

Curly Lewis

Not only did he play fiddle with the great names of Western Swing, he was one of them himself.

Chapter 01 - 1:06

Introduction

Announcer: Julian “Curly” Lewis was an influential fiddle player who over a career that spanned nearly eighty years, played with some of the greatest western swing bands and recorded many albums.

Born near Stigler in 1924, Lewis later moved with his family to Tulsa. He started playing the fiddle at age nine. It was two years later, in 1936, when he entered and won the Bob Wills fiddling contest. He was too young to join the band, but the contest did land him guest appearances on Wills’s radio broadcasts on Tulsa’s KVOO.

Several years later he actually joined Wills and his famed Texas Playboys for six months on a West Coast tour, meaning Lewis could claim official Texas Playboys status. But for the most part he was identified with Johnnie Lee Wills and his band on KVOO and at Cain’s Academy in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Chapter 02 - 3:50

Cain’s Academy

John Erling: My name is John Erling. Today’s date is August 9, 2011. Curly, would you state your full name, please?

Curly Lewis: Julian Franklin Lewis.

JE: Your date of birth?

CL: December 22, 1924.

JE: Your present age would be?

CL: Eighty-six.

JE: I’ve got to ask you, you stated your full name but how did Curly come about?

CL: Well, I had curly hair when I was a boy, and they didn't call me Curly so much until I started in the music business. After I got out and got around Julian's kind of a bad name, so a lady I used to work with named Billie Walker actually said, "Why don't you let me call you Curly?" So it stuck and that's what I've been known as ever since.

JE: Your full legal name, were you named after somebody in your family?

CL: My dad had a friend that was a fiddle player, lived in Arkansas, and his name was Julian. And my dad admired him quite a bit.

JE: All right. Joining me in this interview is John Wooley. John, welcome, nice to have you here.

John Wooley: Thank you, John, it's really nice to be here.

JE: And let me say that as a result of your efforts and behalf of your state's music and musical figures you became in 2003, the first and so far only writer to be inducted into the Oklahoma Music Hall of Fame. In 2009, you were also inducted into both the Oklahoma Jazz Hall of Fame and the Oklahoma Cartoonist Hall of Fame, the latter for your comic book writing and, I didn't know about your comic book writing but apparently it's very good.

So Curly, tell us where are we recording this interview?

CL: At Cain's, Cain's Academy. That's what we used to call it anyway.

JE: You used to call it what?

CL: Cain's Academy.

JE: Cain's Academy. Why Cain's Academy?

CL: That's the name it started out with, Cain's Academy of Dancing. Mr. Cain, who built Cain's, is the guy that called it that.

JE: Did they teach dancing here?

CL: Yeah, yeah.

JW: They did, yeah, Madison Cain was his name.

CL: Yeah, yeah.

JW: Before Madison Cain there was also dancing here. Tate Brady, one of the founding fathers of Tulsa, as you know, John, had created this. First it was going to be a Hupmobile dealership, but it became a dance hall called the Louvre, back about '25, I think, Curly, right in there, '25 or '26 when he built it. Daddy Cain, Madison Cain, his nickname was Daddy—

CL: Yeah.

JW: He studied with Vernon and Irene Castle in New York. Came back here, it was very big in those oil boom days to give dance lessons, ballroom dancing lessons. So that was originally when he bought it from Madison Cain that's what this place was.

CL: You know back in those days and especially a little past that was people like Arthur Murray, he had dancing academies and taught dancing all over the States. When I first came here they were still having dancing lessons here.

- JE:** Um-hmm (affirmative).
- CL:** Howard Turner was an instructor then.
- JW:** Howard Turner had taken over because Madison Cain had had a stroke, as I recall it.
- CL:** Oh is that right?
- JW:** Yeah.
- CL:** Now I didn't know that part of the story.
- JW:** That's when Mr. Mayo came in and made the arrangement to have Bob Wills here, which would have been in 1934.
- CL:** Yeah. Then Mr. Mayo later bought Cain's. Howard Turner worked for him that year. Clear on up as long as I was with Johnnie Lee, you know, until '54.
- JE:** Um-hmm (affirmative).
- CL:** Howard Turner was still here. Broadcast was twelve thirty to twelve forty-five or one on Saturdays. We'd get through that, a lot of times Howard Turner would have people waiting out here to take their dancing lessons. He'd set up his music box out there and he'd give them lessons and everything. We might be up here rehearsing on stage, you know—
- JW:** So he'd use recorded music?
- CL:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.
- JW:** Howard Turner did. Um-hmm (affirmative).
- CL:** Yeah, he taught them foxtrot, waltz, and all that kind of stuff.
- JE:** So this stage, what we're standing on, you have no idea how many times you performed with Bob Wills, Johnnie Lee, and we'll get into all of that.
- CL:** Well—
- JE:** It must bring tremendous memories back for you.
- CL:** I counted at one time and it was something over four thousand times, played on KVOO from Cain's.

Chapter 03 - 5:16

Musical Family

- John Erling:** Let's go back to your birth. Where were you born?
- Curly Lewis:** Stigler, Oklahoma.
- JE:** In a hospital? In a farmhouse or where?
- CL:** In a farmhouse. No doctor. My grandmother, midwife.
- JE:** Your mother's name, maiden name, where she grew up?

- CL:** It was Nance, Corda Nance. She was born in Carthage, Missouri, and they moved to Stigler. They lived out just about eight miles north of Stigler at the time. And at the time, it was known as Garland, IT, Indian Territory, before Oklahoma became a state.
- JE:** What was she like? Was she a musical person?
- CL:** She played the organ for church and stuff like that, and sung. And my dad was quite a singer from a family of singers. You know, they had quartets.
- JE:** What was his name?
- CL:** Lester.
- JE:** And then where was he born and where did he grow up?
- CL:** He was from Hartford, Arkansas. They came to Stigler in 1907, when he was fourteen years old, I believe. And they resided down there out in the country back then.
- JE:** So he was musical from the get-go as well?
- CL:** Yeah, yeah. He didn't play no instruments or anything but all of his brothers, they were well-known at that time for their quartets.
- JE:** What was the name of the quartet?
- CL:** Just the Lewis Boys.
- JE:** What did your father do for a living?
- CL:** Just farmer, farmer was all he ever was.
- JE:** So did you do some farming then yourself? Working on the farm? Chores?
- CL:** Yeah. Yeah, what time I couldn't hide. That's the reason after I found out I could make a dime or something playing, why I thought that was a little easier than getting out there chopping cotton and picking it and all that stuff.
- JE:** So it was cotton he was raising?
- CL:** Well, he raised a little bit of everything, cotton and corn. Of course, back in those days you had to raise your food or you didn't hardly eat. Back in those Depression days of the '30s. So he'd grow cotton to sell in the fall and corn to feed his livestock. Always had cows, and he'd raise pigs for meat through the winter and stuff like that. If it hadn't of been for farms, you know, a lot of people would have starved back in those days. You know, like John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*, that was very true-looking to me at the time it came out.
- JE:** We're also talking about the Depression and Dust Bowl days.
- CL:** Right.
- JE:** But your farm survived where many of them did not?
- CL:** Yeah. Well, we didn't own any farm, we just rented. But in 1934, I think it was, the Dust Bowl was so bad and everything was so dry till the government went around paying farmers to get rid of some of their cattle or stuff so they could have feed for them the next winter. We had a bunch of cattle we had to have slaughtered. They had a hard way of doing things back then.

JE: For the record, we can say that here we are in 2011, and we've just gone through twenty-five, or almost thirty days of temperatures over 100.

CL: Right.

JE: Which were comparable to the Dust Bowl days.

CL: Right.

JE: Our land is still taken care of better today, probably didn't have the wind today they had back then.

CL: Yeah.

JE: But the heat you went through back then you're going through today.

CL: Oh yeah. I remember in 1936, that was our first year off the farm, that year in Tulsa. We came here on January 6, of 1936. That year on August 10 was the hottest record ever recorded here in Tulsa.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

CL: And I remember that very well because I had a double cousin and that was her birthday. I was over at their place, of course, I was eleven years old at the time, and we were playing. I remember that.

JE: What was that temperature, do you remember?

CL: 115.

JE: Yeah. And we came 113, I think, the other day.

CL: Yeah, yeah.

JE: Came two degrees from it.

CL: In fact, tomorrow would be the anniversary, that would.

JE: I guess so.

CL: Yeah, yeah.

JE: Brothers and sisters?

CL: Yeah, I had five brothers and three sisters.

JE: Was everybody musical?

CL: Well, sort of but nobody kept after it much. My brother never did do it for a living. My sister, she did it for just awhile and she quit. She got married and had family and everything so she quit playing. She played fiddle, my brother played guitar. We used to play as a trio.

JE: Where did these instruments come from?

CL: Actually the first fiddle I ever got ahold of my dad bought it out in Stigler for five dollars one day when he went to town. He knew an old fiddle player down home there, his name was Ed Patterson. Him and Dad had been friends for a long time and he was an old time fiddler player, like I say. Dad got him to come home, stay all night. He got that fiddle out and started playing it.

Back in those days you only went to town once a week on Saturdays. And every two or three Saturdays, why Dad would bring him home and he'd sit there and play and we got ahold of a guitar. My brothers got to where they could play in what we called "second after." You know? They'd sit there and play until midnight a lot of times. Shoot, I'd be asleep. But, nevertheless, that was how we first got our instruments started.

JE: You would have been about how old then?

CL: I was nine years old.

JE: And so the first instrument you played was?

CL: The fiddle. Yeah.

