and said, "Hey, I forgot some music. Can you bring it to Little Rock tonight?" And I said, "Sure." So in the meantime, I had a guy that used to buy from me—he was eating lunch at a restaurant in Clarendon.

[02:35:37] And he said, "Bubba." He said, "I'm sittin' here eatin' lunch, and I know this has gotta be Robert Plant in this restaurant over here." And I said, "Well, I don't know, it might be," you know, and I knew that's who it was 'cause he goes the back way, you know, on the . . .

SL: Yeah.

BS: . . . interstate. And so it was funny—we get over there, and we sit up behind the stage, you know. And so there's a—when we get there I go to the will-call window, you know, and I—they give me the tickets, and I go backstage. And back then they had—the first backstage is where all the little young honeys are with their short skirts and everything.

SL: Yeah.

[02:36:17] BS: Then Robert comes out of the dressin' room, and he

calls us back into the dressin' rooms, you know. And he told—he put his arm around me, and he said, "Now, Jimmy Page—see, this guy's got a cool record shop, man. You miss out when you don't go around to some of these places, you know." So we got to meet all those people and everything, and so I get back up where my—so I said, "Well, you know, I never drank a beer at the—at a coliseum." And I said, "Damn it, I'm gonna do it tonight." So I go down, and I have on a King Biscuit shirt.

SL: Yeah.

[02:36:45] BS: Man, all these young kids, eighteen, nineteen, twenty, twenty-one, said, "Hey, you're with King Biscuit." "Yeah." "Come get in line. We'll b"—they started buyin' beers, you know. So I carry beer back up there and my wife and everybody—and it's about five couples sittin' behind us, young girls and guys, probably in their early twenties . . .

SL: Yeah.

BS: . . . if they're that old. And Kathy said, "You're not gonna believe what they're talkin' about." And I said, "Well, I don't know." And they said, "Well, they had a radio station here in Little Rock." I think it's Magic 105 then, and they said, "They was givin' free tickets to the concert if they could—if somebody could call in and say, 'Where's Robert Plant spendin' his day?'" Well, nobody

guessed that it—Helena, Arkansas, and so the little girls—my wife told 'em—said, "When my husband comes back, you just need to talk to him, you know." So this little girl asked me—she said, "What's your name?" And I told her, and she said, "Do you have a record store in Helena, Arkansas?" And I said, "Yes, ma'am." [Laughs] And she said—I said—she says, "Is that where Robert Plant spent all day?" And I said, "He spent pretty good [laughs] part of the day there." So she said, "Oh, I've got to have your autograph." And I said, "Honey, I'm just me. I'm not—Robert Plant just happens to be a friend of mine, you know." And so it— but it's funny how things work like that. [02:38:01] And so then here—like, I don't know, a couple years ago—had to be in Little Rock at the doctor's office. So I hadn't seen Robert in about a year. So Robert said—my buddy that does some stuff for concerts over there—he said, "Oh, he's playin' at Robinson Auditorium. Let's go track him down." So we got to Robinson—can't find it. So we found his bus at the Capital Hotel. [02:38:25] So we go into Capital Hotel, and I go over to the hotel thing, go in the bar first, and I asked—"Oh no, he's not here, you know." So I—and I used the name Robert Cullis, and nobody knew that name. And course, then I saw a girl come in from Channel 7, and I knew that they were gonna interview him. And then I caught the bus driver,

and I said, "Hey, give this card to Robert Plant," you know. And he said, "Okay." He said, "Yeah, we're goin' to—he's upstairs." Said, "We're goin' to sound check at four o'clock." So I walk outside the Capital, so I keep—people in—they start whisperin' in the Capital Hotel, "This guy thinks he knows Robert Plant," and this and that, you know. So I don't say anything. [SL laughs] So then I step outside Capital Hotel, and I miss him gettin' on the bus, you know. But a guy gets off the bus, and he takes a baggage and puts it on the thing. They're goin' to sound check.

SL: Yeah.

[02:39:15] BS: I said, "Give this to Robert." It wasn't thirty seconds. He opened the door, and he said, "Robert Plant said get on this bus." And so [laughter] I jump on the bus, you know, and had to be there by—that's when he had that group, the Band of Joy, you know.

SL: Yeah.

BS: So "Hey man, how are you doin' and everything?" Said, "Meet everybody in the band," you know, and it was just me that got on the bus. And so he said, "Man, I hadn't seen you in about a year, you know." So we start—he said, "Hey, you wanna go to the show tonight?" And I said, "Yeah, I got my wife and another couple." He said, "Well, give me your cell phone number and I—

the guy'll call you in about ten minutes." So he called me, and [SL laughs] after I got off the bus, he said, "I'll see you tonight." [02:39:47] So he said, "I'll have a package for you." So we got—I got—I went up to the will-call window, you know, and this little girl—she's probably about twenty-five, and I said, "Do you have a package for Bubba Sullivan?" And she said, "Oh, are you Bubba Sullivan?" I said, "Yes, ma'am." And she said, "You must be somebody really important." I said, "What do [laughs] you mean?" She said, "Robert Plant left you a big old package here, you know." Course, it had tickets backstage, and it had, you know, all that stuff. We're sittin', like, ten rows back, and then, you know, we go backstage after the show and meet him and everything, you know, and just have good conversations. [02:40:22] And he said, "Man," he said, "You know, I really love the Arkansas Mississippi Delta." He said, "You know, if I ever get married again and have a child, I'm gonna name it"—what'd he say? "Lula Moon Lake." And I said, "Robert," I said, "the first thing, you're probably never gonna get married again. [SL laughs] Second thing, you're probably not gonna have a child, you know." But he's just, you know, real open and everything, and then last year at the festival, he calls me about two weeks before, and he said, "I wanna come over." And I said,

"Well, when you get to the bridge, you call me, and I'll get you in the back door here." So he came in and put his stockin' over his head, and I told a couple of girls workin' here—I said, "Now, look, just be cool," 'cause he didn't wanna sign anything, you know. And so we were out by the stage. Nobody recognized him. Two little boys about sixteen called me over. "Mr. Bubba, isn't that Robert Plant? I wanna take a picture with him." I said, "Look, you stand off if you take a picture. He just doesn't want to be bothered." But nobody else recognized who he was, you know.

SL: Huh.

[02:41:27] BS: And so he was a—he signed my poster there that's got—you know, the one where John Bonham died, and they didn't do the concert. But yeah, he's just a really good friend. I—you know, and I met some good people that can—nobody—Kentucky Headhunters are just the nicest guys in the world, you know. And you know, like I said, John Lodge—he just said, "Hey, man, and whatever you need, you know, you just call me and everything." So it's been—my life has been good, and this is—you know, I don't go and meet them. They show [*laughs*] up, you know.

SL: Right. Well . . .

BS: So . . .

SL: . . . you have a very unique product here.

TM: Hey, Scott, let me take a quick break. I need to change the lights.

SL: Oh, okay.

TM: Changed.

[Tape stopped]

[02:42:09] SL: Okay, we had to adjust a light and . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: We were just starting to really talk about this blues festival that you put on every year now. And I'm assuming it's become—has reshaped your life for the past however many years you've been doing it. And we got a little sidetracked into Robert Plant . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . your relationship that you've built with him. And I believe when we left the conversation to fix a light, you were saying that these folks—they come to you. You don't seek them out.

BS: Yeah.

[02:42:48] SL: And my comment to you would be, well, you've got a very unique thing here. I mean, the—I don't know how many record—I doubt that there's a record shop like this anywhere. And if there is . . .

BS: There's none.

SL: . . . I don't know where it would be.

BS: There's not . . .

SL: And it's certainly not [*BS laughs*] on hallowed ground . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . which this area . . .

BS: Is.

SL: . . . this part of the country is.

BS: Yeah.

[02:43:10] SL: So you know, it sounded like to me that you started this—the festival idea as really just a party—that it was—and it was a group of friends that got together and barbecued and had a good time doin' the barbecue. And then made it, you know, made it clear with the locals that this was what you were gonna do out in the middle of a field and no harm would be done.

BS: Yeah.

SL: And they kinda gave you a blessing to do it. And so, at some point in time, it transformed from . . .

BS: That party.

SL: . . . a fun idea . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . and a way to spend a couple of weeks . . .

BS: To a festival.

[02:43:54] SL: To a festival. And I know from my own experience

that you're talkin' a lotta work, and a lotta things have to come together on top of having the kind of personality that is able to make it happen and everybody be pleased and want to do it and keep doing it. So beyond that, tell . . .

BS: Yeah, see, we've gone through a lotta changes. I mean, used to—when we first started it, it was, like, just to make enough money to make it the next year. There was no charge or anything. Like my good friend who passed away, Ray Galloway, he asked me one time—he said, "Man, how in the world did we drink for a week and just make this thing happen?" And I said, "Hell, Ray, we were in our forties then. Now we're gettin' close to seventy." But it's got where now it is a—it's a year-round job. See, we had—in nineteen—I believe it was 2005 or [20]04—I'm not sure of the year—see, the King Biscuit name—you know, *King Biscuit Time* and everything—we got ?theirs?—but it used to be a thing called the *King Biscuit Flower Hour*, and that's *F-L-O-W-E-R*. Westwood One did that, and that was a rock syndicated show. Well, a lotta people got it mixed up with *King Biscuit Time*. See, King Biscuit Flour here was *F-L-O-U-R*.

SL: Right.

[02:45:23] BS: And so, when it was Westwood One on that, everything was cool, you know. Everbody—then you got the

Internet, and people started—Westwood One got bought out by fifteen lawyers in New York. I think that was, like, 2004 or [20]05. Well, they got to hearin' Sonny Payne on the Internet, you know. Well, we needed to get some money out of this or whatever. So they called us, and Ray was handlin' all our law stuff then, and so they said, "We want \$30,000."

[02:46:01] SL: So—okay, I'm a little bit confused. There was *King Biscuit Time* and . . .

BS: That's a radio program.

SL: Radio program. And it was from—it was sponsored by a flour company—*F-L-O-U-R*.

BS: Yeah, it was sponsored by Interstate Grocery.

SL: Interstate Grocery. Okay.

BS: And what Interstate Grocery did—they were the first people to let Sonny Boy and the King Biscuit entertainers on the radio.

SL: Yes.

BS: Fifteen minutes back then. All right, Mr. Max Moore owned Interstate Grocery. There was about 120 little grocery stores. Well, he knew that King Biscuit Flour was gonna sell and the—and he gave 'em—fact, they were the first African Americans on the radio. They tell me even before—back in 1941, even before some of the black radio stations. And he was a smart enough

businessman to know, and then he took a photograph of Sonny Boy and put it on a cornmeal sack. And they would get on the radio and say, like, "Hey, we're playin' over in Mississippi," or somewhere, and you know, "Come see us at a"—and I talked to some of the King Biscuit entertainers, [*laughs*] and they said that the only bad thing about playin' Mississippi—if you didn't get back to the ferry, you had to sit on the other side till six o'clock in the mornin' if you didn't get back there fore midnight.

SL: Right.

[02:47:25] BS: But can you imagine bein' a African American in 1941 and you hear some of your people on the radio. And they're—say it's somebody dedicatin' somethin' to your aunt or grandmother or somethin'. I mean, that's gotta be pretty . . .

SL: That's strong stuff.

BS: Pretty strong stuff.

SL: Yeah.

BS: Yeah.

[02:47:44] SL: Okay. So now tell me about this other entity—the—that's—is spelling "Flower Time" *F-L-O-W-E-R*.

BS: All right, that's . . .

SL: What is that?

BS: That was the king bi—that's a rock syndicated show. I'm not—I—

it amazes me that you're not familiar with that.

SL: Well, it's not me, but I want the kids and everybody . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . that's listening to this . . .

BS: Well, what it . . .

SL: . . . to get the story.

