

Guy Logsdon

A man who celebrates the music and culture of folk artists, cowboys, and western swing.

Chapter 01 - 0:53

Introduction

Announcer: Guy Logsdon grew up in Ada, Oklahoma. He graduated from Ada High School and East Central State University and earned his masters degree and ADD in education and administration at the University of Oklahoma. Dr. Logsdon became Director of Libraries and Professor of Education at the University of Tulsa.

Logsdon became a leading authority on Woody Guthrie's life and music and western swing music, including its principle performers Bob and Johnnie Lee Wills. He became an avid collector of cowboy songs from working cowboys, and also became a fellow at the Smithsonian Institute.

His long list of publications includes *Woody's Road*, written with Woody Guthrie's sister, Mary Jo Guthrie Edgmon. His many honors include induction into the Hall of Fame of the Oklahoma Historical Society in Oklahoma City.

So now, listen to Guy Logsdon talk and sing his way through his oral history interview on VoicesofOklahoma.com.

Chapter 02 - 8:38

Logsdon Family History

John Erling: Today's date is February 16 of 2010. My name is John Erling.

And, Guy, if you will state your full name, please?

Guy Logsdon: Guy William Logsdon.

JE: Your date of birth?

GL: May 31, 1934.

JE: And that makes you how old today?

GL: I think I'm seventy-five.

JE: Right. We're recording this where?

GL: In our home in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

JE: Where were you born?

GL: I was born in Ada, Oklahoma, Pontotoc County. And I'm proud of it.

I was the youngest of five. I had three older sisters and an older brother, so I was the youngest.

JE: Your mother's name, maiden name?

GL: Mattie Marseilles. But this was a strange situation. My mother was born in the Creek Nation, 1903, December 12th. And they weren't sure if it was the 11th or the 12th but they decided to use the 12th because that's the day her mother died. Her mother died giving birth to her. And she was given no name. But her mother's name was Mattie, so they started calling her Little Mattie.

She grew up as Little Mattie, and Marseilles was her father's name. Her father was of Cherokee descent. And I've never learned but I think her mother also was of Indian descent. Since she died giving birth we know very little. But her mother's maiden name was Cherry. And I think there may be some Creek background there.

But my mother grew up in the Creek Nation. And she thought when they had their ceremonials and all and would drink the purgative, which was to cleanse the body and all, and go out and throw up, she thought they were drinking alcohol. So she said, "No, no, I don't want to be Creek."

But her best friends growing up were Creek Indians in a little town called Yeager, Oklahoma, which is northeast of Holdenville.

Her father's real name was Mothershed, but he was married. And in turn, that wife, the first wife, said, "I wish I didn't have your name."

And as he left, he said, "I'll fix that." And so he changed and took his mother's maiden name, which was Marseilles. Came in to Indian Territory, because he was from Tennessee somewhere in one of the Cherokee areas, and he became Thomas Marseilles.

In turn, my mother had no middle name. But there was a time in Indian Territory and early day Oklahoma when a school down in Sherman, Texas, called Kid Key College for Girls—it was a girls boarding school—many early day Indian families sent their daughters. People forget that the Indians were better educated than the whites in those days, in spite of what some may think. He wanted her to have a good education, so he went down to Sherman, Texas, and enrolled her. She wasn't nine years old. He enrolled her.

They said, "Well, you have to have a middle name."

He said, "Uh," and he got to thinking and he said, "Theresa." That was a name he liked. So my mother became Mattie Theresa Marseilles.

He died shortly after. Her mother died giving birth and her father died when she was nine. But she had a tremendous education due to her father.

JE: When you say she grew up in the Creek Nation—

GL: Yeah, Yeager, Oklahoma.

JE: And that was the Creek Nation in that area?

GL: Yeah, oh yeah. Holdenville, all of that area was part of the Creek Nation. Like I say, she wrote many, many items and statements about her friendships. So it was not critical, she just thought they were drinking when they had the ceremonials.

JE: Was she musical?

GL: No. My mother was extremely well-read and she read a lot. Before dying she wrote three books of genealogical studies. And every book that she read she wrote her comments in it.

We had a tremendous library, growing up. This was in Ada. Surrounded by books, grew up reading. She was a scholarly lady and very religious, Methodist. She was a leader in the Methodist church at Regents, and loved research and writing.

JE: That seed was planted, obviously, with you.

GL: I think I was very fortunate in getting a little from each parent. My father was the musical one.

JE: And your father's name?