Chapter 04 - 5:45

Fiddle Player at Ten

John Wooley: Curly, do you want to tell John that story about how you picked it up while your dad was out milking? I think that's a good story. This kind of tells the first time he ever actually played.

Curly Lewis: Well, Dad was out doing our morning milking and I picked up the fiddle. I hadn't even tried it before. I got to messin' with it a little bit and shoot, I could kind of tell how it was working, you know? And I learned how to play "Sweet Abeliene" while he was milking out there.

JW: Just like that? Just that morning?

CL: Yeah, of course, he was out there probably forty-five minutes or an hour. He came in from milking and he asked my mother if Ed Patterson had come by. He'd heard the fiddle out there. And she said, "No, go take a look."

He looked in there and I was sitting in there on the bed playing it. And so that's how I first came about. But it wasn't anything special to me really, it never was a very hard job to learn how to play tunes.

JW: How long was it between then and when you and your brother and sister started playing together as a trio?

CL: Probably maybe a year, something like that.

JW: So you were about ten when you started, actually?

CL: Yeah, yeah. I had a fiddle, guitar, and a mandolin.

JW: Um-hmm (affirmative).

CL: Yeah. My little sister, she started playing the mandolin and then she learned to play fiddle. Her and I switched back and forth on the mandolin and fiddle. I'd play breakdowns and she'd play the songs and melodies and, I mean, singing songs and all that kind of stuff.

JW: Um-hmm (affirmative). Can you explain what a breakdown is?

CL: A breakdown is a hoedown or something like they used to square dance to. Like “Sally Goodin” and “Sally Johnson,” “The 8th of January.”

JW: Um-hmm (affirmative).

CL: I don’t really know where they came from, maybe Irish, anyway, they’re fast.

JW: And they’re instrumental?

CL: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

JW: And they’re fast, they have a beat that you can dance to.

CL: Yeah, yeah, it’s a fiddle deal entirely, breakdowns.

JW: I believe you told me you didn’t play anything but a breakdown until you got with Johnnie Lee.

CL: That’s right.

JW: Okay.

John Erling: So then in 1936, you were eleven years old.

CL: Yes.

JE: And something happened to you. What was that?

CL: Well, I won a contest that Bob Wills had done here in Tulsa in 1936.

JE: That contest then was at the Avery Coliseum downtown.

CL: It was between 5th and 6th on Elgin.

JE: How did you get entered into this fiddling contest?

CL: Well, my brother was downtown fooling around. He was five years old than me.

JW: And that’s Press.

CL: Press, yeah. He was my guitar player.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

CL: He was downtown and he passed by down there where they were entering people for the contest. So he just went in there and entered me in it. He came and, of course, I wasn’t very happy about it, I didn’t really want to do it.

Anyway, it was a three-day contest and sixty-seven old fiddlers from seven different states all around Oklahoma here. The contest ran three nights. The first night, all sixty-seven played and they picked out twenty-five. I was number nine in the twenty-five.

The second night, they picked ten out of the twenty-five and I was number six of the ten.

So the next night, they had two contests. The first one they picked three out of the ten for the final deal. Before that, my brother said, “Boy, if you just keep coming out three at a time you got it made.”

Anyway, the third night they picked three out of the ten and, sure enough, I took third place in that. Then the three of us played off and I was lucky enough to win it.

JE: At—

CL: Of course, the old saying, “You don’t perform against dogs or kids.” You know, my size had a lot to do with it I’m sure.

JE: Well, I’ve got to believe you’re real good. And we should point out again that you were just eleven years old.

CL: Yeah, that third place I took and that paid ten dollars. And the grand prize was a hundred. That was like, oh gosh almighty, two thousand nowadays or more, you know. I wanted my dad to take that hundred dollars and move back to Stigler because I liked that country. I was tired of town already.

He wouldn’t do it. Instead he bought me a blue serge suit, paid seventeen dollars for it. Boy, that was high class then.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative). What happened to the balance, the rest of the money?

CL: I don’t know.

JE: Went to the family probably.

CL: Yeah sure it went for family, yeah. Everything went for family back then.

JE: And you were living in Tulsa then at that time?

CL: Yeah, right.

JE: Where were you living?

CL: Over on Quanah, South Quanah. I remember at the time we were paying fourteen dollars a month for rent. We paid it by the week. Every Sunday morning the landlord, his name was Miller, he’d come by there and collect his rent, you know, three and a half every Sunday morning.

We’d go out and play for tips through the week and my mother paid him two or three times in dimes, all dimes. He got quite a kick out of that, but back in those days a dime would buy a loaf of bread or whatever.

JW: How come you to move from Stigler to Tulsa? How come the family to move, Curly?

CL: Well, times were so hard. I had an uncle that had moved up here, Dad’s older brother and they were kind of close. His older brother was always talking him into something and he talked into selling out down there and moving up here.

JW: But your dad didn’t have any work, I mean, you kids were pretty much the sole source of income there for awhile, right?

CL: We sure were. Yeah, Dad’d get a day’s work here and there, you know. But as far as finding a steady job there wasn’t any to be had.

Chapter 05 - 5:06**Lewis Trio**

Curly Lewis: Actually, we got started out, they used to have a radio show down at KVOO called *Kiddie's Review* on Saturday mornings. Allen Franklin, I don't know, you may have heard of him?

John Wooley: Um-hmm (affirmative).

CL: He was one of Bob Wills's big announcers a long time ago. But anyway, he had what they called the *Kiddie's Review*. We used to go down there and play on Saturday mornings. We made quite a name for ourselves at that time. We were getting fan mail.

Finally got one letter there that wanted to take up a collection and send the Lewis kids to Major Bowes in New York.

I don't know, something happened, Dad always thought he got bought off but that's kind of hard to say.

John Erling: Um-hmm (affirmative).

CL: They never did read that on the air.

JW: To go back to before you started playing the joints here in town, your trio had really gotten started back in Stigler.

CL: Yeah, yeah, well, the *Kiddie's Review* actually is when we first started playing for tips and things around town.

JW: Okay, so Stigler was before the *Kiddie's Review*?

CL: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

JW: Okay, all right. So you were playing little school things and stuff like that in Stigler?

CL: Yeah, we used to have a deal, the guy that sponsored us down there, he owned a grocery store. Me and my brother, more or less, around that grocery store and we'd go out and play schoolhouses and things. Little shows. He was kind of a, like you said about yourself, Jack of all trades.

JW: Um-hmm (affirmative).

CL: He would book some of them schoolhouses around. Of course, it was all country schools. We went out to one country school, in fact, it was the first school I ever went to as a kid, it's called Oak Ridge, out south of Stigler. We went out there and did a show one night. They were charging, I think, fifteen cents and they made us pay to get in. It was really well organized back then.

JE: In your family trio who was playing and what instruments were being played?

CL: Guitar, fiddle, and a mandolin. My brother played guitar and my sister played fiddle and mandolin, and we switched back and forth, fiddle and mandolin. Actually, my brother,

when he was twelve years old, he and I were playing one time with some dynamite caps. One of them exploded and it blew part of his left hand off. So he played with the guitar laying flat on his lap and he'd note it like this, you know, with his fingers.

JW: Almost like a dobro or something.

CL: Yeah, yeah. People like to watch that too.

JW: And that was Press.

CL: Yeah, that was Press.

JW: And your sister's name?

CL: Edie.

JW: John, I don't want to get ahead but later on when Curly did his solo album "Shenandoah," in the late '70s, Press wrote a couple of the songs. And he was actually a good songwriter.

CL: Yeah he was.

JW: Was a good songwriter.

JE: So the family tree, you played in these beer joints around the area, right?

CL: Yes.

JE: You were pretty young—

CL: Yeah.

JE: ...and playing in beer joints. Was that an issue, your age? Being so young?

CL: No because Dad was always right with us. He took us and he stayed right by us all the time and made sure that nobody bothered us or anything. At that time, of course, I guess they still do, had child labors laws. Every once in awhile they'd check in on us but they never would stop or us anything. Because we weren't playing a steady job or anything like that.

JW: Completely for tips always, wasn't it?

CL: Yeah, only for tips. Yeah.

JW: What was a good night for you, back then?

CL: Probably two or three dollars was a good night. It'd a been a good night back then, you know.

JW: Sure.

CL: I do remember one night we was playing a joint over in West Tulsa. We'd walked across that old Eleventh Street Bridge over there. We was in this joint playing and this one old boy, he was kind of reeling around, and he started poking one-dollar bills in the F holes on my sis Edie's fiddle. He put about three or four or five of them in there. Man, we were really getting with it there.

He had a friend that came up and stopped him and got him and took him away. My dad said that if that old guy'd of left him alone he'd of put all he had in there. That was a good night that night.

JE: Do you remember any of the names of the bars around?

CL: No I don't. There was lots of them up and down 1st Street and by Aiden. Where, of course, some of them were called bloody buckets but we didn't mess around those too much.

JE: Why? Were they the roughest?

CL: Yeah.

JE: Fights?

CL: Yeah fights and things 'cause times were hard but everybody was looking for a dime to buy a glass of beer with. There was lots of bums up and down the streets at that time and they'd go into these beer joints and try to bum somebody and try to get them to buy them a beer or something. First thing you knew, you had a fight on your hands.

They never did bother us because Dad always kept us out of those.

JE: This again would have been 1936?

CL: From the first part of '36 to '38, we moved to Oklahoma City in 1938. We were here in '36 and '37.

Chapter 06 - 3:10

Fiddle or Violin

John Erling: We talk about the fiddle but it's also known as the violin. So why do we call it a fiddle?