BS: What it is—and that was owned by Westwood One out in California. I think that's where they were located. Well, nothin'—you know, they—there was never anybody that argued about "Can you use this name, or can you use that name?" And a lotta the young kids would get things mixed up—the rock syndicated show with *King Biscuit Time Show*. And so then some lawyers bought out the—fifteen lawyers in New York bought out Westwood One. [02:48:37] Well, and then the Internet came in, and they got to hearin' Sonny Payne and some people on the Internet, and they thought, "Hey, these guys are—we've got this name, you know. We bought 'King Biscuit Flower.'" So they called and said, "We want \$30,000." Well, Ray Galloway was the lawyer for us. We just decided, "To hell with 'em. We've been workin' all our life for nothin'. We're not payin' anybody anything." So that's when the change came to Arkansas Blues and Heritage Festival.

SL: Okay.

BS: All right, now there's this group—I wish I could think—they bought all Bill Graham's stuff, and they were goin' through their archives, and they found out that they had bought the King Biscuit name. So now that's how we got the King Biscuit name back here. You know, we have to pay 'em some money every year, but hopefully down the road it'll get—you know, it just gets where—like you said, when we started this thing, it was all about havin' a—you know, doin' somethin' for the people—bringin' the musicians back home. [02:49:49] And then you get everything tied up in legal stuff, and you know, now it's a—I mean, we—in nineteen—well, in two thousand—what is this, 2012—2009, I think, Ray and all us guys workin' the stage, we just worried about the music. Wasn't worried about the money or nothin'. Wasn't chargin' then. And we looked up, and hell, we're, like, over \$100,000 in debt. So a couple of the people that were on the board quit, left, whatever. [02:50:18] Nobody was ever accused of anything, but you know, we knew there were some things goin' on that wasn't right. Well, I was walkin' ever mornin', and I ran into Munnie Jordan, and she walked up in the neighborhood where I was. And I said, "Munnie"—she was the festival director at one time back a few years before that, and I said, "You need to come back. You know, we need your help." So she came back and took on—and we

started chargin'. And for the last three years we've made money 'cause we went—you know, we charged for the—out in front of the ?deal?. But you still got four stages that are free. I mean, you can walk down this street right here and see the back of the performer. You just can't see their face. Everybody that pays gets out there. [02:51:02] So it's become a big-business thing—deal now. I mean, to put this thing on when you put everything on, with all the events and everything—I mean, you think—it's close to a million dollars now. I mean, man, that's pretty—for a small community here. And you know—course, I look at my shop. I look at some other businesses in town, and if it wasn't for the festival, I don't think they'd be in business. I might not be in business. I mean, that's what it means to this economy over here, you know. And so it's—and I member there was people—I won't call any names, but there was a couple of businesses here in town that—"Aww, hell, we're not gonna do the—I don't even care about King Biscuit." But I think the first year this one person made \$10,000. Well, he's the biggest sponsor now.

SL: Sure.

[02:52:03] BS: So hey . . .

SL: It's all economics.

BS: What I would always tell people, "If you're gonna put forty

thousand people in front of my shop, I'm gonna sell 'em somethin'." I mean, that—there was a couple of ladies that had a store here in town, and my wife told 'em—said, "Look, you oughta let—do a thing called 'Potty Pass.' And that's where you buy somethin' that—or you buy four 'Potty Passes' for a dollar, and you get to go to a clean bathroom. And you know, the 'Potty Passes' never ex—no expiration date." Well, Kathy never could talk these ladies into doin' that. "Well, I don't want 'em in my store." Well, you know, nine people outta ten that are goin' to use a clean bathroom are pretty decent people.

SL: Yeah. [*Laughs*]

[02:52:46] BS: I mean, you think about that now, you know. And most of the people that come here from around the world—up until the last year or so, their economy has been good until the economy got bad, you know.

SL: Right.

BS: So it—it's—you know, it's just—it's been wonderful for this town. I mean, like—I mean, there's just—you know, your film people come from all the world. I mean, the Japanese, aus—I mean, just every country. I mean, this is . . .

SL: It's put it on the map.

BS: Yeah.

SL: It's put it on the—back on the map.

[02:53:20] BS: This is the place to be in October. I mean, you look, and there's people that'll tell you they've been comin' every year. And it's just—it's really like old home week. I remember the first festival—the second festival—Levon Helm, Joh—Robert Lockwood, Pinetop Perkins, they were all in here. And back then this was kinda ground zero, where everybody met. You know, it was like old home week and all that stuff. [02:53:53] And old Robert could be cantankerous at times, but he was just a wonderful guy, you know. And so, we had this lady from Tulsa. She passed away with cancer a couple years ago, but we called her Blues Sister Jeanie. Well, she was in here, and she said, "Bubba, you think Mr. Lockwood will let me get a autograph?" And she asked Levon, and Levon signed. And she asked Pinetop and she—and I said, "Oh hell, go ask him." I said—she asked—she said, "Mr. Lockwood," said, "would you mind signin' my poster?" And he said, "Yeah." And she said, "Well, I just didn't know if you'd do it or not." He said, "Look, lady, the only difference 'tween you and I—you came to hear the blues, and I came to play the blues."

SL: Oh, that's good.

[02:54:35] BS: And I thought that was—you know, that just—that kinda set the tone for everything, you know. And these—and

there was a—hi—her husband—he is probably—he's from Tulsa, and he is probably—it's the first time he's been over here since his wife passed away. But he used to walk up to us and shake our hand and give us \$100 bill for doin' this and said, "Put that in the pot for the festival," you know. And so he—I member him tellin' me the first—the second year he came to the festival—he was a welder in Tulsa—he said—I said, "Arnold, how much money'd you bring?" He said, "I brought \$9,000. I might not spend it," but he said, "we're goin' to Memphis. We're goin' to Clarksdale. We're gonna spend money in town." That's the kinda thing that it took us years to convince people—that people away from here had money, and we're showin' them a good time here. And they're gonna spend money here, you know. And that money's gonna stay here. So . . .

[02:55:40] SL: You know, I've got—there's a couple things I wanna ask. First of all, 1941—*King Biscuit Time*.

BS: Yeah.

SL: It seems to me that would just predate anything that would've happened in California or on the Internet or all that stuff. I mean . . .

BS: Yeah, hell, there wasn't . . .

SL: . . . yeah, and they [*unclear word*] . . .

BS: . . . any Internet back then.

SL: Yeah, I mean, it seems like to me that you guys have every right, you know, as long as the radio show is in favor of it. I mean, the—it's—really, King Biscuit is the deal, and I just can't believe that . . .

[02:56:18] BS: Well, I'm not a lawyer and it all—you know, I think what basically happened—that the people that owned the radio station did not do their homework and get the proper—you know, it's just like a guy told me. I had a guy called me from New York one time, and he said, "I understand you're a friend of Levon Helm's." And I said, "Yes." He said, "Well, you know, Levon"—he said, "First off," he said, "I'll tell you I'm Jewish." And said, "You know, Jewish people can get stuff done." And I said, "Yes, sir, I understand that." He said [*SL laughs*], "Levon handshake on the *Coal Miner's Daughter*—now, he got money for playing the music, but he doesn't get any royalties off of it." And he said—I said, "Sir," I said, "I went to—Levon and I went to different high schools," but I said, "he's from the old South—the old school—a handshake is supposed to be your word." And he said, "Well, that's not the way it happens in business," and said, "I'm tryin' [*laughs*] to rectify this to get him some money." But you know, that's just the way he was.

SL: Yeah.

[02:57:29] BS: And that's the way people that grew up in that area and with—probably with the *King Biscuit Time*, they just didn't—you know, who'd . . .

SL: Yeah.

BS: . . . ever thought, you know, that things would be what they are today.

SL: Right.

BS: I mean, it's like—see, like Houston Stackhouse, he and—Houston Stackhouse Jr.—his dad played on *King Biscuit Time*. Well, he recorded with Wolf Records out of Australia. They keep tellin' him—said, you know, "We're gonna send you a check." But that's been years and years and the check had never got here. And course, Mr. Booker T. Laury was a player in Memphis. Now, he was smart enough to get—and he got his royalties from that company. But you know, that was the thing that hurt so many of 'em—just a chance to play, you know, and just not knowin' the business side of—and that's the sad part about the music business, and you know, you gotta have all these copyright laws and everthing. So I just tell people now—these young kids, you know—"Man, whatever—if you write somethin', get it copyrighted 'cause"—you know. But it just—you know, like, we're sittin' here

talkin'—I mean, I would never think that this record store would do that kinda business.

SL: Right.

BS: I mean, you know, you just—you never—I guess we don't think big enough. Maybe that's what it is, you know. I don't know.

[02:59:00] SL: Well, the smallest things are the seeds of what's going to grow.

BS: Oh, that's exactly right.

SL: And if you take care of something, and you pay attention to it, and you make it—continue to feed it and keep it healthy, it'll grow, and it'll be something there even after we're gone, if it's done that well.

[02:59:26] BS: You see, Sonny Burgess—about—he and I been friends for a long time, and he said, "Bubba, we just need to do a rockabilly festival." So I talked to one of my friends, and we put up the money for it, and the first two years it's rained. But he—we had—we've had great lineups for those two years. He said, "Bubba, we play overseas." Said, "People would just kill for these kinda lineups." And he said, "If we ever get good weather," said, "this thing is gonna take off." And he said, "When I tried to"—I let him get the artists the first year 'cause he was more familiar with 'em in the rockabilly field than I was. And he said, "I tell 'em"—

they said, "What's this"—you know, Sonny said, "Look, this is just on the ground floor." He said, "I might be dead, and Bubba might be dead, but one of these days"—he said, "How do you think King Biscuit started?" And said, "We might all be dead and gone, but one of these days this thing could be—and I really—just me sensin' the people I talk to and stuff, I think this thing could grow. You know, I might not be around, but in say ten years or so, be up there—not as—maybe not as big as King Biscuit, but it's gonna be a mighty big festival in the state of Arkansas, you know." And you got all those guys, you know, that played back durin' the Elvis days and everthing. You know, they're well up in age, but you know, they're—they got fans out there, too.

SL: You bet.

[03:00:53] BS: I mean, Sonny told me they just played at Newport, and he said they had five thousand people. And he said, "Bubba, I think this spring we're gonna have ten thousand if we get good weather." So you know, I just told my partner—I said, "You know, we lost money the last two years," but I said, "you know, sometime you gotta baby a thing to keep it goin'." But I said, "We're on the right track." And so, you know . . .

SL: Well, it's also . . .

[03:01:19] TM: Scott, we should probably change tapes.

SL: Okay.

[Tape stopped]

[03:01:22] SL: So this is our fourth tape?

TM: Mh-hmm. Yeah. [*Unclear words*]

SL: So you're—come—you're about to do four hours here as a Pryor Center victim. That's pretty good. [*Laughter*]

BS: Hell, y'all made all—y'all came this far, so we might as well get it all done.

SL: That's exactly the way I feel about it.

BS: Yeah.

SL: And I—you know, I also feel like a day is really about the minimal polite time to spend with somebody that's . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . willing to talk about their life. So . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: It's—again, it's a . . .

BS: There's—now, there's a lotta stuff we can't talk about, but I mean, you know, most things we can.

[03:01:56] SL: Well you know, there are—there's a lotta stuff we can talk about.

BS: Yeah.

SL: And some of that stuff you don't think we can talk about, we can

probably talk about, too.

BS: [*Laughs*] Well, I understand.

[03:02:03] SL: So—the—we've been talkin' about the King Biscuit Time Festival. Now, it changed names. You had to change names for a while because of these claims that someone owned . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . your name that really started all the way back in 1941 . . .

BS: Yeah, that's exactly right.

SL: . . . which is just . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . awful to me. It just . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: It's part of that—it's not service, it's greed that drives . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . that.

BS: That's right.

[03:02:34] SL: So I have to believe in the long run, in the long term, you guys win.

BS: Yeah.

SL: And I don't know when that'll be, but there's goodness in your all's effort, and there's greed in the other one.

BS: Yeah.

SL: And so I . . .

BS: Well, that's the reason when we started the rockabilly, and it was the Arkansas Delta Rockabilly Festival is what I called it, I went and got everything copyrighted . . .

SL: Yeah.

BS: . . . you know. So when I'm dead and gone, they don't have to worry about all that stuff, you know.

[03:03:01] SL: Yeah. Fool me once.

BS: Yeah.