GL: Guy Logsdon, no middle name, because people from Texas in those days, they only had the first name and the last name. Two aunts and two uncles from a family of twelve from Texas. They all wound up in Ada.

I'm not sure why but the only grandparent I had was my daddy's mother, my old Grandma, we called her. And she was seventy-five years old when I was born.

My daddy was one of twelve children. I've never identified which, but six of them died in childhood, none at birth. My grandparents buried six children. One daughter died on Christmas Eve. This was back when whooping cough and things went around.

But then, another one lived until he was in his twenties, I think. He was a younger one, died in 1922. And he died from appendicitis. They were operating on him and he died.

So my daddy and two sisters and two brothers were the only ones of twelve.

I didn't know it until later in life, my grandparents decided to make the Oklahoma Land Run. They loaded up a wagon and headed to make the run in 1889. But they got to Ardmore and one of their young sons died. He's buried in Ardmore. And then they returned and went back to Texas. They didn't make the land run.

They were unusual people. My grandfather was born in 1845, that's Grandfather Logsdon. His name was John Logsdon, which my brother, who's now deceased, was John Logsdon. And I had a cousin John Logsdon. My grandfather was born in Indiana, and they moved to Texas, in 1850. And he fought for Texas during the Civil War and was wounded. A teenager.

My grandma was a Chapman. She was born in Denton County, Texas, in 1861. She used to tell that since her name was Chapman that Johnnie Appleseed, Jonathan Chapman, better known as Johnnie Appleseed was a distant relative. I don't know if it was true or not but that was her story.

And I had the privilege of remembering things that she told me. She also said that Cynthia Ann Parker was a distant cousin. Cynthia Ann Parker was Quanah Parker's mother, the Comanche leader, Quanah Parker. So that means that Quanah Parker had a little Chapman blood. And I don't have any of that blood coming this way, but some of that blood may have gone his way.

My daddy, I don't know why he was named Guy, he was born in 1893, in Tira, Texas. My Uncle Claude, who was older than my daddy, his son was named Guy Connor Logsdon. I was the third, Guy William. And then there was a guy, Connor Junior, all in Ada, now.

Now there's a Trey, Guy Connor the Third. And I don't know what they would call it, a quad? Guy Connor Quad? But anyway, the name has remained and I'm proud of it.

Chapter 03 - 4:50 Coming to Oklahoma

John Erling: So how does Guy Logsdon, your father, come to Oklahoma?

Guy Logsdon: He was playing the fiddle by the time he was six years old. My daddy was a tremendous musician, entertainer deluxe, tremendous salesman.

Nineteen twelve, most of the family had already come up to Ada. Something brought all of them to Ada. My daddy came up 1912, because he said if he stayed in Texas he would have to marry a cousin.

And I have enjoyed telling people through the years that's what's wrong with Texas today. It's made a lot of Texan friends mad at me, but, ha-ha-ha.

But anyway, his sister, an older sister, did marry a cousin, so it was not something false. They said, "You're going to go to Oklahoma and marry an Indian squaw."

And he took my mother back to Texas to meet his Texas relatives. He said, "Don't you dare tell anyone that you're part Indian." Hell, you didn't have to, you looked at my mother and you knew that she was of Indian descent. She wasn't full blood, by any means, but of Indian descent.

JE: And again, which nation?

GL: Cherokee. And she was extremely proud. And she traced all of that back in her genealogical studies. This is a woman whose mother died giving birth to her, and her

father died when she was nine. She knew very little, but she did a tremendous amount of genealogical research. And she was convinced that her great, great grandmother was a sister to Stand Watie in the Cherokee Nation. And I don't know if that's true or not.

But when I was growing up not many said, "Yeah, I'm part Indian." For some reason or other, the youngest of five, I don't know why, I guess I knew it and it didn't make any difference to me.

But my number three sister was teaching school in Wyoming. One night the phone rang, and I was there, my sister said, "Is Mother—"

I said, "Well, no, she's busy."

She said, "Some woman up here asked me what tribe I'm from, what Indian I am. Ask Mother."

So I went in, and she said, "Yeah, we're Cherokee."

I went back and I said, "Bobbie, we're part Cherokee." Ever since then there's been no problem, but in those days, you didn't admit you were part Indian. But now it's a different ballgame. Everyone wants to be because they think they'll get some money.

But my grandfather refused to sign the rolls, so by federal law now, I'm no longer part Cherokee. But I am, and I'm proud of it.

JE: A little bit about why they didn't want to admit that they were Cherokee, or Indian of any descent?