Curly Lewis: Well, I don't know, I think it just comes from country people. I think, really, fiddle playing started way back there, you know. Actually, old cowboys played fiddle but they didn't have no accompaniment because guitars hadn't come out at the time. The those old trail hands, some of them could play a fiddle or tune a tune. They'd carry it alone in a flour sack or something out on the range. At night they'd play it around the campfire.

They always called it *fiddle* and as far as I know, that's just a country saying for a violin. It's all the same thing, just a difference in what you call it. Of course, Isaac Stern, he called his violin a fiddle. And he had a Stradivarius! So it's just a term, whatever you want to call it.

JE: Is it true then that when Billie Walker hired you that was your first full time professional job as a musician?

CL: Yeah, yeah, and that was in 1944, here in Tulsa. Actually, the way that came about was Hal Burns and Garrett Snuff variety gang used to have a program out of Memphis.

John Wooley: What was his name?

CL: Hal Burns.

JW: And Garrett Snuff—

CL: Yeah, variety gang is what we called it.

JW: Variety gang, with Garrett Snuff variety.

CL: Yeah, he had a whole bunch of different people, you know, like guy singers and girl singers and everything. He came to Tulsa and brought a whole bunch of them people with him. And they had an early morning show on KVOO. My brother and sister and me went down there and started playing with him.

JW: They brought the show in for one time or several?

CL: Every morning at five thirty.

JW: Oh man.

CL: I had joined the union at that time, so all those people were un-union. And Tabby Young, secretary of the union—

JW: And the musicians' union, sure.

CL: Yeah. He came up there one morning and wanted to know who all had a union card and everything. And everybody that was union, he cut them off 'cause KVOO wasn't paying anybody, naturally. And we couldn't work on there unless we were getting paid.

Billie Walker was one of the people on there that had a little group, so when we quit that, my brother and sis, he was working at Douglas at that time. She went back to Stigler, she was still single. Billie Walker wanted me to join her little group. That's how I came to be with her.

JW: She was originally out of Memphis. She was old-timey, wore a bonnet.

CL: Yeah, wore a bonnet, yeah, yeah. She was a real hillbilly type thing. 'Course, I didn't know much of anything other than Gene Autry type songs and stuff like that. And we'd always have a hymn of the day.

JW: You were playing guitar on that show?

CL: Yeah.

JW: Which is why you made the jump to Johnnie Lee playing guitar rather than fiddle.

CL: Yeah, right.

JE: You were what, about six months with Billie Walker?

CL: Yeah, something like that.

JE: And then played with Johnnie Lee Wills, the brother of Bob Wills. That was your first job with the Wills clan.

CL: Yes.

Chapter 07 - 6:00**Western Swing**

John Erling: Do you remember the first time you ever played here in Cain's?

Curly Lewis: 1936, with Bob on his broadcast.

John Wooley: Just sitting in because he won the contest.

JE: That was part of the—

CL: Oh yeah, just came after the broadcast, of course he knew me from the contest and he let me get up on the stage and play a breakdown for him.

JE: So you didn't know you were going to play with him when you came to the show?

CL: No, no, we just came down to watch.

JE: Here in Cain's?

CL: Yeah.

JE: You were standing right down here?

CL: Yeah, well, Leon McAuliffe actually was the guy that saw me up there when I came in the door, me and my brother, and he brought me down to see Bob. Bob had me get up on the bandstand and play one.

JE: You're twelve years old.

JE: Were you so young that this didn't bother you or did it make you nervous?

CL: Uh, it didn't make me nervous. I was so bashful back in those days it wasn't funny, but, in fact, I was so bashful I wouldn't even go out to the front of the stage and get my prize that night, as big as it was down there at the Coliseum. Just a scared kid, I guess.

JE: So that's something, here where we sit is where it really took off for you.

CL: Yeah, yeah.

JW: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: The music, was that known then as western swing?

CL: No I believe that term came along a little later.

JE: Okay.

CL: Actually, the term for the kind of music we played was hillbilly.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

CL: In those days instead of country. Of course they kind of separated it out in that they started calling it country music and bluegrass and then western swing, you know. But the western swing, when I was with Johnnie Lee, well, all of western bands I was with we played everything that came out. If it got popular we played it because it had to do it on the radio and then dance it.

So it didn't make any difference if Margaret Bladding or whoever came out with a song, or Jimmie Davis or whether it was country, pop, whatever, we played it.

JW: Now they would sometimes call that also hot string band music. Wasn't that one of the terms that they used back in those days?

CL: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

JW: Western swing allegedly came along in the '40s to describe Spade Cooley, who was the West Coast western swing player, an Oklahoma native but a West Coast western swing player because Benny Goodman was out there as the king of swing. And so they needed something to differentiate Spade Cooley, so they started calling him the King of Western Swing.

Later on, Count Basie's band was called the King of Jump Swing. So there were these little gradations. Mr. Mayo always said it was Roy Rogers that came up with that term. I don't think it was but it's possible, but it was a West Coast term that came along in the mid-1940s.

CL: Yeah.

JE: Would it be true that Texas was the birthplace of western swing?

JW: What I like to say on my show is that it was born in Texas, but it grew up in Oklahoma.

JE: Yeah.

JW: It was from right here where we're sitting with KVOO, the Cain's Barroom, and Bob Wills in 1934, when they started those daily broadcasts that western swing became what it is. Don't you think, Curly?

CL: Yeah, I really believe that. And when they got rid of the banjo and added the drums.

JW: Yes.

CL: That's when—

JW: That tenor banjo.

CL: ...western swing really took off.

JW: Fort Worth was when really they started playing with The Light Crust Doughboys and all of that back in the late 1920s, early '30s. Milton Brown, Bob Wills, Herman Arnspiger, Derwood Brown was on that, Sleepy Johnson, maybe some of those guys.

CL: Yeah.

JW: But it was really when Bob came up here and started really doing it every day. KVOO was a true clear channel, it could get all over the western part of the United States, up into Canada and everything. There are stories of people in the Philippines getting radios out of bombers and tuning in Bob Wills from Tulsa. So that's really where it took off. It was born in Texas, but it took off here.

JE: Is western swing a combination then of other forms of music? Let's talk about that a little bit. Jazz, it comes off jazz?

CL: Yes, jazz, Dixieland, and country, and blues, it's a form of all of it, really.

JW: Um-hmm (affirmative). Pop music, as you were talking about.

CL: Yeah.

JW: You'd play the pop tunes like "Tuxedo Junction" and all that kind of stuff.

CL: Yeah, yeah, right, right, right.

JW: Certainly south of the border music, there's a lot of south of the border sound in some western swing.

CL: Right.

JW: It's really an amalgam. If you want to define it, to me, and I've spent years and Curly and I were talking about his on the way in, it's closer to Dixieland jazz than it is anything else because it's jazz improvisation over a dance beat.

CL: Yeah, right.

JW: That's really what western swing is with usually country lyrics. But it's country dance beat with jazz improvisation on the instruments.

CL: Right, it's actually just like the big band music, in a way, because they took a lot of it off horns and put it on strings.

JW: Um-hmm (affirmative).

CL: It has a little bit of every kind of music in it.

JW: What Curly means about the strings is a steel guitar might play, for instance, the trumpet part in a big band.

CL: Yeah.

JW: Or the sax ensemble in a big band.

CL: Yeah.

JW: What were you telling me on the way in, in Leon McAuliffe's band when you play that real big band stuff like "Dream," you'd have two fiddles and a clarinet?

CL: Yeah.

JW: To mimic the sound of Glen Miller with the four saxophones. So you have an analog with string, it's mostly stringed instruments as opposed to a big band, which is mostly brass and reeds.

JE: You were inducted into the Oklahoma Jazz Hall of Fame, and there might be some who wondered, "Well, why the Jazz Hall of Fame?" but our discussion here should bring that together as to why that made sense.

JW: Sure, it's string based jazz, yeah.

JE: But way back when, wasn't jazz kind of known for the city folk and the big city?

CL: Right.

JE: And here comes western swing that was probably nurtured out of the country folk and the rural folk. And you combine that beat and jazz together and that's how that all came about.

CL: You're right there, yeah. Country people didn't care too much for jazz because, naturally, they were raised on, at that time known as, hillbilly music. Of course, that took in a lot of genres of the music. Hillbilly was then what we call western swing and country now.

JW: And cowboy.

CL: Yeah, and cowboys took it and everything just about.

Chapter 08 - 9:48

Bob and Johnnie Lee Wills

John Erling: You're continuing with Johnnie Lee but then you ended up with Bob. Tell us that transition.

Curly Lewis: I left Johnnie Lee for about six months, I guess it was, and I went out on the West Coast and worked for Bob up and down the West Coast. Then I came back and worked with Johnnie Lee for about another six months before I moved on to Hank Thompson.

John Wooley: Now Bob had wanted you to come out to the West Coast before.

CL: Yeah.

JW: Because he had not come back after the war, he had relocated his band.

CL: Yeah.

JW: And he wanted you to come out and you didn't want to go. Right?

CL: No I never did want to go but finally, I was having some problems, first one thing then another here in Tulsa and I finally decided to go out and work with him. But I didn't stay out there but about six months.

JW: Can you contrast the two band leaders' styles? You worked for Bob and Johnnie Lee.

CL: Yeah.

JW: How were they different as band leaders?