SL: That kinda thing. Yeah. So not only has—you know, your wife is some part of this or at least . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . the decision to keep doing it, I would assume.

BS: Yeah.

[03:03:25] SL: Let's talk about you and your wife. Now, what is her name?

BS: Now, her name is—used to be Kathy Morgan.

SL: Okay.

BS: And her—she was from Fort Smith. Course, she was kind of an army brat, so they moved all around. But they settled in Fort Smith, and she went to school at Fort Smith Northside and then went to the University of Arkansas and graduated there. I—well,

fact, I think she went one year to Hendrix and then went on to Fayetteville and graduated. And her dad was a oil and gas lawyer in Fort Smith.

SL: Okay.

[03:04:00] BS: Lawrence Morgan. And he taught law at the University of Arkansas.

SL: Okay.

BS: And so Rob Porter and I had met in Fayetteville, and when he lived up there—you member when he had the accident?

SL: No, I don't.

BS: Okay.

SL: Tell me about that.

BS: Well, Rob had a date with a girl from Helena, and they were goin' the Pig Trail.

SL: Okay.

BS: And they ran off the mountain up there, and just luckily a tree stopped 'em. Well, the girl was okay, but Rob—it messed his legs up and he—they—he couldn't ever get his back straight. I think he still has problems today. You know, the curvature of the spine and everthing. And so he was—I think he was bedridden for a year, and he told me—he and I got to be pretty good drinkin' buddies and stuff and friends, and he said, "You know, when I was

laid up for a year, I said, 'I'm gonna become a doctor and become very sma'"—and so he made—he was one of the few people that I've ever seen that could listen to a stereo—that's when they had LPs—have headphones on, listen to the Allman Brothers, and ace the damn test the next day.

[*SL laughs*] I mean, he's one of those cats that—you know, a lotta people's got book sense don't have common sense.

SL: Right.

[03:05:26] BS: But Rob had all that, and so he and I became good friends. And so he was—and this was even before I met my wife. Well, his mom and dad—we would all go to Little Rock and party. And his dad was a banker in Blytheville, and his mother had a—big Razorback fan, and she had a room with all the memorabilia and everthing, you know. And so Rob—his dad was a Alabama—big Alabama fan, but he would come to Little Rock and go to all the Arkansas games. Carry us out before the game and feed us and all that stuff, you know, and everything. So when Rob and Marilyn decided to get married, well, we all—most of us had long hair then. So they were gonna get married in Blytheville. Well, I was not in the wedding, but I was the emcee at the wedding rehearsal party at the Blytheville Country Club. [03:06:22] So his grandmother [*clears throat*—excuse me—his grandmother

was livin' then, and so, you know, everbody's at the country club. Everbody's drinkin', you know, and all of this, and his grandmother looked at me up by the front table, and she said, "How we gonna get everbody quiet?" You know, and I said, "Oh, I'll take care of it." So you know, after you have a few drinks, I tapped on the little deal, you know, and I said, "Okay, folks, I need your attention." I said, "Everbody bow your heads." And so everbody bowed their heads and I—they probably figured I wasn't gonna pray anyway, you know, and they said—I said, "Now call the Hogs." [SL laughs] And man, it just broke everybody [laughter] up. And the grandmother—his grandmother just looked at me and said, "That's the way to get 'em, man, you know." [SL laughs] [03:07:06] But it was a [SL laughs]—it was just—so Rob and I were just really good friends, you know, and then he moved to Little Rock after Fayetteville, and you know, him and Marilyn got married, and they were livin' in the Heights. Well, I'd go up to all the football games in Little Rock, and so I was at his place when they—and he'd just graduated from med school. And so he had always told me—years ago, he said, "Man, if I ever get outta med school, I'm gonna go and buy me a set of Klipsch speakers, you know." So we went to Rodney Parham Road one Saturday mornin' and bought . . .

SL: Yeah.

BS: . . . Klipsch speakers, and I think he told me a few months back that he—they moved into a smaller house, and he had to sell 'em. But he had a—you know, he had a record player and everthing. He's a huge Linda Ronstadt—he thought Linda Ronstadt hung the moon, you know. [03:07:59] So we're over there drinkin' one day—and so somehow Kathy lived two doors down from him, and I went over to borrow some ice, and so, that's how we kinda met, like that, you know. So we started goin' to ball games and datin' and everything. She was workin' at Teletype in Little Rock, you know. And so that's how I got—met up with her, you know, and that's how Rob and Marilyn and, you know, everybody that we knew—and even though I didn't go to school in Fayetteville, I knew most of the people that Rob knew. And—but that's how we met, and you know, we got married before a Razorback game in 1979. Played Baylor and beat 'em twenty-nine to twenty. That's when the old Southwest Conference—and like you said, we were at Jim Rose's house . . .

[03:08:54] SL: But now wait a minute, you gotta say where in Fayetteville you got married.

BS: Oh, I got married at the Greek Theatre in Fayetteville.

SL: [*Laughs*] And how did that happen?

BS: And how that happened was that Jim Rose graduated at Mississippi State, but he and Ray were goin' to law school at the University of Arkansas. So Rose is one of these type guys—you know, he was—I think he got sent to Vietnam three times, and if I'm not mistaken, Rose was one of the guys, when Martin Luther King was marchin', Rose was—like, had to be one of his guards, you know, on the march through Alabama. So I said, "Well," I said, "I wanna—we're gonna get married before a ball game in Fayetteville." So Rose had to go before the chancellor or whoever—or the president of the university and the guy kept askin'—he said, "Well, did he go to school here? What's his credentials or whatever?" And Rose said, "No, he'd come up and partied ever weekend. He might as well have went to school here, you know." [*SL laughs*] [03:09:53] So somehow Rose and his ways that lawyers can talk—we got the Greek Theatre. Well, we had—then Jim Sugg and I were good friends, and he was married to a girl named Melanie Harrison. Well, her dad was a judge in Blytheville. So he swapped judgeships with somebody that weekend so he could do the wedding ceremony. So we get married in the Greek Theatre. It was thirteen degrees, cold as hell [*laughs*] on a Saturday mornin'. Course, you know, and everybody's bundled up, drinkin' whiskey and whatever, and so, I

[*SL laughs*]—but when they announced us man and wife at the end of it, well, everbody gets up and calls the Hogs, you know. [*SL laughs*] So that—I thought that was pretty neat. And then we go and win the ball game. And then that night we wind up at—go back to Rose's house and everbody's partyin', and we wind up at the The Library. [03:10:47] Well, Zorro and the Blue Footballs were playin' there. [*Laughs*]

[03:10:49] SL: Now, The Library Club is actually a club on . . .

BS: Yes, it . . .

SL: . . . Dickson Street.

BS: Yeah, it's a club on Dickson. And I guess it's still there. I don't know. This was . . .

SL: Well, it's not The Library anymore, but . . .

BS: Is that . . .

SL: Yeah.

BS: Well, it was back then.

SL: Yeah.

BS: And what was the old joke that a lotta the parents would call up there and ask their student—said, "Where have you been?" and "I've been to The Library." Well, they thought they'd been to the real library, but they'd been to the drinkin' library . . .

SL: Right.

BS: . . . you know, so—but Zorro and the Blue Footballs was there, so it was a—you know, just a fun weekend, and we've got some pictures of it and everything. And . . .

[03:11:20] SL: What do you remember about Zorro and the Blue Footballs?

BS: I just remember they were wild and crazy and I really—of all their antics, they were just very, very good musicians. You know, they just—they did the music that drinkin' people loved back in those days, you know. That's just—they'd make you feel good. And I . . .

SL: They . . .

BS: . . . guess The Library would have 'em 'cause they were the kinda band that'd make you wanna have another drink.

SL: That's right.

BS: So you know, that's the kinda band they were, and I'm sure that's why they were playin' [*laughs*] in a college town [*laughs*] like in Fayetteville, you know.

[03:11:54] SL: Yeah, yeah. Okay, well, that's a good story. And so that was in [19]79.

BS: Yeah.

SL: And so y'all have been married a while.

BS: I don't know how many years it is comin' up on November the

tenth, but it's been a long time.

SL: You probably need to find that out.

BS: I think it's thirty-three [*SL laughs*], but don't hold me to that.

[*Laughter*] My math is not too good. [*SL laughs*] Yeah.

[03:12:14] SL: And so have y'all had any children?

BS: No. No children.

SL: No children. Okay.

BS: All the kids that work for me down here and work for Kathy in the antique shop—they're like my fam—they're like the kids, you know. I mean, they're like—they were like our kids and everthing.

SL: So she has an antique shop here in . . .

BS: She had a antique shop over here, right next door.

SL: Oh, is that right?

BS: Yeah.

SL: Well, I have to go.

[03:12:35] BS: It went out—no, this is it.

SL: Oh, this is—oh, I see.

BS: I mean, it went out in—I think we closed it in, like, 2001 or somethin'. You know, business just got bad.

SL: Right.

BS: But we were doin' gr—I mean, we were—it was a big antique

shop. Hell, it—we had, like, ten or twelve employees.

SL: Wow, that is a big antique shop.

BS: We were doin' good. You know, things were good back in those days and then, like all small towns, you know what can happen.

[03:12:59] SL: Did y'all do your own refinishin' and stuff in the back or . . .

BS: No, we had—we hired people to do the refinishin'.

SL: M'kay.

BS: But we had some people that were really good . . .

SL: Yeah.

BS: . . . you know. And the kids were all good. They're all now, like—you know, they're in the medical field. Some of 'em's pharmacists. They've all gone on to become really, really good. I'm proud of all of 'em.

[03:13:26] SL: So you've kept up with the kids that y'all hired.

BS: Oh hell, they all come back. Yeah.

SL: So it is like a set of children, really.

BS: Yeah, it really is. Yeah. See, like one—her—fact, she just had a baby here. She works at St. Vincent's. And she worked for us for years, and her dad's a dentist here in town. But you know, she said—her little baby's, like, I don't know, maybe two months old now, and she says, "Now, you gotta live a long time 'cause this

baby's gotta know what Blues Corner [*laughs*] and [*laughter*] all this stuff's about, you know." So I mean, it's good when they do that, you know. They bring their . . .

[03:14:09] SL: Well, you know, you've been here—how long have you had the Blues Corner here?

BS: Started the festival—helped start the festival in [19]86; opened this in [19]87. So twenty-seven years of festival; twenty-six years of music.

SL: I think that qualifies your business here as an institution.

BS: Yeah, probably so. I mean, you know, it's a—I've been lucky. I've been on Japanese television, six o'clock news—front of—they said—three million people. I've been on the Travel Channel. I've been on CNN across America. I got them here for our festival in [19]93. [03:14:49] Fact, they opened the news and the—opened the program at eight o'clock with the King Biscuit Blues Festival. Like the guy told me—he's retired now—but he—Larry—what was his name? Larry—can't member his last name. But anyway, when he called to tell me about, you know, CNN, he said, "Hey," he said, "y'all are gettin' five minutes and thirty-two seconds." He said, "Hell," said, "Chevrolet can't buy that kinda"—I member him saying, "Chevrolet can't buy that kinda advertisement back then." And he said [*laughs*]*—*he said, "And you know another good, cool

thing about it is," he said, "Saddam Hussein watches CNN ever day [SL laughs] when he was livin'." I thought that was a pretty unique [laughs] deal, you know. [SL laughs] So . . .

[03:15:32] SL: So the whole world knows about the Blues Corner.

BS: Oh, I think the whole world knows about—I mean, I have people come in, you know, from all over. It's just—I guess one of the most moving moments was a guy came from Germany. And he came in here that morning, and he'd been from New Orleans all up through Mississippi, and he said, "You know, I read about all these wonderful juke joints, and now they're all gone." And I could tell he was really kinda disappointed. I said, "Well, look," I said, "you just make yourself at home here, and I'm gonna kinda make your day. I'm gonna carry you down and get you on Sonny Payne's *King Biscuit Time Show*." So I—at that time I didn't know he was a guitar player. I mean, I didn't know he played an instrument. So I carried him down and got him on Sonny's show, and Sonny let him do a couple songs on there. Well, he came back down here, he and Sonny, and called his wife from here and h—he had tears in his eyes. He said, "I was on *King Biscuit Time Show*, and I'm in—I been treated so well here in Helena, Arkansas," you know. So that makes you feel good when you have people from around the world. And you know, they write

you thank you notes for what you do and for how they're treated, you know. So I mean, I've always felt like, you know, hell, you treat somebody like you'd wanna be treated, you know. And it's worked out really good, and you know, like I said, I've—I have people from all over the world, you know.