GL: You have to go back and say, "Okay, when blacks were slaves of the five civilized tribes and they brought them into Oklahoma, or Indian Territory at that time, many thought that if you were part Indian you had black in you. You were also part black. But it had to do with the same concept of shame or embarrassment, whatever you want to call it. You wouldn't say, "Yes, my great, great grandfather was a black slave," if you're out living a white man's life. It was the same with Indians.

In fact, the first missionaries who came into what is now Oklahoma, yes, there were some French up in the northern part, but the first was Union Mission, about thirty miles north of Muskogee, up the Grand River. In those days, this was considered foreign missionary work. Any missionary who came into Indian Territory was considered to be a member of the foreign missionary organization. And they considered coming into Indian Territory going into black country.

It's hard to believe, but I've read the stories and the background. But then, bit by bit it changed with the five civilized tribes coming in. And that changed attitudes. But there was a tremendous, tremendous fear through the years. And there are people today, I guess, who wouldn't want to admit they're part Indian. But I'm proud of it.

But that's sort of our background in Oklahoma.

Chapter 04 - 3:14**Puppy Pooch**

John Erling: The first school you attended?

Guy Logsdon: Well, I attended Willard Grade School in Ada. I was, like I say, the fifth. I had cousins ahead of me, cousins who were there. I would have been in the first. My brother would have been in the third grade, and Bobbie would have been in the fifth grade. So I went to Willard Grade School in Ada.

And there the janitor named Rucker, Mr. Rucker, called me down one day. And this is when you had steam heat. Go down to the basement in the big steam room, the janitor's room. Well, he said, "Pick out the one you want."

And I reached down and I picked up a beautiful little puppy and took it home with me. And I have been a dog man ever since.

JE: What did you name that puppy?

GL: Pooch. And I remember, it was howling for its mother, and we had it down in the basement and my parents were asleep. So I got up and slipped down into the basement. I'm six years old, and I held that puppy.

And my daddy came down and said, "Get to bed!"

I've loved dogs ever since. I'm a dog man. And a man up the road from us who was a manager, foreman, whatever you would call it, of a game preserve, three years later deliberately ran over him and I saw it. And I cried and I cried. And I have hated the memory of that man ever since. And I'm not one to forgive anyone who deliberately kills dogs.

JE: Yeah.

GL: Again, you understand, I have a sickness up here in my mind. Ha-ha-ha. I love dogs.

JE: First house you remember?

GL: Oh, the only house we had was outside the city limits of Ada. It's now a centennial house in the state of Oklahoma, because of our centennial celebration in Ada and Oklahoma. But Ada was older than Oklahoma. It was there in the early 1880s. But my folks built it. My daddy was in the furniture business. They had—they said it's five acres. Now that I look back I think it was much larger than five acres.

We had three barns hooked together. The hay barn, the milk barn, and the chicken house. When you have to mow with an old push mower and it takes all week to mow, and then by the time you're through, it's back ready to be mowed again. And I carried scars on my belly button from that old screw coming out of the handle and your belly goes—do you know what I'm talking about?

JE: I do.

GL: But my brother and I did that. That was the only house I knew. And then my daddy died first, and then my mother. And I was the executor of the estate. I seldom cry, but I had tears coming down when I drove away from that house. It's still standing, it's a centennial house, but great memories.

Chapter 05 - 7:55

Professor Logsdon

John Erling: Well, in that house, then, as a child, you started either singing or playing or doing something.

Guy Logsdon: I started listening. I'll go back and say, Phyllis and I were married December 28, 1953. We were teenagers, and we're still married. I don't know what that means about either one of us but we are. But anyway, my daddy had very little to do with me growing up. I always wondered, "Why is it that my parents don't like me?"

I won't go through all of this, but shortly before my daddy died, he died in 1957, on our fourth wedding anniversary he dropped dead from a heart attack. And three months earlier he said, "I have been wrong about you. I want to teach you the furniture business."

Because my brother had been it, my brother was working at the furniture school. And when he was in high school it was known that he was getting it. But, we had just moved back to go in business, he was going to teach me, and he dropped dead. So I wound up, my mother-in-law helped, Phyllis's mother helped this, I wound up selling life insurance in Ardmore. And I was not a natural born life insurance salesman, I'll put it that way.

But when my daddy said, "I've been wrong about you, you're more like I am than I ever thought," I always wondered, "Hmm (thoughtful expression)." And he said, "I want to teach you the furniture business." And he gave to me some old family items from his father who had fought in the Civil War.

I should say that my old grandma used to get a Texas Civil War veteran's check every month from Texas.