CL: Well, of course, Bob had a lot of charisma, you know. And Johnnie Lee, he was more or less an introvert. He wasn't the kind of guy you'd think would be out really pushing himself, and he didn't. Actually, Johnnie Lee was really, as far as I was concerned, a better band leader than Bob because Bob, like I say, he had the charisma but he was harder to work for. You really had to pay attention. That was the most nervous band I ever worked on. You had to keep your eye on him at all times. 'Course, you had to keep one eye out there. He wanted you to interact with the audience but also you better be watching him, and he was bad to break meter.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

CL: Sometimes you'd be playing a chorus or something or somebody else would and get completely through it and maybe two bars into the next chorus and he'd point this guy over here to take it.

JW: To take a solo.

CL: Yeah, you just had to stay on your toes all the time. And you know, that was kind of rough coming in two bars late on a chorus or something anyway. But Johnnie Lee knew meter a whole lot better than Bob did. He knew when to point and when not to.

JW: And he was easier going in general, wasn't he?

CL: Oh yeah, yeah. He was the greatest guy I ever knew, I guess.

JW: His band was called Johnnie Lee Wills and All the Boys or Johnnie Lee Wils and His Boys. And I've had people tell me and, Curly, I don't know if you agree with this, he was kind of one of the boys, Johnnie Lee was.

CL: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

JW: He was not like Bob, the star.

CL: No, no, no, uh-uh (negative).

JW: He was one of the boys.

CL: Johnnie Lee, he had the best definition, of course, Johnnie Lee wasn't a real good fiddle player. He's a good banjo player, he played good tenor banjo.

JW: Um-hmm (affirmative).

CL: I know one time Mr. Fine, he used to run the UCT Winter Garden in Fort Smith, Arkansas. We used to play down there every other Friday night. He was talking to Johnnie Lee one time about just musicians and how he kept going real good with everything. And Johnnie Lee told him he knew that he couldn't play very well, he couldn't sing real good or anything, but he said, "I always try to surround myself with good musicians, or better musicians." That was his philosophy anyway.

JW: And he did too.

CL: Yeah, and he always did that. A lot of times he'd have a lot better bands than Bob did.

JW: And a lot of you guys stayed with him for a long time.

CL: Oh yeah.

JW: During Clarence Cagle and—

CL: Yeah, yeah.

JW: ...Mister Magnus and a lot of those guys.

CL: Nobody hardly ever left Johnnie Lee.

JE: Bob, though became the biggest name.

CL: Oh yeah.

JE: Is that because of his charisma and he was more of a showman?

CL: Yeah, I think so. Actually, Bob was a good breakdown fiddler player.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

CL: Like we were talking there, he did have the charisma, he was just a showman.

JW: Also an originator. Between him and Milton Brown, and Milton Brown died very early in his life, Milton Brown died in the mid-1930s. Bob was the guy who started it all, really. Wouldn't you say so, Curly?

CL: Yeah, right.

JW: Because of Brown's early death.

CL: Right, right.

JE: They started all the western swing—

JW: Yeah, those were the two guys who came out of The Light Crust Doughboys.

CL: Right.

JW: From Fort Worth, who had started down there and sort of started creating western swing together, putting all these different genres of music together. And then Milton Brown went off first and started his own band, The Musical Brownies. And he died, was it '36? In a car crash.

CL: Yeah, yeah.

JW: Bob moved from The Light Crust Doughboys to Waco and then Oklahoma City and then to here. He was here by February of 1934. He didn't come to Cain's until '35, but he was here February of '34, and that's when it all started.

And then he got to the Cain's in '35, and then that's when it really took off. So he was an originator and a lot of times the first guy that does anything—

CL: Right.

JW: ...is going to be the guy that everybody remembers.

CL: Right, you got it right there.

JE: And then he was a terrific promoter, wasn't he?

CL: Yes he was. And he had a good promoter for a manager too.

JW: O. W. Mayo.

CL: O. W. Mayo, yeah. Was he a school teacher or—

JW: No he was with the oil company, Curly. His brother-in-law was one of those firemen that put on a dance down in Waco after Bob had left The Light Crust Doughboys. They were putting a thing on for the fire department and Mr. Mayo was related by marriage to one of those firemen. And that's how he got to—he went out and bought him some stuff and helped him get going and decided to leave the oil business behind, back there in about 1933.

CL: I'll be darned, I didn't really know the story behind those.

JW: That was his deal, he was an oil company guy.

CL: Yeah.

- JE:** So while we talk about these great names, Bob Wills and Johnnie Lee, you're obviously the youngest on the stage.
- CL:** I was at the time I joined the band, yeah. Other than Billy Jack I was the youngest one. And I was for a long time.
- JE:** Did you always enjoy it? Were you always happy that this is what your lot in life was?
- CL:** Yeah I did, I really did enjoy it. In fact, I enjoyed it more than I thought I did, now that I think back. Oh it was hard, in a way, because we played, as a rule, four nights out of town each week. At least three or four, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday. We had that twelve thirty broadcast every day so we'd go play a dance, get through at one o'clock, drive back in, and get in around five or six o'clock a lot of times.
- JE:** When you say drive back, meaning back here to Tulsa?
- CL:** Yeah.
- JE:** From KVOO.
- CL:** That's the, yeah, we were out and in. Then have to get up at ten thirty or so to come up here and make that broadcast and maybe rehearse a little bit if you didn't have too far to go that night. But you'd take off again about three or four o'clock in the afternoon. And the same thing just over and over.
- JW:** And then Thursday, Thursday and Saturday you're always here playing.
- CL:** Yeah, yeah.
- JW:** Your broadcast dances, and then you ended up having, on top of all that, to do those syndicated shows for General Mills.
- CL:** Yeah we did two hundred of those.
- JW:** You do a bunch of those at once though, right?
- CL:** Yeah we do about twenty-five at a time.
- JE:** Where were they aired?
- JW:** All over the country.
- CL:** Yeah.
- JW:** Well, mostly this part of the country, right?
- CL:** Yeah, yeah, we recorded them down at KVOO studios in the field tower at that time. Yeah, they were syndicated all over the country. We even got fan mail from up in Vermont, places like that, once in awhile. They'd trace it down and see where it was originating from. Actually, if you didn't know it was transcribed, well, yeah, Frank Sander did mention transcribed. If you happened to miss that, why you didn't know it was transcribed because it was just like a live show came on every day.
- JW:** And all General Mills, it was always throughout its lifetime it was sponsored by General Mills.
- CL:** Yeah. You know, that got real popular one time. We were playing a broadcast from Fort Smith, Arkansas. After the broadcast was over we were signing some autographs for

people coming around and talking. And this one lady came around and got an autograph or something, and she said, "Which one now is General Mills?"

But anyway, she'd heard them say, "General Mills presents."

JE: That was bringing in quite a bit of money for the band, wasn't it?

CL: Yeah. We made \$27.50 for each fifteen-minute program.

JW: Each band member made \$27.50?

CL: Each band member. Johnnie Lee got twice that. It was good back in those days. It was '51 and '52 when we got those. Yeah, that was before wages had got up too much. Things were still kind of slow going, but 'course, everybody else was too. And the little extra money like that really came along good.

JE: So you're in your early twenties about that time?

CL: Yeah, I was about twenty-five.

JE: And making good money.

CL: Yeah, for the time.

JE: You said you had a noon broadcast, but wasn't there also a six in the morning broadcast and a six p.m.?

CL: No.

JE: Okay.

CL: And when I first joined Johnnie Lee we were on KTUL too for thirty minutes every day. And KVOO. But they later dropped that KTUL radio show.

JW: Those were two different shows, Curly?

CL: No.

JW: Oh, they would just be simulcast then?

CL: Yeah simultaneously. KTUL sent an engineer, he sent a remote back to KTUL.

JW: Now there was at one point, it may have been before you got there, didn't they have a Thursday morning gospel show way back when? That may be what you're thinking of, John, they did a Thursday morning gospel show for a time but it got to be just too much because it's what Curly's talking about, coming back—

CL: Yeah, well, that actually started with Bob's band and then we kept it up. But used to we got so many requests for gospel and sacred songs. They tried to do one each day for a long time and they finally decided that they'd just set aside one day and do all gospel and religious songs. And did that on Thursday.

JW: The syndicated show, did it play on KVOO as well?

CL: Uh—

JW: The General Mills show?

CL: No, no, no.

JW: Okay, that's what I was thinking.

CL: No, no.

JW: You guys had your noon broadcast and those were two different things.

CL: Yeah, we had our own. But anyway, we called them hymn shows, hymn days. We didn't use no horns, no drums, anything like that, just piano and strings, like guitars and fiddles.

Chapter 09 - 4:45

Curly the Singer

John Erling: We've talked a lot about your instruments but you sang too.

Curly Lewis: Yeah.

JE: So you were adding to the band with your voice.

CL: Well, I was trying to. It didn't sound quite like it does now.

John Wooley: Well, you did some really good, those early RCA's, but can you tell John or tell the listeners how everybody got bumped up. Leon Huff started out as the number one singer.

CL: Yeah.

JW: And then can you kind of let us know how you became the number one singer on the band?

CL: Well, Leon passed away, you know, in 1952.

JW: Leon Huff, yeah.

CL: So Johnnie Lee asked me if I'd be willing to take up his deal because Leon just about sang everything. And it was a hard deal, in a way, but I did, so he gave me a raise. And then a little bit after that, Don Harlan quit and went to work down at Jenkins Music Company. He was Johnnie Lee's band leader when Johnnie Lee wasn't there. So when he left, Johnnie Lee gave me that job. So I got another raise. That went on for, oh a couple of years before I left him, I guess. But I enjoyed it.

JE: While we sit here on this stage, we're looking out on this dance floor out here and on a Saturday night this thing had to be really, really packed.