[03:17:04] SL: You know, you've mentioned Levon Helm a couple of times. How did you first get to know him?

BS: Well see, Levon went to—he—now, he was born in May of 1940, and I was born in August of [19]40. So he was a little bit older than I was—you know, three, four months.

SL: Yeah.

BS: But see, he went to school at Marvell, and I went to school at Elaine. Now, we played basketball against each other and football against each other. And then I member when he was in high school, they'd have these 4-H club meetings, see. And his sister Linda at that time played the—a . . .

SL: Washtub bass.

BS: . . . washtub, yeah, with a broom handle on it. And Bob Evans was [*SL laughs*]*—fact, I think he went on to be—do the Miss America pageant. You know, he did the Miss Arkansas pageant. He was from Helena, and he sang that song, "Phillips County Blues," and he carried Levon and Linda to—they'd do the Miss*

Arkansas pageant. They'd do the Miss Louisiana pageant. So Levon—he would—you know, he'd play guitar back at 4-H Club, Riley's, and all this stuff. So we knew each other through sports and stuff like that in high school, you know, and everything.

[03:18:19] SL: You member what kinda basketball player or football player he was?

BS: Oh, football player—he wasn't any good. I member in basketball [*laughter*] he had a coach named Ernie Crone. Ernie Crone was about six eight, and I member in—he could kick a football, like, eighty yards. And I member we'd be playin'—you know, they had little old bitty gyms back then and they—you could hear ever word everybody said you know, and everthing. And so I member he just—Levon said he'd pull him out, and he'd just talk to him like a dog [*laughs*], you know, and send him down to the end of the bench and everthing. But you know, it was all in fun and everthing. I mean, I think Levon just played sports to be around the girls and the—you know, to have somethin' to do and he was more into music than he was bein' an athlete, you know.

[03:19:02] SL: Well, he was kind of a noted prankster, wasn't he?

BS: Oh, I think so. Yeah, you know, he was always—he was tellin' me a story about one time—old "Fireball," you know, Edward Carter. They called him Fireball in high school. I think he had a [19]55

Ford and Levon—and he's kinda—he's not what you'd called crippled, but you know, he has trouble getting around, walkin' straight and everthing, you know. And just a wonderful guy. Fact, I think he and Levon graduated together. And [*laughs*] Levon said he was down in West Helena one time and the cops pulled him over. And I guess he'd been drinkin' beer or somethin', and he said [*laughs*]*—*you know, the beer cans just roll out, and [*SL laughs*] Edward's tryin' to talk to the cops and everthing. I mean, Levon has to tell the story 'cause it's so much—you know, he can make it sound so real, you know. He was a great storyteller, you know. [03:19:52] But—oh yeah, when he was home from Woodstock, he would come down and—oh, I'm tryin' to think what year that was. This was—that's when he was livin' out there in Shadden's house. You know, the guy that had the barbecue place out . . .

SL: No, I didn't know that he was . . .

BS: Well . . .

SL: . . . livin' out there.

BS: Well, the—Shadden had a house, and Levon was rentin' it from him and eveything. And he'd come down here, and I had these old jukeboxes, and man, he loved Jimmy Reed, you know, and . . .

SL: Sure.

BS: . . . hell, we'd go get beer, and we'd sit in here and drink beer and talk about the world and everything, you know. [03:20:24] And I member him and his wife and me and my wife—they had the Elaine Christmas parade. You know, Bill Clinton used to come down to the Christmas parade in Elaine every year when Mary Louise Demoret was livin'. So they had a—so Levon said, "Man, you know, I wanna go down to the Christmas parade." So we went down there. Well you know, then we were both, hell, around sixty or maybe a little older—somewhere—probably about sixty. And he would tell these people, these young people—he'd say, "Hey, I'm Levon Helm." Well—I said, "Levon, they don't know who in the hell you are. I mean, you know [*laughter*], you ain't been around here in a long time. I mean, you know, you kinda forget." But it was funny to see that, you know. I mean, course, a lotta people knew him, you know.

SL: Well, sure.

BS: But it was—you know, these young kids, you know, they didn't know Levon Helm from me or anybody [*laughs*] else, you know.

[03:21:21] SL: Yeah, you know, that's—I think that's mostly true, but you know, my children—they prefer the music that I prefer.

BS: Oh, yeah. Oh, now all these kids I have workin' here—man, they

would—they were in that oldies but goodies stuff.

SL: Yeah.

BS: I said, "Where in the world'd y'all learn that?" "Well, my—that's what our parents listened to." So I was always proud of those kids because they listened to stuff that—you know, good music is what I say, you know. They wasn't into all this other mess, you know.

[03:2:53] SL: Well, you know, I think the best music tells a good story.

BS: Oh, it does.

SL: And Levon and The Band—not only did they tell good stories, but they had characters in their story, and each one . . .

BS: Characters.

SL: . . . would take a role in the song. And it just—I don't know, sometimes it always—the stories were good, and somehow or another they rang true. And . . .

[00:22:18] BS: And Hawkins was the same way.

SL: Yeah. Now what about Ronnie Hawkins?

BS: Ronnie Hawkins—see, I never did know—I mean, I knew who Ronnie was. I never did know him that well. But he was up in c—see, I knew him through Levon and through Ed Burks . . .

SL: Okay.

BS: . . . and like that. Ronnie didn't spend a whole lotta time here,

but he did before they went to Canada. Him and Ed Burks stayed at his aunt's house, you know.

SL: Right.

[03:22:43] BS: And I said, "Ed," I said, "how'd your aunt and Ronnie get along?" He said, "Well, man, you know [*laughs*]," he said, "he would slip her little drinks, you know," and said, "she loved that guy like—she loved Ronnie for that, you know." And I think his aunt was probably up in her eighties or somethin'.

SL: Well, not only drinks, but cigars.

BS: Yeah.

SL: He'd slip her cigars.

BS: Yeah, he'd come and [*SL laughs*]*—*you know, they had that—Ronnie was lookin' for a drummer, you know, and course, Levon was a senior, and so I think they had to go out and talk to his parents and everthing. And they did some stuff at a—playin' around here, you know. And so they had—so you know, I didn't really know Ronnie that well. [03:23:23] And then Ronnie came back to the States one time. He was on Conan O'Brien, and they gave him that JUNO Award. You know, I think that's like winnin' a big award in America, you know, but up in Canada. And so, you know, he was doin' this tour, and so they had—ah, the Thompson guy was his manager. And Ronnie was gettin', like, \$5,000 a

show back then, guaranteed. Well, I told him—I said, "Hey, we can have it at Sonny Boy's music hall then." I said, "We can have it," but I said, "hell, man, we don't have \$5,000." Well, he was playin' at the casino the night before. [03:24:01] I think it was Lady Luck over there then, instead of Isle of Capri. And so I think the guy's name was Butch Thompson. And I said, "Look, man," I said, "we'll sell enough tickets to cover everthing." So he didn't tell Ronnie. So I said, "Well, you know, Ronnie's playin' here." I said, "I'll get"—they parked the bus in the alley down there behind the old J. C. Penney buildin', and I said, "Well, I need to get some of Ronnie's friends here." So I got Sonny Payne. They hadn't seen each other in thirty-five years. And I got Sonny Burgess to come down, him and his wife. Sonny was married then. So [laughs] they got their bus parked out back, you know. [03:24:38] So man—oh hell, we sold tickets. We had a big crowd. So I go out there and beat on the door and old Danko . . .

SL: Rick.

BS: Rick Danko's son was playin' in his band.

SL: Okay.

BS: I mean, his brother. And I said, "Hey," I said—I could hear old Ronnie—"Who in the hell is that out there?" And I said—you know, and I told old Danko—I said, "It's Sonny. Sonny Burgess."

[*Laughs*] And here's old Hawkins—you know how Hawkins is—
"Well, tell that son of a bitch to get on this bus," you know.

[03:25:07] And so, course, Sonny Burgess—they hadn't seen
each other in a long time, and [*SL laughs*] this was one time after
the show, he did two shows—man, when he started the music
everbody got up and danced. And he got on about the second or
third song, and he said, "You know, I'm playin' in Helena,
Arkansas, and I hadn't been here in over thirty-five years." And
said, "My old buddy Charlie Halbert" who used to put 'em up out
at the hotel and everthing. And he said, "I really wished he was
here tonight." And he said, "I wrote a song about a old girl, that
prostitute over here on one of these streets over here," and said—
it was that song "Odessa Baby." You know, that was her name.

[03:25:48] And so it was really a fun show, and after the show
they did two sets. You know, he set—I've got pictures here of it
and everthing—they set, and you know, he visited with people and
just was—and a lotta places they said he didn't let—he didn't talk
to anybody after the show. And so, old Butch Thompson—we took
in about sixty-five hundred dollars that night. And so later on, he
told Ronnie about this, and boy, he said Ronnie just lit into him,
man. He said, "Hey, Hawk, here's the cash money, and those
guys made money, too." So you know, everything worked out.

SL: Yeah.

BS: But . . .

[03:26:25] SL: I want you to go back to the gentleman that owned the Rainbow hotel.

BS: Mr. Charlie Halbert. Yeah.

SL: Do you—tell me a little bit about Charlie Halbert. Do you . . .

BS: Charlie Halbert—I wanna say he played—he played major college football. Whether it was at alaba—I don't know where he played. But see, he had the thing out there, and everybody would go out there. That's where all—that's where Hawkins would stay. That's where Conway—all the—you know, he kept all the musicians. And Mr. Charlie Halbert was—he had the biggest hands of any man I've ever seen. Ray Galloway and I were probably—I mean, we were old enough to drink. But he had a place down here called the Pot of Gold. It was a private club. [03:27:13] Most people wore jackets to get in there, believe it or not—you know, sport coats and stuff.

SL: Yeah.

BS: And Charlie would have bands, and he'd have everthing, and have like these little tea dances and stuff like that, you know. But he had—I member Ray and I were in there one time, and he said, "What are you boys doin' in here?" Said, "Well, we wanna order a

drink." He said, "Well, I know both of your daddies. One of your daddy is head of the state police," so Ray and I—we's scared, you know, even though we knew we was gonna get a drink. But Mr. Charlie Halbert was drinkin' that whiskey, man, and eatin' peanuts. Whiskey and peanuts, man. And course, we thought it was funny, but we darn sure wasn't gonna laugh, you know, bein' in his place. [03:27:53] But he had everything—I member they had a—my dad was a huge—he thought the sun rose and shined on Jerry Lee Lewis. He just—he was a big Jerry Lee Lewis fan. Well, they had a deal out at Central High School. They had wooden backboards. They were doin' a benefit. Mr. Charlie Halbert put it together—a benefit to raise some money for glass backboards back in those days.

SL: Yeah.

[03:28:18] BS: So Jerry Lee's band was playin'.

SL: Wow.

BS: So it was a group called the Jesters that played before 'em, and I think Ed Burks was in The Jesters. I know Bill Holland was. And so Jerry Lee—that's when he brought this woman in with him, this little girl.

SL: Fourteen-year-old . . .

BS: And everybody thought it was his daughter. But that's—that

was—what was her name—the cousin or whatever he married.

SL: The cousin. Yeah. Fourteen years old.

BS: All right. Yeah. But nobody knew back then. There was no Internet. I mean, there was nothin'. I mean, he couldn't play anywhere else in the world, but Charlie Halbert got him to play here. And so, man, I mean, everybody—I mean, he knocked 'em out. And course, nobody knew who in the world she was, and nobody probably cared . . .

SL: Right.

BS: . . . who it was, at that time. And I member my dad and—you know, we listened to him and everthing. Well, Bill Holland was tellin' me later on that they went out to Charlie Halbert's place.

SL: The Rainbow.

[03:29:08] BS: Rainbow. And see, that night the Jesters did a song called "Hello Josephine." Well, Bill Holland was the drummer for the Jesters. So Bill tells me that they all get out there and they go to drinkin' whiskey. And so Jerry Lee gets about half drunk, and he says, "Hey, that damn song y'all did, 'Hello Josephine'—I want you to teach it to my drummer." So Bill [*laughs*] Holland said he has to get a trash can, and they're all about half looped, you know. And then, you know, later on Jerry Lee recorded that song. I mean, it was on some of his albums and stuff. But you

know, Mr. Charlie took—he took care of all the musicians. He was just a wonderful . . .

[03:29:48] SL: Well, was he ever a musician himself?

BS: Oh, I don't think so. I don't think he ever played. I think he played college football, and then I don't know—just in the motel business and just, you know, that kinda stuff.

SL: So the Rainbow was a motel.

BS: Yeah.

SL: But did the rooms—did they have doors between the rooms where they . . .

BS: Yeah, there—they . . .

SL: . . . could open 'em . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . up, and it'd be like a suite?

BS: Yeah, there was kinda—there was rooms that you could open 'cause I member Captain Galloway—when they would have company and they couldn't stay at the house, why he, you know, he'd call Charlie, and he'd say, "Hey, I'm sendin' my boys out there, you know. Put 'em up for the weekend," or whatever.

[03:30:24] So it was a—you know, he was a mover and shaker here in town, and like I said, he had that place called the Pot of Gold.

SL: Pot of Gold.

BS: And they would have some pretty good name acts in there, you know. And so it's just a—oh man, Helena was just a boomin' town. You know, there was, like, you know, restaurants everywhere, and there was, like—I member the old Holiday Inn. I member the—it was in the—we started the festival in [19]86. Well, the Holiday Inn—they had a mixed-drink thing there. You could get food there. Everbody ate there on Sunday. You know, it was a big—the Holiday Inn was big deals back in those days, you know. That was one of the . . .

[03:31:05] SL: It was a breakthrough . . .

BS: Yeah, it really was.

SL: . . . in motel design . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . and hotel design.

BS: And so after the festival in—I believe it was [19]88 when Levon and them came out there, and they had a jam, you know, and it was just—you know, things were just—good time—and the Holiday Inn back at that time—now, they had a band, like, three nights a week—you know, different people—or maybe ever night. I don't know. I member Sterling said he got a call one night from somebody . . .

SL: Sterling . . .

BS: Billingsley. He's president of the Sonny Boy Blues Society.

SL: Kay.

BS: And he was one of the founders of the festival, too. And he said somebody called him and said, "Hey man, you need to get out to the Holiday Inn." Said, "Lonnie Mack's playin' out there." He said, "Man, there ain't no way in hell Lonnie Mack's playin'." He said he went out there, and sure enough, he was playing. So you know, back in those days you never know who was gonna show up at any of these . . .

[03:31:54] SL: I wonder if Stan Szelest was playing with him then.

BS: Yeah, Stan came—yeah, he was playin' at the festival here. Oh, Stan was a cat, now.

SL: Yeah, he's . . .

BS: One of the best piano players in the world.

SL: . . . the real deal. Real deal.

BS: Yeah.

SL: Yeah, I got to record him with Ronnie.

BS: Smoked cigarette after cigarette.

SL: Yes. Uh-huh.

[03:32:10] BS: I mean—and drank that whiskey, you know. And he was just a—Stan was tellin' me one time—he said they came—I

guess it was Stan and Robbie and Rick, you know, the—part of the old original band, some of Hawkins' band. He said, "All these Canadians came down to Helena, and it was in the summertime." They didn't know what the hell the weather was. And he said they all [*laughs*] had on coats, long coats and everything, and he said [*unclear words*] and it's like . . .

SL: Oh yeah, I think Robbie was here.

BS: Yeah, and it's like a hundred degrees . . .

SL: Yeah. Uh-huh.

BS: . . . or somethin'. Yeah, cause Robbie—it was about that deal about walkin' down the levee lookin' at Nick's Cafe or whatever, you know, in one of those songs or whatever. But see, The Band did a song—I don't member the name of it. It was on one of the first albums. But one of the verses in there were, "They hid away in Modoc, Arkansas." It was about a drug dealer. It's on the thing. And I'd play that thing over and over.

SL: Oh yeah, that's . . .

BS: And I'd say, "Modoc, Arkansas." I said, "Now, who in the hell—unless you from Phillips County, you got no idea where in the hell they're talkin' about. Modoc, Arkansas, you know."

SL: Yeah.

BS: And I thought, "Only Levon could come up with somethin' like that

in a song, you know."

[03:33:22] SL: Yeah, I know that song. I'll . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . get you the name of it in just a second. I'll think about it 'cause that's about all I—that's the only music [*unclear words*] . . .

BS: "Caledonia's Mission" or somethin' like . . .

SL: Yeah.

BS: Somethin'. I don't member the name of the song but, yeah . . .

SL: "Caledonia Mission." I think that's it. Yeah.

BS: Is that the name of it? Yeah.

SL: Yeah. That's . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . one of, like, three albums I listen to all the time.

BS: Yeah. You know, they—but it is, like, you know, Hawkins singin' those songs about—you know, the—back then they did music like—you know, that related to things that . . .

SL: What—here.

BS: Yeah, what was here.

SL: "W.S. Walcott Medicine Show."

BS: Yeah.

SL: Yep.

[03:33:50] BS: You know, "Ruby, Ruby" and stuff like that . . .

SL: Yeah.

BS: . . . you know, that Hawkins sang. [03:34:14] And you know, you think about this—now, everybody's tied into Michael Jackson with the damn moonwalk and all that . . .

SL: Oh, the camel walk.

BS: Hawkins was doin' the camel walk, man. I mean, he was a bad boy [*SL laughs*] back in those days, you know.

SL: Yeah.

BS: I mean, hell, Michael Jackson wasn't even thought about bein' born when that happened.

SL: Yeah, that's right.

BS: And see, that's where I think people lose sight of what—you see people like Michael Jackson, and you see these other people doin' things—hell, it's all been done before.

SL: Yeah.

[03:34:32] BS: Fore they were ever born. I member Robert Lockwood used to tell me—he said, "Now, you look at rap." He said, "You know the reason they do rap?" And I said, "No, Robert, I don't know." He said, "Hell," he said, "'cause they can't play music. They can't play an instrument."

SL: No melody.

BS: And he said, "They don't know a damn thing about a record player." I mean, that was his line, man. And you know that's just—that's so true.

[03:34:55] SL: You know, I was seein'—I was lookin' at one of the posters, one of the playbills of one of the festivals, and it has Levon Helm and the All Stars. Now, was that the RCO All Stars or . . .

BS: No, no.

SL: . . . is that just the jam of everybody.

BS: That was the band he brought from Woodstock.

SL: Okay.

BS: They had different players in it. Fact, Stan was in it. And you know—and I think then he had just hired Jimmy Weeder.

SL: Yeah.

BS: The guitar player.

SL: Guitar player.

[03:35:26] BS: He sent Jimmy Weeder in here—I think that was [19]88. He told him—he said, "You go over to the record shop, and you buy anything he's got by Earl Hooker." Said, "You learn how to play the guitar like Earl Hooker." [SL laughs] So he came over. I had two or three albums by Earl Hooker. And course, Jimmy Weeder turned out to be a great player.

SL: Great player.

BS: And you know Randy Ciarlante was down there. They brought a guy—I can't remember his name—he was a guitar player and a saxophone player. And Levon had him here for one festival. And man, he was so—he was just so good. I don't remember that guy's name. But you remember when Tyson got him to play out at Marvell at the fairgrounds?

[03:36:05] SL: I was not a part of that, but . . .

BS: Okay. But the Holiday Inn was open then, and after they left the fairgrounds, we all went down to the Holiday Inn. And we're sittin' out in the hall drinkin' and this guy—they were talkin' about Levon, and this guy says, "You know, I wished I could take Levon and bust his head open and pick his brain because there's stuff in there that would be the most amazing amount of information you could ever do." And that's the only guy I've ever heard that. He said, "You know, he is so far ahead of his time and things that he sits in conversation with you with, you know." And he was. You think about all the stuff that he does—or did, you know.

SL: Yeah.

[03:36:51] BS: I mean, he was a—you wouldn't think somebody that grew up where he did—but you—that goes back to what we talked about in the earlier interview. You created things. You didn't

have computers and all that stuff to go to. You walked outside.

You listened to the birds sing. You watched . . .

SL: Yeah, tweeting was listening . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . to the birds.

BS: Yeah. [*SL laughs*] My—but I mean, you know what I'm talkin' about.

SL: Yeah, yeah.

BS: Yeah, it's just—you have to—like I go back and say, you know, I don't have computers or anything or iPhones or whatever. Facebook—hell, I thought that was a damn comic strip when I first heard about that. I didn't know. And so they—'cause somebody asked me when I—when Facebook first started, they said, "Hey," he said, "are you on Facebook?" And I said, "Well, hell, I used to read comic books, you know. [*SL laughs*] Popeye and that kinda stuff." [*Laughs*] They looked at me like I was crazy, you know. But I didn't know what the hell they were talkin' about 'cause I'm not into that. [03:37:54] It's just like, you know, old Frank Frost. You know, he would always come—when Frank lived around the corner there. Frank and Sam—I kinda took care of both of those—Sam—when they got up in age, you know, and so .

. .

[03:38:06] SL: Okay, now tell us who Frank Frost . . .

BS: Frank Frost was one of The Jelly Roll Kings. He was one of the great harmonica players. And Sam was the drummer, and Robert Nighthawk was his dad.

SL: Okay.

BS: And they played with Big Jack Johnson, and they were The Jelly Roll Kings. Well, Frank would come over here, and he'd bum cigarettes off me and everthing, you know, and so [*SL laughs*]—always he would come ask me, "What do you think about this?" When somebody would call him—when Ry Cooder would call him and say, "I want you to come do this," he would always come ask our advice. And see, Ray was kinda—Ray never charged him. Ray was his lawyer, you know, Ray Galloway. [03:38:42] And so, Frank one time—Eric Clapton was playin' in Memphis, and so Frank comes in here on mo—he didn't come see me before the Eric Clapton show. He comes in on Monday, and he throws this ticket down on the desk that was here, you know, and he said, "Hey man," he said, "you know that guy there?" And I said, "Oh yeah, I know who he is." And he said, "Well you know, they called Sam Carr, and told us to drive to Memphis and meet 'em at B.B. King's. And then they came and picked us up in a limo and carried us to the show, and we went backstage and met this guy,

Eric Clapton, you know." I mean, Frank still didn't know who in the hell he was. [SL laughs] And he just kinda looked at me as sincere as anything, and he said—I said, "Well, how were things?" And he said, "You know, the old boy's a pretty good guitar player." [03:39:32] [SL laughs] And I tell that to people, and they say, "Man, everybody knows about Eric Clapton." I said, "Now, how in the hell would Frank Frost know who Eric Clapton is?" But I said, "The good part that you're missin' is that Eric Clapton knows [laughs] who in the hell Frank Frost is, you know." [03:39:45] And so it's a—but you know, Frank did that movie, "Crossroads." He played the harp in there, and so they wanted—so he came to me—he finally quit drinkin' about the last five years of his life.

SL: Yeah.

BS: And man, he used to could drink that whiskey straight. Lord, have mercy—smoked them cigarettes. I never could figure out how he could play harp, but he told me—he said, "You play from"

. . .

SL: The stomach.

BS: . . . "your guts." Yeah, the stomach.

SL: Yeah, diaphragm.

[03:40:11] BS: So Ry Cooder called him and wanted to come to

Memphis—wanted Frank to come to Memphis. And I said, "Frank," I said, "as good as you are, you"—when he called, he said "He's gonna call me back tonight." I said, "You tell him that your health is not good. If he really wanted to play with Frank Frost, he could bring all the crap that he was gonna have in Memphis down here." But they never worked it out, you know. So . . .

SL: Yeah.