CL: Yeah. We played here Thursdays and Saturdays from '45 up until the early '50s. If you had less than eight hundred people in here on Thursday it was a bad night.

JE: How many could be in here? There certainly was a limit at one time.

CL: We had 2200 in here one New Year's Eve.

JW: Wow.

CL: That was about 1946 or somewhere there.

JW: I think the fire marshal capacity is like 1200.

CL: Yeah. Shoot, you could almost walk on across on their heads. Of course, we didn't have tables, chairs, or anything in here at that time, just benches around the walls. Just a regular Saturday night was always fourteen to fifteen to sixteen hundred people.

JE: Wow.

CL: And I'm not bragging one bit, that's true.

JE: We talk about groupies today, groupies.

JW: Yeah.

JE: You must have had all these women—

CL: Oh yeah.

JE: ...who would just hang around you guys—

CL: Oh yeah.

JE: ...and stand in front of the stage and—

CL: Yeah.

JE: ...they probably met you at the stage door?

CL: Oh yeah, yeah.

JE: And so you were a young guy and those things just happen, don't they, in the music business?

CL: Sure do. Yeah, of course, it's nice to be idolized, I guess. I don't know whether they idolized you or not.

JW: No.

CL: But a lot of them do.

JW: I think that's why it's good—

CL: They can't keep their eyes off of you, and it kind of makes you feel humble, I guess.

JW: A lot of women brought food, did they not? Cake and stuff, pies?

CL: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

JW: They would bring that. That was their kind of a—

JE: An introduction to you?

CL: Yeah.

JW: They'd bring the band food.

CL: Yeah, it was kind of different world back then.

JW: Well, people baked more then. You were working for a flour company.

CL: Yeah.

JW: Flour was a very big deal. And Bob Wills started with Playboy Flour. Flour was a huge deal because everybody baked.

CL: Yeah.

JW: Flour was a very competitive market.

CL: Yeah, yeah.

JW: That continued through General Mills.

CL: Right.

JW: General Mills had been the one doing Playboy Flour and Red Star, was that—

CL: Red Star was their main flour after Playboy left.

JW: Red Star, so the flour company, flour was a very big deal and cooking and baking was a very big deal.

CL: Yeah.

JE: You said Playboy?

JW: Playboy Flour.

JE: Well, what was that about?

JW: Bob Wills made a deal with General Mills, was it Curly?

CL: Yeah.

JW: That was before your time in about '35 or '36, right?

CL: '36 or '37.

JW: '36 or '37.

CL: Yeah, they made a flour they called Playboy Flour.

JW: Um-hmm (affirmative).

CL: And also Playboy Bread.

JW: Playboy Bread.

CL: Probably what they did was take a sack full of Red Star Flour and pour it in that Playboy sack.

JW: Exactly, exactly. And the musicians had little cards with their favorite recipes.

CL: Yeah. And their picture.

JW: And their picture. Yeah, I have some of those.

JE: The money that came about from Playboy Flour, did that all go to Bob?

CL: Oh yeah.

JW: Yeah, a dollar a barrel, I believe it was, was the term.

CL: I don't know how much money actually went to Bob but they paid all the radio broadcast and all that kind of stuff. Yeah, they had to pay him so much.

JW: Yeah, I believe it was a dollar a barrel when he made the first contract, if I remember right.

CL: Oh yeah, yeah.

JW: I believe that was right, yeah. But those sacks, those flour sacks, today are prized items for collectors.

CL: Yeah.

JW: The Playboy Flour sacks.

JE: So they would buy them in any of the grocery stores around town?

CL: Yeah, yeah.

JE: Or they were distributed throughout the States?

CL: Yeah, you could buy it anywhere in Oklahoma, anyway.

JW: Bob Wills's picture on the sack.

CL: Right, yeah.

JW: A picture of Bob's face on the side of the sack.

CL: Yeah, yeah.

JE: And do you have one of those sacks?

JW: I have a T-shirt with that logo, I don't have a flour sack.

JE: But they're around someplace?

JW: They're around, you can get them on eBay.

CL: That T-shirt might have been made out of one of those flour sacks.

JW: It may have been made out of a flour sack.

JE: Well, it attests to his promotional abilities.

CL: Right.

JE: Bob Wills again.

Chapter 10 - 4:50

San Antonio Rose

John Erling: And we can't talk much more about him without talking about "San Antonio Rose."

Curly Lewis: That's right.

JE: Talk to us about that song and how it came about. He wrote it, didn't he?

John Wooley: Yes, it's an interesting story. Do you know that story, Curly? About "San Antonio"?

CL: No, not all of it I don't know.

JW: Well, I actually have some of the correspondence that Loreen Wills gave me.

JE: Loreen was?

JW: Loreen was Bob's sister.

CL: Yeah.

JW: And she gave me some correspondence between Mr. Millston, who was Bob Wills's lawyer and Irving Berlin's publishing company. Well, the story goes that they had "San Antonio Rose," which was an instrumental. Wasn't it an old fiddle tune, Curly?

CL: Right, right.

JW: Irving Berlin's folks heard it and they said, "You know, if you put some words to it we'll publish it." And, of course, song publishing was a very big deal in 1940, I believe, is when that came out. So Everett Stover—

CL: Right.

JW: ...Bob, and one other, I know it was Everett Stover, Bob, and one other person.

CL: Might have been Tommy Duncan.

JW: Might have been Tommy Duncan at that time, sat down and wrote some words, sent it to Irving Berlin. Well, as Curly has alluded to, Bob didn't do anything by the book, exactly. And "San Antonio Rose" wasn't the kind of song, the structure of song, that Tin Pan Alley was used to.

So, first of all, you've got the instrumental music, they published that as "San Antonio Rose." Then they have "New San Antonio Rose," which has the words. Well, "New San Antonio Rose" was rewritten by Irving Berlin. They rewrote the melody, they rewrote the lyrics. And it's all what you would expect Tin Pan Alley to be, and put that out as "New San Antonio Rose."

Well, Bob was always game to do anything so he tried to play it that way, and the fans would say, "Where is 'San Antonio Rose'? This is not 'San Antonio Rose,' this is something else."

So I have some of this correspondence that Loreen gave me between Mr. Millston and Irving Berlin. I have the one where it says, "All right, we're going to go back and we're going to print copies of your original 'San Antonio Rose.' We're going to do that because we understand now."

So now there are three pieces of sheet music you can get from "San Antonio Rose." "San Antonio Rose," "New San Antonio Rose," and one called "New and Original San Antonio Rose," which is the Bob Wills's version with the lyrics.

So that's how that all happened and it became his biggest song ever, of course, covered by Bing Crosby, among other people. And I should say that somewhere there exists a disc that was done during World War II. You may remember this, Curly, when Bob Wills came to town with Bing Crosby for a war bond drive?

CL: Yeah, yeah.

JW: At the Tulsa Country Club. They recorded on an acetate, together, Bing Crosby and Bob Wills doing "San Antonio Rose," sold to the highest bidder. An oil man here in Tulsa bid on it. It's the Holy Grail of Bob Wills's stuff. Now somewhere that record still exists, nobody knows where it is.

JE: And it's only available, to your understanding, on that 78?

JW: Yeah, it was just an acetate, it wasn't even a 78. They just cut a one-time only deal back then, just an acetate, and gave it to the highest bidder.

JE: It was never produced for duplication?

JW: No, one copy only.

JE: And we have no idea where it is?

JW: We have no idea where it is.

- JE:** But we believe it's still around?
- JW:** And we have been looking for it for many years, many of us have been looking for it for a long time.
- CL:** I'll be darned, you know that's a new story on me.
- JW:** You didn't know that story?
- CL:** I didn't know that whole story.
- JW:** That's the one that apparently—
- CL:** Yeah.
- JW:** ...somebody got it, I can't even really find out who got it but it was some prominent country club person.
- CL:** Yeah.
- JE:** Let's take out a big ad in the newspaper.
- JW:** Oh man.
- JE:** And be looking for that.
- JW:** Oh man.
- JE:** The song "San Antonio Rose," you enjoyed playing that?
- CL:** Oh yeah, yeah, I like "San Antonio Rose."
- JW:** Did you sing that with the band?
- CL:** Yeah.
- JW:** With Johnnie Lee?
- CL:** Yeah.
- JW:** You sang it?
- CL:** Yeah, yeah.
- JW:** Well, now I figured you were the lead vocalist on that.
- CL:** Yeah, yeah.
- JW:** Well, just on Johnnie Lee's version. See, Johnnie Lee and Bob had a lot of the same repertoire.
- CL:** Yeah.
- JW:** A lot of people will tell you and, of course, you know this, Curly, that they danced to Bob Wills here in the '40s, when they were really dancing to Curly's band with Johnnie Lee.
- CL:** Yeah.
- JE:** Because in all actuality, yes, Johnnie Lee was here much longer than Bob Wills. It was almost like Bob Wills was passing through. Is that true?
- JW:** Well, from '34 to '43 he was here full time.
- JE:** Okay.
- JW:** Then he would come back for special things.
- CL:** Yeah.

JW: Throughout the '40s, '50s, he came back in the late '50s for a time, and actually bought the Cain's from Mr. Mayo for a time, combined the bands, that didn't work. That ended the daily broadcasts.

Then in '59 is when they went to Las Vegas, Curly?

CL: I believe it was, yeah.

JW: By that time you were with—

CL: Leon McAuliffe.

JW: Leon McAuliffe, right.

CL: Yeah.

JW: But they would change members, the Johnnie Lee and the Bob Wills bands were almost interchangeable because they'd have some of the same members. They'd move back and forth from the Coast or Texas, Bob was there later, and they moved back and forth between bands. So I guess you guys just played a lot of what Bob played.

CL: Yeah, yeah.

JW: Bob would, of course, play the stuff you played.

CL: Oh yeah.

Chapter 11 - 4:20

Hank Thompson

John Erling: Overall, you played ten years with Johnnie Lee Wills, but then you were ten years with Hank Thompson.

Curly Lewis: Yes.

JE: Do we have some stories and memories from those years?

CL: Most of the memories I have I couldn't talk about it right here.

John Wooley: I might interject here, Hank Thompson was known as kind of a party band, wasn't it?

CL: Yeah, yeah, really was.

JW: That was a—Hank Thompson had this song, "The Wild Side of Life." And Hank Thompson and his band sort of pursued the wild side of life a lot of times. It was a pretty wild band. Out of Oklahoma City.

CL: Yeah.

JE: But you hung on for ten years with him?

CL: Yeah, I first worked two years and then I came back to Tulsa, trying to get off the road. And I ran a dry cleaning pick up station out here on North Cincinnati for a year. I wasn't

doing any good so I went back with Hank. That was in '58. I stayed with him six months that time, and I came back to Tulsa and went to work with Leon in about 1959.

JE: Leon McAuliffe?

CL: Yeah. Leon McAuliffe.

JE: And you were with him for about four years.

CL: Right, and then I went back with Hank and was with him then until 1970.

JW: We should mention that Hank Thompson, in addition to being kind of a wild band, also had great, great musicians during that period. Always in the downbeat polls when they'd have a western band or hillbilly band or whatever, they were always number one as musicians. There was nobody better than Hank Thompson's band when Curly was in it.

CL: Yeah, I've got a trophy from the time I was on Hank's band and it—

JW: Oh yeah that plaque!

CL: Yeah, plaque. And it's got the years that we were number one. And they just barely did have enough space on that plaque to put all the years I was on that band.

JW: That was a great band.

CL: Yeah.

JW: The Brazos Valley Boys.

CL: Yeah, 'course I had more years on there than anybody else because the year that I was off I was still there part of the year, see, so?

JW: Um-hmm (affirmative).

CL: From '55 until '70. That was fifteen years it looked like I was there.

JW: Parts of fifteen years anyway.

CL: Yeah parts of fifteen years. But actually I was there ten and a half years.

JE: Were you ever tempted to front your own band and go out on your own?

CL: Not until maybe later years. In fact, we did a record session with RCA Victor here about 1953, I believe it was. The A and R man that came down here from RCA, his name was Steve Sholes. I was the vocalist on everything we did on that.

JW: Those were some great records, those are very prized among collectors. One of the things Curly did was "Blackberry Boogie," which Tennessee Ernie Ford, I guess, covered you? Or we don't know which version came out first on that, do we?

CL: No, don't know for sure. 'Course he had the big record on it, you know.

JW: But your record is awfully good.

CL: But anyway, Al Clauser was up at our recording session up there one day, and he was in the engineering room there and Mr. Mayo and Steve Sholes are in there and I was doing the vocals on something. Steve Sholes said, "Well, I wonder if he'd like to have a record contract?"

And Mr. Mayo said, "No, I don't think he would, you know. He's pretty well satisfied here with Johnnie."

You know, I didn't know anything about that because Steve Sholes never did say anything about it. Later on, I guess I had just gone to work for Leon McAuliffe in '59, and Al Clauser had a tune he wanted me to come and make a dub on. So I went out there and made a dub on that and a couple more tunes. I said something about like, "I wish I could get a recording deal and get to record some tunes like that."

He said, "You know I always wondered," he said, "why didn't you take that deal when Steve Sholes offered it to you?"

And I said, "What do you mean?"

And he said, "Well, I was sitting right there in the studio when he said he'd like to record you."

JW: Wow.

CL: And he said, "Mr. Mayo said that he didn't think I'd be interested." But he said, "I just took for granted that they had told you about it." But nobody ever did and so it was three or four years later, more than that later before I even knew anything about it. So anyway, I haven't done anything with it but at least I'd a had a chance at it.

Chapter 12 - 1:50

Faded Love

John Erling: The song "Faded Love," how did that come about? That was such a big hit.

Curly Lewis: That was another old fiddle tune that Uncle John, Bob Wills's daddy used to play. He'd sit out on a porch, they lived out in the country in cotton fields, and I've heard his daughters talk about him playing, sitting out on the porch at night playing "Faded Love." He had played it all his life and his youngest son, Billy Jack, then wrote words to it and Bob recorded it. That's how it came about anyway.

JW: Well—

CL: That didn't happen till about 1950.

JW: Relatively late, yeah.

JE: Did you ever have a music lesson?

CL: No. No I never did.

JE: These were notes or tunes that were floating around in your head, so you could improvise. You'd just take off and you'd hear it and it's transferred to that instrument immediately.

CL: Yeah.

JE: Which is just so remarkable.

CL: You learn the melody, why you can play it. You know where it is on your instrument. I was lucky in that I learned to play straight, I mean, I learned to hold my fiddle right and use the right fingers. A lot of fiddle players, if they learn by themselves, they'll use the wrong fingers for certain notes. I don't know how come they don't do that but I guess I knew those fingers were there for some reason. Anyway, I was fortunate that I did learn to play straight to begin with.

A lot of guys, Cotton Thompson, he was a good dance fiddle player, but he used those two fingers just about all the time. And you do a lot of sliding in and out and first one thing and then another.

There's a note underneath each one of those fingers. You hear it in your head.

Chapter 13 - 7:05

Cimarron Ballroom

John Erling: Somewhere along in here we had a competing ballroom known as the Cimarron Ballroom.

Curly Lewis: Yeah.

JE: The history of that and how that came about and was there really competition between the two?

John Wooley: Huge competition.

CL: Yeah.

JW: And Curly, of course, played at the Cimarron with Leon McAuliffe, so you might want to talk about that.

CL: Yeah, yeah I played at the Cimarron with him for about four years. Played it every Wednesday and had what he called a "Over Twenty-nine Dance." We'd play mostly pop and modern music for the older dancers. And then on Saturday night just played everything.

Leon's daddy-in-law and Leon bought that, it used to be the old Shrine Temple or something there.

JW: 4th and—

CL: 4th and Denver.

JW: 4th and Denver, right.

CL: Yeah. Anyway, they bought it and then remodeled it into the Cimarron and then started putting those dances there. Old Leon, boy, he had crowds just like we did there for a long time.

JW: But there was a lot of competition between the Cain's and the Cimarron.

CL: Oh yeah.

JW: Especially on the weekends.

CL: Yeah, yeah.

JW: It was real.

CL: That's kind of like people going to the same supper club or same beer joint or whatever, you get your regular crowd and they more or less stayed with the same place they're used to going. Whenever I moved to the Cimarron, of course, you'd see a lot of people that you'd see up here but not near as many. It was newer, different people, you know.

JW: Um-hmm (affirmative).

CL: Some of them liked Leon's band better than they did Johnnie Lee's and vice versa, you know.

JE: Probably arguments in the street as to who's the best and all that kind of thing.

CL: You know, in about 1948 or '49, Leon had just started playing the Cimarron there and we had what we called Battle of the Bands. His band and Johnnie Lee's band, and we went to the old Fairground Pavilion out there.

JW: So a neutral site?

CL: Yeah a neutral site, yeah.

JW: Not at Cain's or Cimarron, uh-huh (affirmative).

CL: Johnnie Lee, we had just bought brand new suits, so I went down on Leon's program and won and played a tune. And tell them what we was going to do to them out there that night, you know, and everything. Talking about Leon's big ears and everything else. Of course, he told me to say that. He said his fiddle player, which was Cecil Brower at that time, up here did the same thing on Johnnie Lee's show.

Anyway, we got out there that night to play that dance. We had our ties and new suits on and we hired this guy that used to be an usher here in Cain's and where we walked up on the bandstand, he was standing there with a brush. We walked up there and he'd brush us off. Porter, you know. But anyway, that was a lot of fun.

JW: You had a lot of people there, I imagine.

CL: Oh yeah, yeah, it was really loaded.

JE: Who won the battle?

CL: Oh I don't know.

JW: I don't think you ever really had a winner, did you?

CL: No, no, I don't think so.

JW: Sometimes they wouldn't.

JE: That had to be the talk of the town when those two bands got—

CL: Oh it was, and man, they really ballyhooed too before. Of course, we had just about all that pavilion would hold. And on Saturday nights, you know—

- JW:** It was hard.
- CL:** ...Cain's crowd and the Cimarron crowd both—
- JE:** Those years would have been about when?
- CL:** That was about '48 or '49, somewhere along in there.
- JE:** Do you remember some of the downtown businesses and restaurants, like—
- CL:** Oh yeah, yeah, you remember Bishop's? Bishop's used to be down between 5th and 6th. That was the only all-night restaurant downtown at that time, back in the '40s there and the '50s. Of course, the old Orpheum Theater, I remember a lot of buildings downtown.
- JE:** Do you remember movies or movie stars that you might have seen? You were working nights, I don't know if you got to see movies, but—
- CL:** We did a remote broadcast from down on 5th and Main down there one time. And I forget what the picture was, it was showing in town, but anyway, we had Guy Madison, Wild Red Berry and two or three more stars at—
- JW:** All at once?
- CL:** Yeah and they would—
- JW:** Wild Red Berry and Roy Calhoun? I love them.
- CL:** Yeah, yeah, all of them the same show. They were appearing here for some reason, I forgot now what it might have been, but anyway, they were staying at the Mayo Hotel and we did that broadcast from a truck bed down there and they were all on it.
- Also we did another one down there one time from 5th and Boston and had tires and Johnny Weissmuller, he was down there. Boy, I guess more people gathered around to watch him than anybody. This was early on about '46 or '47.
- JE:** He was quite a physical specimen.
- CL:** Oh yeah, yeah he was, he really was. Of course, he did his Tarzan yell, especially kids, they really loved him. We had a lot of famous stars came by here from time to time.
- JE:** Like what stars?
- CL:** Forest Tucker and the Sons of the Pioneers.
- JW:** Did Gene Autry ever come by here?
- CL:** No, I mean, not while I was here.
- JW:** Yeah, that may be earlier, that may be the Bob days at one point, yeah.
- CL:** Well, now he might have then, yeah. We had Jimmy Wakely, Tim Holt, of course, the Johnnie Lee Wills stampede that they had every may would usually have some headliner. Like one year there was Sons of the Pioneers. And then that was taken hold.
- JW:** That was the rodeo.
- CL:** They'd always come up here on the Saturday because we had a thirty-minute show on Saturday. During that rodeo, man, we'd have almost as many people in here for that broadcast as we would for the dance.