[03:40:33] BS: I mean, that's the big problem I have that some of these top-notch supposedly musicians use a lotta these guys, you know. I know some of the guys that were here from Woodstock—they were tellin' me that they were doin' a big concert for Levon to help pay off some debts that he owes. And I said, "Butch, the thing that bothers me about that is one of those guys could write a damn check and pay everything off and never miss a beat."

SL: That's right.

[03:40:58] BS: And I said, "It makes you wonder, as good as Levon was and as kind as he was and good old Southern soul, that he just—people took advantage of him, you know."

SL: Yeah, not only—I think there is some history there of that . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . and not just with Levon, but with the folks that got this all

started.

BS: Oh yeah, it is.

SL: Here.

BS: Yeah.

[03:41:28] SL: So, Bubba, I think that you've done an amazing thing with just the spirit of letting people have a good time over all these years. But you know, this town, Helena, is not what it was when you were born and when you were a child . . .

BS: No.

SL: . . . and growing up. Something has happened here to this town, and I know there's probably a number of things that have caused it to get to where it is. But you don't—you know, we have maybe two restaurants downtown here.

BS: Yeah.

SL: One that does lunch and this place that we went to.

BS: Yeah, it has just—it's—I've seen the good times, and I've seen the bad times. And you see—you know, when it becomes—now, like what right now—a mayor gets, what, sixty, eighty thousand dollars. I was on the city council in 1988, and the only reason I got on the city council—I ran against an incumbent and beat him, like, eighty-four votes to 16 percent or somethin'. I don't even remember. But I had one guy walk up to me and said, "I don't

like this other guy." This guy was workin' for AP&L. He said, "Here's a hundred dollars." Shook my hand. And another guy that lived next door to me gave me some things to put up signs. I did not advertise anything. 'Cause I really didn't wanna run. The only reason I ran—Sammy Brocato was mayor, and he hated the blues festival. He just didn't like the blues festival at all.

[03:43:09] SL: So you weren't gonna get equal representation.

BS: No, and so I knew that everybody on the Sonny Boy board said, "Hey, you know, we got to have"—so I ran and got on there. Let me tell you, two worst years I ever spent in my life. I mean, I felt like I had diarrhea for two years. I mean, Joann Smith ran for mayor the next term, and she asked me—she said, "Would you please run for city council?" I said, "Joann, you and Donald Trump ain't got enough money to make me run." I said, "I can do a whole lot more from down at Blues Corner than I could ever do." See, we would go in—that's when they had Helena and West Helena. [03:43:47] Now, West Helena, they couldn't get 'em to meet, you know. Nobody wanted to meet. They had all this mess—racial stuff. So here Sammy Brocato would walk into a meeting, throw stuff down on the desk and say, "What do y'all wanna talk about tonight?" Well, hell, we'd be in there till twelve o'clock—not get anything accomplished. And I thought, "Man, you

know, this is just not [*laughs*—this is not my cup of tea." So I think the politics—and I didn't even know you got paid for runnin' for city council. My feelin' is—and I know it's—people would argue with you and everything 'cause the way time—times are now.

SL: Yeah.

[03:44:25] BS: I think if you love your city, why get paid to do a job or why take a certain amount of money? I mean, if you wanna do somethin' good for the city, hell, you oughta give your—if you don't, don't run. I mean, that's the way I look. But now, you know, they're gettin' all this money, and it's all become—you know, it's just a—and I think, you know, I had a girl or lady—she's a sister of the Kentucky Headhunters. Now, her and George Bush's sister were big buddies. Now, she used to run stuff up in Washington. Her husband was from there. They're back in Kentucky now, and he runs a hospital. But she would put on events at the Kennedy Center, and when all the ambassadors from other countries would come, she would do all the parties for 'em in Washington. [03:45:16] So I got her—I wanted to do this thing called the American Music Museum Project, and you know, get the musicians to come in and teach the kids in school music and stuff like that, and maybe put a recording studio in here. And give people recognition that people don't recognize, like you

know, up until the last two years ago, Steve Cropper wrote so much great music. But hell, he was at—everybody—he just played with Booker T. & the MG's, and he was just a guitar player.

SL: Session man.

BS: Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

[03:45:48] BS: So I mean I wanted . . .

SL: Blues Brothers. [*Laughs*]

BS: Yeah, so I wanted to do some stuff. And Steve and I talked, and of course, he's big in the Stax Museum, and he said, "If you can ever"—he said, "It's like pushin' a snowball up a hill. It's heavy," but said, "once you go down that hill and you get people on your side"—you know, and I've talked to Robert Plant about it and everything, and it's just—so I mentioned it to the Kentucky Headhunters, and he said, "Man, you oughta get my sister, Mary Jane—you know, she worked in Washington." So Mary Jane come down, and she walked Cherry Street. I mean, she walked it from one end to the other, and she said, "Bubba," she said, "you know what this town reminds me of?" And this has been about eight years ago—and I said, "No." And she said, "Reminds me of downtown Nashville, Tennessee, fore they ever did anything to it."

And course, look at downtown Nashville now.

SL: Yeah.

[03:46:36] BS: She said, "Let me tell you how the game is played."

Said, "I've been in Washington, DC." Said, "The team with the most toys wins." And I didn't know what she was talkin' about.

And I said, "What are you talkin' about?" She said, "The people

with the most money win." She said, "If you can—if we can find

an investor to come in here and when the politicians and when the

mayor and when the governor and everybody says, 'You can't do

that,' this guy'd turn—this guy or this woman turns to him and

says, 'Hey, I can buy and sell you.'" She said, "That's when it's

gonna change—when you control everything. And you can start

bringin', you know, your musicians and everything in here."

[03:47:18] So you know, John Lodge of the Moody Blues is

gonna try to help, and Robert said he would help. And you know,

you're just waitin' on the right one. I've got a guy in Indiana—he

became—he was a good friend of Delaney Bramlett, and I don't

know if—are you—you're familiar with Delaney and Bonnie?

SL: Yeah.

[03:47:43] BS: Well, there was a guy from overseas—we thought we

knew his name, but he [*horn honks*] led us on for a couple of

years, and he loved Delaney Bramlett, and he always wanted to

come to the festival. And it's now gotten—when Rupert Murdoch got in trouble overseas, this guy worked—to tell you—I don't know the guy's name 'cause he wouldn't tell us his name. [SL laughs] He gave us a false name, but he said Rupert Murdoch brought him from England to find somebody to run the *Wall Street Journal*. Now, you gotta be pretty powerful. And so the last conversation we had with 'im, he said, "Before Christmas I'll be back with y'all 'cause you're fixin' to un"—said, "If I tell you my name you'd recognize it right off the bat." I got no idea who it is. But he said, "You know, I wanted to use some of Rupert Murdoch's money to help here." But he said, "I've got enough money saved up we don't need Rupert's mo—we don't." [03:48:44] So I don't know who this cat is, but he's stayed in contact. He keeps callin' my friend in Indiana and callin'—he said, "Tell Bubba I know it's been four or five years, but tell him to just"—see, the guy would call, and he'd say, "Man, Rupert Murdoch's got me flyin' to buy this company." I mean, that's when things were big, you know. Two or three years ago. So I don't really know what's gonna happen. But if a guy like that comes, let me tell you you're gonna see some changes downtown. And I—and I just hope I live long [laughs] enough to see it happen, you know. So I don't know.

[03:49:20] SL: That is frustrating, but you know, here you are

continuing to do what you do . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . regardless of what . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . this mysterious guy does or not. I mean . . .

BS: That's exactly right.

SL: And your intent . . .

BS: And if he does . . .

SL: . . . is still impeccable . . .

BS: . . . we . . .

SL: . . . whether he comes along or not.

BS: Hey, and if he does, we're fixin' to do big time.

[03:49:37] SL: Yeah. Well, I think you're already doing some big-time stuff.

BS: Well, I mean we are, but I mean the—what I'm sayin' is if this guy comes and he's got the resources I think he has, then all these kids that grew up here that wanna come back home—and they can't come back home 'cause there's not a big enough hospital here. There's not a big enough—you know, whatever.

SL: Well, the quality of life . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . is not as attractive.

BS: That's exactly right. And they can—'cause I've had some of the young girls that went off said, "Oh, I'd love to bring my baby back to be raised at environment that I was raised in." Now, before I leave this earth, that's what I hope that I can do here.

[03:50:23] That I can give back to this town and have it, like—maybe not—you can't always go back and do like when you grew up, but you can make things pretty good, you know. I mean, you look—all right, what's the place downtown in Little Rock now—they got the . . .

SL: Capital Hotel or . . .

BS: No, I mean the place downtown that all the little bars and everthing are.

SL: Yeah, on the Clinton Avenue and [*unclear words*] . . .

BS: Yeah, all that.

SL: I know what you're talkin' about.

BS: See, that's—I don't . . .

SL: What's that called? Riverside or . . .

BS: I don't want—yeah, I don't want a Beale Street here, but you want little restaurants. You want people openin' businesses. You want—you know. And that would be my goal, where you can walk d—where you can have a business and make money. There'd be hotels on the street, you know. People say, "Well, that'll never

happen." And I said—and I've always heard people tell me, "Well, if you don't dream big, hell, why are you dreamin'?"

SL: Right.

[03:51:22] BS: Yeah, so that's kinda what my goal is. You know, I might be ninety, and somebody'll have to help me from bar to bar. I don't know. But that would be good . . .

SL: Yeah.

BS: . . . you know.

SL: It would be good.

BS: Yeah, so I would just like to give the kids that grew up in this area a chance to come back home and open a business and raise a family here.

[03:51:48] SL: That's pretty good. Is there, you know, is there anything that we should've been talkin' about that we haven't talked about?

BS: Well, I'm sure when I go to bed tonight and you go to sleep tonight, hell, we'll think of things that we shoulda said. But I think we've covered a pretty good base of stuff, you know.

SL: We—and we know your mom is still with us.

BS: Yeah.

SL: Tell me what happened with your dad before we wrap up.

BS: Well, he had had—you member when the—let's see, it'd be

[19]96, and it was fifteen years from that would be [19]81. See, he was in the A.A. club, so he was drivin' into Helena one afternoon, comin' to A.A. club, and he kinda blacked out, you know. So he—my dad's one of those cats that—him and doctors, you know. So he had a doctor in Memphis, so they sent him up there, and that's when the heart bypassin' just first come in. And they were so expensive back then.

SL: Right.

[03:52:50] BS: Well, he had a doctor in Memphis that was a wonderful doctor, and I'm not even sure he's livin' now—the doctor—but I would carry my dad to the doctor up there, and you could sit in a waitin' room and hear ever cuss word they cussed at each other. They called [*SL laughs*] each other everthing under the sun [*SL laughs*] 'cause my dad used to smoke cigars . . .

SL: Yeah.

BS: . . . and Dr. George made him quit smokin'. And course, then he made him quit drinkin'. And then he put him on a diet and made him quit e—and I could hear him, and he said, "Hell," he said, "you made me quit drinkin'. You made quit smokin'. Now you tell me I can't eat, you know." But when it came time for the heart deal, everbody that was up there with my dad, and there was a couple local people here, they did heart bypasses. Well, his

doctor said, "Hell, no. We're gonna [*unclear word*]*—*he don't have the money to pay for it. We're gonna do medicine." Well, my dad lived for fifteen years, quality life. Worked, went back to work after farmin'. Was a salesman for one—some chemical deal. And all of a sudden, he sat down in a chair one night and took a deep breath, and he was gone. But I mean, he was—it was like he got the quality—one of the guys that he used to work with had a heart bypass. Now, he outlived my dad, but not near the quality of life. See, my dad could go and do stuff, drive, whatever. You know, that doctor just said, "No, we're not doin' a bypass." So . . .

[03:54:19] SL: Well, even in today's time those bypasses—you know, they don't think they'll go much more than ten years anyway.

BS: No.

SL: I mean, it's a—there's so many factors that can mess that up and . . .

BS: Yeah, they can be involved. But he . . .

SL: Yeah.

BS: But he—you know, he lived a good life. Like I said, he lived fifteen years after that, and you know, he just had to take medicine. That's all it was. And then he just, you know, just sat down in a chair, and I told Mother—I said, "Well, you know, he woulda never wanted to live in a—I mean, stay in a hospital

'cause he just wasn't one of those type of people." And so it's just—you have to face reality that you're here one day and bingo, you're gone. But like my friend Ray Galloway that died—see, he was just a—he was a year younger than I was, and see, he had been at—course, we have a thing ever Friday afternoon—it was called a round table that we go—we drink, and we sit around and talk about the world and the festival and what we're gonna do and all this sorta stuff. Well, that—he was with us on that Friday, and then I didn't talk to him, and then Sunday mornin' I get a call. His daughter said that she was upstairs—his daughter lived with him—and he was listenin' to Stevie Ray Vaughn and Albert King "Blues at Sunrise." [03:55:38] He said, "Leslie, get down here and listen to this guitar lick." So she did, and she stayed there with him, and when he got off the treadmill, he walked in the kitchen. She heard somethin' hit the floor, and bingo, he was gone like that. I mean, just one of those things. So I guess if you gotta go—I mean, we're all gonna have to go—that's the best way to go, you know. 'Cause you sure don't wanna sit around and suffer, you know . . .

SL: That's right.

BS: . . . like I've seen so many people do.

SL: That's right.

BS: But I've been blessed. My mother and all her—everbody on her side—they're all from ninety-five to eighty, and I'm seventy-two, so maybe I got part of her genes, you know.

SL: Yeah.

BS: So you know . . .

[03:56:13] SL: Anything else you wanna say about your wife?

BS: Yeah, she's been a wonderful wife. We're a little different and stuff. I mean, I'm all into music and the crazy stuff. And I member [*laughs*] when we were datin', I'd bring her down from Little Rock and, course, had a bar, and we were all drinkin' scotch and whiskey and all that stuff back then, and course, you know, when you bring somebody in a bar, the bartenders that know you, they think that whoever you got with you drinks like you do. Why, hell, they wouldn't put a whole lot of water in mine, just right at the top [*laughter*], and course, she learned real fast that you [*SL laughs*]—"You know, hey, I don't—can't go this route." But she's been good. She's got some health problems now, but things are gettin' better, you know. So I just feel blessed, man, you know. I got—I've lived a good life. I've had a lotta good friends. I mean—and when I had my seventieth birthday party, we had it two doors down. That's when David had the restaurant, and you know, they got all the pictures out from the wedding, and

they got all the pictures out from the cookouts and all the football games. And see, we used to all go—when we'd go to Little Rock to the football games when Porter was up there, we would—TGI Fridays was down—right down from the Governor's Mansion.

SL: Yep.

[03:57:28] BS: On Third Street. Man, I mean, that was a hoppin' place to be, now. So at home, when they closed that down, I've got all the old original menus. I've got where they wrote it down on stuff—hamburger, like a dollar and a quarter, you know. And drinks—so and so. So I got all the TGI Friday memorabilia [*SL laughs*], you know. Somehow I got a hold of all that stuff, and so it's ju—you know, it's been a—I mean, I—I've got to hear—be good friends with all sorts of musicians, you know, and I just was talkin' to a guy with Gregg Allman's band, and he said, "Hey, we're playin' at Gold Strike. Why don't you come up and be our guest up there that night." And I said, "Well, I'll pay for the tickets." He said, "No, man." You know. So I'm gonna go up, and I never have been backstage with them or anything, so—you know, I guess people know that you're a pretty good person that they call and ask you, "Do you wanna come and do this," you know. It's like John Kay on one of his last deals they played at Magic Springs in Hot Springs. [03:58:31] And they were gonna

do that show. That was their last show in America, and then they were gonna do three shows overseas. Well, he called, and Ray and I and Sterling went up—you know, was at the show and visited with him and everthing. So it makes you feel good when you got, you know, got people like that. And I guess the only regret I got outta things that I didn't do—the drummer, the guy with the long chops with the Headhunters, Fred, he was gonna get married in Kentucky. And I got invited, me and my wife, and I don't know, we just didn't go. And I really wished I'd've went 'cause they said that they had the tractors and everything—you can just see—I mean, I think it probably woulda been a, you know, a cool, cool wedding, you know. *[Laughs]*

SL: Yeah, yeah.

BS: But you can't be everywhere, so . . .

SL: That's right.

[03:59:19] BS: No, and I really appreciate the Barbara and David Pryor, you know, archives for thinkin' that I'm worthy enough to be interviewed.

SL: Well, I would say you're beyond that.

BS: Well . . .

SL: Beyond worthy. And you are in good company. I will tell you that

. . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . we feel like we have the best job in the world.

BS: Oh, you do.

SL: 'Cause we get to sit across from folks that have made a difference.

BS: Very interesting stories. All kinds.

SL: Great stories and they're Arkansas stories.

BS: Yeah.

[00:52:49] SL: And that's really what—that's our end of the deal. I mean, your end of the deal is that we preserve your story forever.

BS: Yeah.

SL: And those that care about you and—you know, they'll have that . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . forever. And—but our end of the story is is that we get our—the story of Arkansas . . .

BS: Yeah, see, all the ki . . .

SL: . . . which is a great story.

BS: Yeah. Oh, it's a wonderful story.

SL: Yeah.

BS: See, all the kids that worked for me—now, when they have kids and stuff, then their kids—they'll—they won't understand who I

am through their mama or daddy, but they will—they can go and go to the archives . . .

SL: That's right.

BS: Say, "You know, my mom used to work for that guy."

SL: In this room.

BS: Yeah. So . . .

SL: Yeah, this is the way it was.

BS: Yeah. So . . .

[04:00:34] SL: Yeah. Well, it's a great honor to sit across . . .

BS: Oh, I just . . .

SL: . . . from you, Bubba, and I really appreciate you carvin' out some time for us and . . .

BS: Oh man.

SL: . . . puttin' up with us. Also, I appreciate your encouragement in tryin' to get me to come over here for the last show. And I'm sorry—I just couldn't make it. I . . .

BS: Well . . .

SL: . . . really tried to do it . . .

BS: Oh, I understand.

SL: . . . and I was gonna bring my wife and . . .

BS: Well, it's just one of those deals. But I think it happens October eight, nine, ten next year, I thi—or nine, ten, eleven 'cause I think

Columbus Day's on the thirteenth next year.

[04:01:05] SL: Well, you're gonna have to keep puttin' up with us 'cause you'll be getting stuff from us, and we'll . . .

BS: Oh, that's good.

SL: . . . be in communication with you, and . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . we'll be sending you stuff. So we're gonna keep in touch.

And plus, I can tell you the Helena story is a big story in my mind and in my heart. And I hope that it has a happy ending in my lifetime.

[04:01:25] BS: Well, you know, it's a lotta history here. It's just— Jimmy Mayer, who owned C. E. Mayer, he moved to Baton Rouge and put in a clothing store. And he told me and another guy one time—he said, "You know, when you take the Jewish people and the Chinese people out of a community," he said, "it really goes down." And I remember that's so very true 'cause there was a lotta Jewish families in this town.

SL: That's right.

BS: And it was, like, fifteen or eighteen wonderful Chinese families in this town, and they all had grocery stores. All their kids went off to be lawyers and doctors and everything, you know. So it's a— there's a lot of truth to that, you know. So . . .

SL: That's interesting that you should say that.

BS: Yeah.

TM: Hey Scott, we need to change tapes real quick.

SL: Okay.

[Tape stopped]

[04:02:16] SL: Not quite done with you yet. [*SL laughs*]

BS: Yeah. [*SL laughs*] Well, that . . .

SL: We thought we were wrappin' it up.

BS: Well, let's do the boycott deal and then what he—what I like about this business and then . . .

SL: We'll talk . . .

BS: . . . wind up with George Paul.

SL: . . . Paul. Okay. Well, so now we've mentioned the boycott and the guys standing outside the . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . store and how they decided not to stand outside the store.

BS: Yeah.

[04:02:42] SL: And there was also the boycott that was simultaneously happening in Marianna, I believe. I think they were . . .

BS: I think you're right.

SL: . . . about the same time. And I know it really affected Marianna's

business at the time.

BS: Oh, and I . . .

SL: Stanley Reed talked about it at length.

BS: And I'm sure it did here. See, I was probably at Wabash then, so I wasn't—I didn't own a business. So . . .

SL: You weren't really aware of it . . .

BS: No.

SL: . . . other than the stories . . .

BS: No.

SL: . . . that you heard about it.

[04:03:09] BS: No, just—the only thing I knew about it was when I would go to Ray Galloway's house, and his dad was head of the state police, and when he talked around the table, you know, that's it. But I was not involved in anything because I didn't own a business at that time you know, so . . .

[04:03:28] SL: There wasn't—were there—there wasn't any really physical trouble or . . .

BS: No, I think it was—you know, they just—they wanted to go in a restaurant and eat—I think the drugstore or somethin'—and just, you know, stuff like that.

SL: Yeah.

BS: I don't think it—it wasn't—not that I know of. I don't think it was

anything violent or anything, you know. It was just "Why can't I come in" or "I'm gonna come in and sit down," you know. That kinda stuff. So I don't—I wasn't really involved in it, so I don't really know.

[04:03:56] SL: Now—and you had already gone through high school and stuff before the real integration/desegregation stuff . . .

BS: Oh, yeah.

SL: . . . started happenin'.

BS: Yeah.

SL: And you were already past the public schools at that point.

BS: Oh yeah, I was—I got out in [19]58, yeah.

[04:04:13] SL: Right, right. Okay. All right. And then we were gonna talk about—you know, the past several decades here you've been runnin' this album shop, this music store. So . . .

BS: Well, and see, then my wife had the antique shop, and course, business was good and everything. We had young kids workin' for us and everything. And so it was a—you know, you had to be here at a certain time, and business was good on Cherry Street in those days. There was, like, six or seven antique shops, and so, you know, like, at Christmastime we'd—they'd put up, like, the girls and the women would put up, like, forty trees or somethin'. Now, all of 'em wasn't Christmas trees. They were, like, ?wall?

trees and stuff. And you know—and it was just—everybody shopped. I mean, everybody—we had good customers, you know—we had—carried different lines. And we got—antique shop got written up in—we got written up in magazines and stuff, Memphis magazine, that kinda stuff. So, you know, it was a good time. It was a—now that the antique shop is not here anymore, I get—you know, I got le—I sell a lot of Levon's stuff, so I had a guy put a thing on the thing about Levon, and then Paul Thorn's name just happened to get on the thing, you know, and so it's—I have a lotta people call me and say—and I put my cell phone number on there so—say, hey, I don't work from nine to five. I kinda work when I want to or when I know the boats are comin' in, you know. Or there's gonna be tourists in town or somebody'll call me. But I have a lotta people call me and say, "Hey, are you Paul Thorn?" And I say, "No." They say, "Well, his name is on the—on your window." I say, "I just sell his product, you know."

[04:05:55] And course, Paul says—he said, "Man, you know, I really appreciate you puttin' my name on your window." But I just—I'm just kinda on call whenever—you know, I kinda work when I wanna work now.

SL: Well, that's ideal.

BS: Yeah. I mean, you know—and I go home when I wanna go home,

and so it's just—you know, I'm never more than—I'm—if I'm outta town or somethin', I'll put somethin' on the door—said, "I'll be back tomorrow," or somethin', you know. If I have to carry my wife to the doctor or I have to go to the doctor or somethin', you know. [04:06:23] So it's a—I'm just kinda at that age where now, except for the blues festival and the Wild Hog and the rockabilly, I just—and when they do events on Cherry Street, I just open when I want to, you know. So . . .

SL: That's kind of a dream come true, really.

BS: Oh, it is. It really is. Yeah. You know, you don't have to be at a certain place at nine o'clock, and you don't have to close up at five o'clock or whatever. And I tell people if somebody wants me to stay late, you know, "I'll—you just tell me when you can be here, and you know, I'll let you in and see what I got, you know."

[04:06:58] SL: Okay. Now, that's all great for you and all that stuff and—but we were talking a little earlier about the current state of Helena, the town. But at one point in time there was someone that came along that had kind of decided to help Helena out in a day-to-day way. And tell us a little bit about that . . .

BS: Well . . .

SL: . . . person.