JW: The rodeo lasted a very long time. It started with Bob Wills. O. W. Mayo and Bob Wills started it. And then when Bob left Johnnie Lee took it over. And even outlasted Johnnie Lee's daily broadcast. It went into the '60s or '70s, didn't it, Curly?

CL: Uh, it went into the '70s, I know—

JW: The '70s, I think, yeah.

CL: ...maybe even the '80s.

JW: Yeah, it was around for a long time.

CL: Yeah, '37 is when it started.

JW: Yeah.

JE: You brought up Sons of the Pioneers. I have fond memories, late '40s, listening to them on the radio up in Grand Forks, North Dakota, and the Tumbling Tumbleweeds.

CL: Oh yeah.

JE: So they actually performed with you here on this stage?

CL: Yeah, they came up here and did a couple tunes.

JE: They weren't doing western swing, they were doing western, which is—

CL: Classical western.

JE: ...different than country.

JW: Cowboy music.

CL: Yeah, cowboy.

JW: It was cowboy music.

CL: The group The Pioneers that came by here had Ken Curtis, Lloyd Perryman, Tommy Doss, Hugh Farr, Karl Farr.

JW: Karl Farr.

CL: And Deuce Spriggs, I believe, and Ken Curtis. He later became Festus on "Gunsmoke." You know, he was with them at that time, boy, they had a fire.

JE: With the Sons of the Pioneers?

JW: Oh yeah, he was on their late vocalists, at one point.

CL: Sons of the Pioneers, yeah. Yeah. They had one of their best groups of all time there.

JW: And you also mentioned Luke Wills, though vocalist Tommy Doss was with the band.

CL: Yeah, yeah.

JW: Who it had been before that singing with Luke Wills Rhythm Busters.

CL: Yeah.

JW: I should mention here that on Curly's solo album "Shenandoah," he does a Sons of the Pioneers's song called "Blue Shadows on the Trail," and overdubs all of the vocal parts himself. It's wonderful, it's a wonderful record.

Chapter 14 - 4:00**Wills and Grand Ole Opry**

John Erling: Isn't there a story of Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys and their first time on the Grand Ole Opry on WSM, when he brings his ensemble to town that caused some consternation.

Curly Lewis: Yeah.

JE: And maybe you can both help me tell that story because they were trying to preserve the country song on the Grand Ole Opry.

John Wooley: Yeah, there weren't drums in country music.

JE: Right.

JW: Smokey Dacus, because he was really considered the first guy to have a drummer in hillbilly music back in '35.

CL: Right, right.

JW: Well, you can tell the story.

CL: Yeah, they went down to Beyond the Grand Ole Opry. When they started setting up his drums they said, "Whoa, no drums."

So Bob said, "Well, boys, load 'em up." But they finally got together and agreed that he could use drums but he had to have him behind a curtain. So the audience couldn't see him. And that's the way they got around that deal. They did that just to preserve their country look, along with their sound.

JE: But wasn't there then a moment when Bob Wills said, "No, move 'em out at the last minute? Put them out there and we're going to do it anyway."

CL: Yeah.

JE: So that shows the forceful personality of Bob Wills coming through again.

CL: Right, right.

JE: Which obviously is apparent through all of this.

CL: Yeah. Right.

JE: So bingo, the drums were out there.

CL: Yeah.

JW: It also shows that Nashville country music and western swing music are not anywhere near the same thing.

CL: No.

JW: They're very different. Nashville country music is completely different from western swing.

CL: Right.

JW: To this day you can't find very many western swing players in Nashville. Now, you'll find some, but you find the western swing players in Oklahoma and Texas and California, more than anyplace else.

CL: Right.

JE: Well, then, as time moves along we have rock and roll and Elvis Presley and yet we have western swing, so these two have got to be meeting here sometime, don't they? And rock and roll then takes over?

CL: Yeah, yeah. Along about 1954, '55, when it really started taking over. In fact, I was on a tour one time with Hank Thompson in 1955. We were playing a little tour down South. At that time, the Louisiana Hay Ride was going down at Shreveport, is where that was, yeah.

JW: Shreveport, yeah.

CL: We were playing down around there and on that Louisiana Hay Ride at that time was Johnny Cash, Elvis Presley, and Carl Perkins.

JW: Carl Perkins.

CL: We booked a tour out through Tennessee and Mississippi and out in Louisiana. Like I say, I was with Hank Thompson, this was 1955, and the people on that show as Elvis Presley, Johnny Cash, and Carl Perkins. And the headliner was Hank Thompson.

Shoot, a year or two later, man, you couldn't hear nothing but Elvis Presley, and Johnny Cash started coming on real strong. You tell people about that later on and they say, "Well, how come Johnny Cash wasn't a headliner or Elvis?" you know. Hank was a lot lesser but Hank was pretty well-known.

JE: So you were there and played on that date.

CL: Yes.

JE: But Elvis hadn't really become strong yet?

CL: That was before he made his appearance on the *Ed Sullivan Show*. Yeah, that was before he ever made his appearance on there. When he appeared on there with Tommy Dorsey and them, that's when he just—

JW: That was that summer replacement show the Dorsey Brothers had to try and dance.

CL: ...took off. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

JE: Did you, as a musician, see something special in an Elvis Presley or a Johnny Cash at that time?

CL: No not really, of course, I wasn't paying a lot of attention, I guess. Hank, I remember him talking about Elvis. He said, "You watch that boy," he said, "he's going to make it one of these days." Shoot, it wasn't a year later until he was the biggest guy in show business.

Some people can spot them and some can't. That's what makes guys like Colonel Parker.

JW: Parker, right.

CL: They know how to spot that talent.

JE: Well—

CL: Jim Halls seen guys like that.

JW: Jim Halls, yeah.

Chapter 15 - 7:00

Western Swing Fades Away

John Wooley: I might mention just a couple of quick things. Number one, that Curly, in the mid-'70s, did get a chance to be a recording artist.

Curly Lewis: Yeah.

JW: You were on Sunshine Country Records, cut some 45s, and then you, later on, cut for Delta Records as a solo act. The album we were talking about, "Shenandoah," Curly is a solo act. And then the Sunshine Country Records, which I play occasionally on my show, are the same. Basically, you were kind of this classic honky-tonk guy out that deal, right?

CL: Yeah, yeah.

JW: That's what they were. The General?

CL: The General.

JW: General, I can't remember—

CL: We just called him the General.

JW: He had Billy Parker and Curly and several acts signed to Sunshine Country Records. You guys got some significant airplay back in the mid-'70s.

CL: Yeah we got some good airplay here on KVOO. On some of that.

JE: Yeah.

JW: I would also say that in '58 and '59, western swing, because of rock and roll, I think, Curly, you'll agree, they got in such an eclipse that Bob, well, Johnnie Lee actually had to leave the Cain's Ballroom. He had combined his band with Johnnie Lee. Bob could not figure out the kids. He said, "It's a mixture of black music and country music, the same thing we were doing in 1934, why won't the kids come out?"

I teach a class at OSU Tulsa, I said, "Why do you think that was?"

And they don't know and it's just because kids want their own music. They didn't want their parents' music, no matter how good it was and Bob, Johnnie Lee stayed up with the trends. They had a twist song. Were you on that band when "Blub's Twist" came out? In '60 and '61?

CL: No, no.

- JW:** They had a twist song that made the local charts. They kept trying but kids wanted their own, people their own age, and that's really why. Wouldn't you say that would be right, Curly? That would be why western swing for awhile went into an eclipse?
- CL:** Yeah it was a generation change more than anything else. You know, each generation that comes along, why, when they grow up they more or less like the same things they did when they were growing up.
- JW:** Exactly.
- CL:** So it changes every so often.
- JE:** That's right.
- JW:** Every generation likes the music of their generation.
- CL:** Yeah, yeah, and sometimes it'll repeat and go back a few years.
- JW:** Um-hmm (affirmative).
- CL:** Like every now and then western swing comes back pretty strong and then it will kind of fade again for awhile. And rock and roll kind of faded for awhile and now I don't know what they call this country music they've got now. It's a different kind of country music.
- JW:** It's almost rock and roll.
- CL:** Yeah.
- JW:** It really is.
- CL:** It's kind of between country and rock and roll.
- JW:** It would have been rock and roll in the '50s and '60s, I think.
- CL:** Yeah, yeah. You know, actually, as far as that rock and roll, Cotton Thompson was really, as far as I'm concerned, the first rock and roll singer of all of them. He could do tunes like that "Good Rockin' Tonight" and all that kind of stuff. Man, I'm telling you, you talk about dancing, them people would get with it out there. Of course, the kids and that rock and roll is what put it over with them, mainly. And then guys like Presley and his personality and his good looks and everything.
- JW:** And then on the other side you said Hank Williams had something to do with country music going in an eclipse because he brought a new sound into country music.
- CL:** Yeah.
- JW:** That very nasal kind of sound—
- CL:** Yeah, right.
- JW:** ...which was not western swing sound at all but it was dancing.
- CL:** Yeah, yeah.
- JW:** I remember you telling me that, that you thought that Hank Williams had a lot to do with—
- CL:** He did, yeah. Of course, that's just like I'm saying, it's kind of a mixture of everything.
- JW:** Um-hmm (affirmative).
- CL:** It all kind of ties together through the years. Rock and roll came out and started getting

popular. Of course, country has always been popular. We used to call country music the hillbilly music, you know. That was the term for it back when I was growing up even.

JW: Sure.

CL: I never heard of country music, I don't think, until I got out playing.

JE: Was that tough for you as a musician, to see the crowds get smaller and smaller—

CL: Yeah.

JE: ...as rock and roll came on and you had to—

CL: Yeah, yeah, and TV came in strong.

JE: Yeah.

CL: The dances kind of went by the wayside. You know, people used to come see you when you were on the radio. They'd come see you to see what you looked like. TV took care of all that. People quit dancing like they used to. Boy, I'm telling you, back in World War II, when the jitterbug and stuff like that was going strong, boy, they'd dance. You could play any night of the week, anywhere and have a crowd. Because the people had started to getting work, when they had a little money to spend.

JW: Um-hmm (affirmative).

CL: Of course, when the war was over, why, everybody came back and started getting married and raising families. And having other things to do other than getting out and going to the dance or something.

JE: Right.

CL: TV came on, they'd get all entertainment they wanted, sitting at home on their couch.

JW: For free, yeah.

CL: Well, a combination of things, I guess, kind of stymied western swing music. And dances, in particular.

JE: So there was that moment then when Bob and Johnnie Lee said, "This is not working out here, we're not getting a big crowd."

CL: Yeah, right.

JE: So did they just fold camp completely?

JW: Went to Vegas, was it the Golden Nugget they went to first?

CL: Yeah.

JW: Because, again, they had adults, that was not the teenagers that was listening to the music. They had grownups at a casino and so they went out there and kind of relaunched a career playing casinos.

JE: When did Bob Wills pass away?

JW: '75?

CL: Yeah, 1975, I believe, for his funeral.

JE: Where was that funeral?

CL: At the Baptist church out on East 11th here in town.

JE: Oh?

JW: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: The church had to be jam-packed.

CL: Oh yeah, yeah, everybody couldn't get in.

JW: Johnnie Lee as well, in '84.

CL: Yeah.

JW: You played for his funeral too.

CL: Yeah, in fact, I played for all the Wills's funeral except Loreen and Luke. And I played for all the girls and the guys.

JW: Loreen was very recent, she was the last one to pass away.

CL: Yeah.

JW: This was just about a year or so ago.

CL: Yeah.

JE: What did you play at Bob Wills's funeral?

CL: Johnny Gamble and Keith Coleman and I played it and we played "San Antonio Rose."
Of course, we played some hymns as he used to do like—

JW: "No Disappointment."

CL: "No Disappointment," and "Have Heaven," and maybe even "Faded Love," something like that.

JE: And Johnnie Lee, you remember what was played at his funeral?

CL: Same thing. Same kind of deal, yeah.

JE: Was this at the Baptist church, downtown Tulsa?

CL: It's out on East 11th Street, just across Memorial.

JE: Huh?

CL: Isn't it?

JW: Yeah. Eastland Baptist? It may have been Eastland. I think it was Eastland.

CL: Might be, might be. It's where Johnnie Lee and them—

JW: Yeah.

CL: ...that's where they all used to go to church.

JW: Yeah. 'Cause that's where Loreen's funeral was, was Eastland, so I bet that's where it was.

CL: Oh yeah, yeah.

JE: And how old were they?

JW: Bob was seventy.

CL: Seventy.

JW: Johnnie Lee was—

CL: Johnnie Lee I think was seventy-two.

JW: Yeah.

CL: He died in '84.

JW: Yeah, and then Billy Jack was about '88, wasn't he? Luke was the last one to pass away.

CL: Yeah.

JW: Billy Jack, the youngest, passed away third.

CL: I played "Faded Love" for his funeral. And went out to the cemetery where they had the graveside services. And I stood off about thirty feet out there and played "Faded Love," just fiddled.

JE: That had to be moving.

CL: Yeah. It was, really, we got a lot of reports on that.

JE: All four of them are buried in our Memorial Cemetery?

CL: Memorial, Memorial.

JE: At 51st Street.

CL: The whole family's buried out there.

JW: Whole family, in addition to the brothers, that's correct, yeah.

CL: Yeah.

Chapter 16 - 5:00

Memories at Cain's

John Erling: You know, I always ask in these interviews because students will listen to this and general fans too, what advice you have to these students. But you were just born with this God-given talent that there isn't much advice that you can give to these people if they weren't born with it in the first place. You must have had lots of youngsters who gathered around and idolized you and so forth. And either they haven't or they don't.

Curly Lewis: Yeah. I don't know, I don't really have any advice, I didn't.

JE: No? For you, playing a fiddle is like me drinking water.

CL: Well, it was easy for me. I've often wished that I had studied and did all that, but—

John Wooley: But why?

JE: What would it have brought you?

CL: Well, I don't know, of course, every time you learn something and think you're getting maybe a little bit better at it, it just makes you more hungry. You want more, you know.

JW: Sure. You never get as good as you want to be.

CL: No, you never get satisfied, uh-uh (negative), no. No, there's always something you can do better.

JW: That's right.

- CL:** Even the worst fiddle player in the world, if you watch him for a little bit you can learn something from him.
- JE:** Huh. The man upstairs has been good to you and you shared with me earlier, your voice is raspy and that's due to your bout with cancer.
- CL:** Yeah.
- JE:** What was that fight? In your throat, was it?
- CL:** Well, I think the old surgeon that worked on me said he probably hit a nerve. Of course, when they go in to come something out you have nerves and muscles running all through your back and everything. He said it could have been that he got a nerve that went to my vocal chord. I came up with a paralyzed vocal chord and I couldn't make any sound because my vocal chords wouldn't go together.
- So this guy talked me into having that paralyzed vocal chord filled with silicone, that would make it stiff and the other vocal chords would go over and touch it.
- JE:** Hmm (thoughtful sound).
- CL:** And that's where I get my sound from. Of course, it used to be a little bit better than it is now but anyway, till we try to sing or anything.
- JE:** So you had been singing, right? Up until that time?
- CL:** Yeah, up until I was seventy-two.
- JE:** And now we're sitting on the stage of Cain's, but outside on the sidewalk, Cain's has their Walk of Fame and your name is there. I believe, the only side man to be so honored, as a matter of fact. And that's got to give you a good feeling.
- CL:** Makes me feel real humble and real honored, sure does.
- JW:** I'm getting choked up here.
- JE:** Because I'm sitting in front of somebody who is truly great, you're looking out at the floor out here. In your mind's eye, you can see down through the years, all these crowds that came to listen to you and your music. There's got to be a good feeling that comes from that.
- CL:** It is, John, it really is. A lot of memories, a lot of good memories, in fact, most of all of them were good memories. I enjoyed it, really.
- JE:** Talk about holy places of music, here we are on this stage, Cain's and KVOO, your music along with the Wills brothers, we're sitting right in the middle of it all.
- CL:** Yeah, that's right, that's quite an experience for me anymore.
- JE:** And, John, I want to thank you for joining us on this. This was very, very helpful. All the work you do through books, you've become a historian and so forth, we appreciate you very much.
- JW:** Thank you, John. It's an honor to be here.
- JE:** Thank you, Curly.
- CL:** Thank you, John, for having me and also thanks to John Wooley over here too.

JW: Thanks, Curly.

JE: You know, I might just say that these sounds we're hearing right now of traffic weren't heard back in the '40s.

JW: Uh-uh (negative).

JE: Because right now outside, not far from Cain's Ballroom we have Interstates 244, we have interdispersal loops that are all winging around here that we could never have thought of back in the '40s.

CL: No this Interstate is going across what used to be our parking lot out here. For Cain's.

JW: Yeah, Mr. Mayo had to sell that to the city, didn't he?

CL: Yeah.

JW: Maybe '68, maybe somewhere in there. Yeah, '68.

CL: Yeah.

JE: You know, I didn't ask about your personal life. Did you marry?

CL: Well, I've been married five times.

JE: All right.

CL: My wife right now, her name is Edie. She's in an Alzheimer's home.

JE: Okay.

JW: We had a lot of family for Curly's tribute concert that we did, and including your daughter, who just got her PhD.

CL: Oh yeah, PhD. Yeah.

JW: Psychologist.

JE: Oh. How many children did you have?

CL: I had six.

JE: Were you able to pass this music gene on to them?

CL: Well, my youngest son, Steve, he sings and plays in church. Of course, he's a minister too.

JE: Oh?

JW: He's the head of the Baptist Student Union at TU.

JE: Oh?

CL: He's a great boy.

JW: He is. He's a good man.

JE: Huh. Well, thank you, both again, so very much.

JW: Well, thank you.

CL: Thank you.

JE: This was fun.

Chapter 17 - 0:33**Conclusion**

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