BS: . . . see, I knew—all right, George Eldridge, who runs Doe's in

Little Rock . . .

SL: Yeah.

BS: He was the first guy to run B.B. King's in Memphis.

SL: Okay.

BS: They bought the restaurant across the street on Beale Street, Blues City Cafe. Well, little George, his son, was goin' to school at Memphis State, and he was runnin', you know the [*unclear word*]

. . .

SL: Blues City.

[01:07:51] BS: Yeah, the Blues City. And so, Beale Street was boomin' then because you had—B.B. King's was havin' bands. You had good people runnin' it. You had other places up and down the street. It was before it turned into daiquiri bars and discos and that kinda stuff, you know. So it was really, really good back in those days. Well, George Paul would come down to the festival every year, and he'd say, "Bubba, you know, I wanna be festival director here." And I said, "George," I said, "you're twenty-six, man. You got one of the best restaurants in Memphis. You're young." And he was nice-lookin', and that cat can make stuff happen. And so, he—you know, one thing led to another, and so he called—I said, "Now, look," I said, "we've got six or seven Sonny Boy members on the Main Street board." And I said,

"Now, if you wanna be festival director," I said, "now, we can make that happen, but you got to tell me that that's what you wanna do." [04:08:51] So he called me, and he said, "That's what I wanna do." I said, "Okay, I'll make it happen." So we made it happen. I can't remember what year it was, but he—and he called me back, and he said, "Hey." I said, "What are you gonna do about Blues City Cafe?" He said, "Well, I got some guys that I can trust to run it." And then he called me back in about two weeks, and he said, "Hey, I sold it." [SL laughs] And I said, "Hell, I bet you sold it too cheap." I think he sold it for five hundred thousand dollars, I think. And I bet you the next day he couldn't've bought it for a million and a half. But he got out from under it. He came down. He did a couple events. He would come down, and he was livin' in Augusta with his dad, you know, at their farmhouse. And so he was, like—he would always come by and see me, and he'd say, "Come on, let's ride around." And he'd say, "What is this building doin' empty? What is that buildin'?" I said, "Hell, that's the reason we got you. You're gonna make things happen." [04:08:46] And I really believe that he would've been—he had the know-how. He was—like I said, he was festival director—and then that—Jim Guy Tucker was governor.

SL: Okay.

BS: And Jim Guy Tucker had got in trouble.

SL: Yep.

BS: And so they had—the city had, like, \$35,000 that the governor was gonna give 'em to complete this Malco Theater—to complete the deal, whatever it was. Well, when George Paul got on there, Joann Smith was married to George Paul—said, "Well, I'll go to Little Rock, and I'll take care of it." Twenty-six. Great charisma. Nice-lookin' guy. He went over there. That cat came back with a \$35,000 check. And so, like I said, we would ride around and—I think he had ideas—course, the festival is doin' really good now, but we're talkin' about back a few ye—quite a few years back. Well, he—I think he woulda taken this festival to heights that—'cause he was one of those guys that just was a go-getter, just knew how to make things happen. And you know, when you're twenty-six or twenty-five years old and you're nice-lookin' and your dad's got connections to Clinton and all this kinda stuff, you know, things can happen. [04:11:00] Well, he would come by ever Friday, and he'd say, "Well, I'm either goin' to Augusta, or I'm goin' to Little Rock to party or whatever," you know. And you know, twenty-six—hell, they think they're invincible. You know how kids are.

SL: Right.

BS: And I get a call on a Sunday. He goes to Little Rock for the weekend. Well, they're at a party somewhere. He'd been drinkin', has a girl with him. Somebody has a Corvette there. Well, if you're not used to drivin' a Corvette like his dad said, you know, those things—and bein' a little drunk, too—I mean, drinkin'—so they go around some curve at probably a high speed and loses control and hits a tree. Well, the girl did not get a scratch sittin' the front seat of a Corvette. Now, you think about that, now.

SL: Yeah.

BS: That oughta be tellin' you somethin'. And he's got—course, he'd've been a vegetable if he'd've lived—what his dad said. So they had to pull the plug, you know. Well, they buried him at Augusta in the family plot up there. So many people at the church in that little old town up there. And he had—James Cotton and Levon Helm played "Amazing Grace" at the funeral. Boy, you're talkin' about ?strain?—I mean, you know, the kinda—you can imagine you're out on a farm and with trees and out in the country, and there are these two guys . . .

SL: What are the instruments?

BS: Harp. Playin' "Amazing Grace" on harps. Both of 'em. And it was just a really sad occasion, and I have not seen—I think his dad

bought some land somewhere down around Cuba or went down and took his boat. You know, just probably wanted to get away from things. And I got—I guess little George's sister ran the restaurant or somethin' in Little Rock. But George came down here for the rockabilly festival. First time I'd seen him, I guess, since little George got killed. And so we started talkin' about things, and he wants to get involved in the rockabilly and everthing and looked good, you know. And he said, "Yes," said, "I've still got the restaurant," but said, "I got rid of my boats and I'm now into—deal with horses and stuff, you know." [04:13:22] And so yeah, I'd—I often—me and Houston Stackhouse Jr. were good friends—grew up here. And little George got Houston—little George was on the blues board in Memphis, and you know, got Houston to be one of the directors up there. And so Houston and I went to the funeral. But I often wonder—you know, I drive the streets now, and I say, "Man, if little George had lived, what would Helena be today?" 'Cause, I mean, that cat—you know, he was—you know, his dad was a big Clinton supporter, so he was—he knew the right people to go and say, "Hey, we need this," or "we need that." And you know, you don't find people twenty-six years old that can do that stuff today.

[04:14:18] SL: Well, and had decided—had made a commitment.

BS: Oh, made a commitment. He said, "Hell, man, we're gonna take this festival—we're gonna take it worldwide." You know, he had that drive and that ambition. And resources to back him up. So—you know, I often wonder—what's the little sayin'—"Only The Good Die Young"—you know, so who knows.

SL: Yeah.

BS: Whoever did that song—so . . .

[04:14:48] SL: Okay, well I appreciate you tellin' that story 'cause I member him as—it meant something to you . . .

BS: Oh, it did.

SL: . . . at the time that you and I first met.

BS: Yeah.

SL: And so, I'm glad we got that done.

BS: Yeah.

[04:15:03] SL: All right. Now then, I'm gonna ask you again [*BS laughs*—is there anything else that you think we oughta talk about before we wrap this thing up?

BS: Oh—no, not that I know of. I think that's—I think we've pretty well . . .

SL: Okay. Well, I do think that your festival is gonna continue to become bigger and better.

BS: Oh, I think so.

SL: Or at least better. I think . . .

BS: Hell, I think what it'll probably happen—it'll probably—you know, it's now almost a week-long deal.

SL: Yeah.

BS: And I think it's just gonna become like that. And course, you got volunteers, so you don't wanna stretch them . . .

SL: Right.

BS: . . . to the limit, you know. But hell, long as I keep enjoyin' doin' it, you know, I mean, it's a—I mean, like I say, we're already workin' on next year.

SL: Yeah.

BS: And hell, I'm workin' on rockabilly [*unclear word*]. I couldn't be a damn big enough fool to just do King Biscuit and Sonny Burgess [*laughter*] talked me into doin' [*laughs*] rockabilly. Now watch it explode now . . .

SL: Yeah, yeah.

BS: . . . and it's just gonna be like . . .

SL: Yeah.

[04:16:10] BS: You know, but you know, it's all good. The blues guys needed, the older ones, to finally get recognition.

SL: Yeah.

BS: The rockabilly guys like Sonny Burgess and D.J. Fontana and Carl

Perkins' son and WS Holland and Travis Wammack and Ace Cannon still comes. Man, Ace Cannon is, what, seventy-eight. Great sax player. And I said, "Ace, how do you keep playin' sax that good?" He said, "I never quit playin'." Said, "I play golf on the w—I play golf durin' the week, and I play music on the weekend." 'Cause I member the first time I booked Ace Cannon. People would call me and say, "Is that his son?" Said, "No, this is the real deal, you know." And so it's a—you know, to be around those kinda guys and to be around Sonny Payne, you know, and Sonny'll be eighty-seven, I think, at the end of this month or end of November. [04:17:05] But you know, to see those guys still performin'—I mean, Sonny Burgess—eighty-four. D. J. Fontana—eighty. You know, that—it's amazing. To me, it is.

SL: You know . . .

BS: It's that adrenaline rush.

SL: I got—and I meant to bring this up earlier, too—Woody Guthrie's name came up early on, and I mentioned Ramblin' Jack Elliott . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . to you. How long—have you ever crossed paths with him?

BS: Never crossed paths with him. I know who he is, but I never crossed paths with him.

[04:17:34] SL: You know, his latest CD—he got—they put him together with some blues cats.

BS: Oh, did they? I didn't know that.

SL: Yeah, and it's good. It's good stuff. And he had never really done blues before, but I think he did a really good job with it. So anyway, I'm just gonna drop that . . .

BS: Well, you know . . .

SL: . . . on you.

BS: . . . you look at—what was that—Les Paul.

SL: Yeah.

BS: I mean, Les Paul is just—was, you know, phenomenal, man. I mean, he—and he played right up until, you know, the end of time—and just like Pinetop.

SL: Yeah. [*Laughs*]

BS: Pinetop played right up until the end, and you know, he woulda—I mean, those guys just—you know, and what amazed me about—and I'm sure some of the rockabilly guys, too—but what amazed me about the blues guys is that, man, they used to drink that whiskey and smoke those cigarettes. I mean, Pinetop quit drinkin' at eighty-six. [*SL laughs*] Hell, most people don't live to be eighty-six. [*SL laughs*] He was probably still smokin' towards the end, you know.

SL: Yeah.

[04:18:31] BS: I think McDonald's made a big mistake with Pinetop because he would go—he told me—he said, "Every day I go get two Big Macs and some—and a apple pie." I think a apple pie is what he said. And see, he was not supposed to drive because, you know, he'd gotten so old, and so he borrowed—some guy he was with—borrowed his truck—was goin' to damn McDonald's and got hit by a train when he was about ninety-somethin', and luckily it didn't, you know, it didn't hurt him. [*SL laughs*] But I told whoever his manager was—I said, "Man, I'd call McDonald's, and I'd say, 'Look, you got one of the best piano players in the world. I'd do some kinda little jingle and—with Pinetop talkin' about eatin' two Big Macs ever day,' I said, 'Man, you talk about gettin' senior citizens to come into your place.'" I mean, my goodness. I mean [*laughs*] the ?cats overnight?. Well, they never did it, but I mean, I . . .

SL: Yeah.

BS: . . . thought that was a pretty good deal, you know.

[04:19:28] SL: Okay, now there's one more thing that we like to do.

BS: All right.

SL: And we haven't really figured out what we're gonna do with all of it. But at the end of each interview, we ask the interviewee,

which you are in that seat, to look at the camera. And the best deal about this is I'm gonna get [*TM coughs*] outta the way, and you don't have to look at me anymore. [*BS laughs*] But you look at the camera, and you say to the camera, "I'm Bubba Sullivan, and I'm proud to be from Arkansas." And it's just a real simple little thing. And Trey will tell you when they're ready and . . .

BS: All right.

SL: . . . it doesn't matter if it takes you two or three times to do it or feel like you've done it right. That's . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . fine, too. And we don't—like I said, I don't know exactly what we're gonna do with it, but everybody . . .

BS: You'll figure out somethin' to do.

SL: We'll figure out somethin' to do with it. So let me get outta the way.

BS: All right.

SL: And you all have fun with it, now.

TM: Okay, we'll let that mic stop goin' and so—just about any time you want to, have at it.

BS: All right. My name is Bubba Sullivan, and I'm a Arkansas guy, born and raised here. And I think there was an old sayin' that says, "Southern born and Southern bred, and when I die I'll be

Southern dead." And I'm glad to be an Arkansas Razorback.

TM: Nailed that.

BS: Is that good?

TM: That's good. [*Laughs*]

BS: All right.

TM: Watch your head again.

BS: All right.

TM: That was great.

[End of interview 04:20:59]

[Transcribed and edited by Pryor Center staff]