JE: Let's just talk about the furniture store.

GL: Yeah.

JE: We didn't establish that. Your father started one when he came to Ada.

GL: Well, he came and at the age of nineteen he worked around different things. Actually, he was a life insurance salesman for a short time at the same company I went to work for. But he was at East Central Teacher's College, now East Central University is in Ada. Started in 1909 and 1910. Many of the regional schools did.

And the war hit. My daddy was a tremendous entertainer. He worked in minstrel shows and all sorts of things. So he just made Ada his home. His mother, his brothers, sisters, everyone was there. The war hit and he was drafted into World War I, and caught flu. He was one of those with the flu and wound up not able to go overseas, but survived the flu. I think he was in the hospital down in Florida somewhere ready to be shipped over, but then he's back in Ada.

And I'm not sure of the year, but people used to come in the furniture store and they'd say, "Is Professor Logsdon here?"

And I found out they were talking about my daddy. "Yeah, he's back there."

Well, I finally got the story that he was known as being one who could take care of himself. I guess that's the best way, he was respected.

JE: He knew how to take care of himself?

GL: Oh yes. He told me that the president of East Central, and this would have been 1919, 1920, somewhere in there, called him in and said, "Guy, there's a school east of here, a very small school between Ada and Allen, a little rural area, and they've been having trouble. Can't keep a teacher. Would you go over? We'll give you a teaching certificate if you'll go over and take care of it."

So he said, "Okay." These are stories he told me. In those days, the rural teachers often had to spend, say, a week with one family. They moved from family to family. He said he was in one situation where they only had one bed, and he had to sleep with the husband. The wife and all of the kids slept on the floor, same room and all.

I said, "Why don't you like raisins?"

He said, "'Cause that man every night had a big box of raisins under the bed. Would reach under, grab a handful and say, "Professor Logsdon, would you like some raisins?"

He said, "I just don't like raisins."

But anyway, his story is that he kept a student in after school, problem student. The next day, a father and a brother came and said, "If you keep my son in after school again I'm going to come back and take care of you."

My daddy said, "I just reached down in my pocket, pulled my knife out, and said, 'Why wait?'" He said, "They left and I never had any more problems at that school."

Now, my daddy was not a big man, he was about five seven, probably about a hundred and thirty pounds. But he was a tremendous dancer, a tremendous entertainer, and one hell of a salesman.

The store, I think it was 1923, he and another brother got the money and bought an old store in Ada and they called it Logsdon Brothers Furniture. But my uncle was an alcoholic and eventually my daddy had to buy it out and say, "This is just Logsdon Furniture."

Just to show a little of my daddy's ability, every year in January, I think it was, he'd go to Chicago to the National Furniture Market. And this man, after he died many years, they said, "Oh, I knew your daddy." He said, "I remember up there in Chicago this man was having a tremendous time selling coffee tables. No one was buying them." And said, "Your daddy walked by and said, 'Having a good business?'" Said he'd had a drink or two maybe.

"Naw (No)."

He said, "Wait a minute and I'll sell them for you."

And said, "Your daddy got up on that and started dancing." You know, the Fred Astaire type. He'd make Fred Astaire look like an amateur. People gathered around, said, "That man sold more coffee tables. Your daddy, he was a tremendous salesman and entertainer."

When it comes to music, people came to our house for music. And it was my daddy. But my oldest sister was also talented, but my middle sister was a fiddle player, played it for my daddy. My next sister, the one four years older than I, played the piano and she now plays about nine instruments. I'm proud to say that in high school they wanted her to play "American in Paris."

Well, she couldn't read music, everything she did was by ear. She went down and bought the old 78 disc of the "American in Paris," took it home, and I can remember listening two or three times, and she goes back and plays it. She also was the pianist for the high school choir. All they'd have to do was hum the tune and then she could play it.

But that was the family. And then my brother played the mandolin.

Ada was a Baptist town, you did not dance in Ada. And Sunday, all businesses were closed and one theater was allowed to open after six o'clock on Sunday night. People would come out to our house outside of town for music, and there might even have been a few who danced together.

But anyway, back to my situation. My daddy had already told me, "You're more like I am than I ever thought." And then he died before he could explain it.

Chapter 06 - 6:50

Slow Talking Children

Guy Logsdon: About two years before my mother died and about seven years after I'd finished my doctorate at the University of Oklahoma, I was down visiting her. And just the two of us were there. And she said, "You know, your Uncle Claude," who was the oldest of the Logsdon family there, "wanted us to put you into a home for mentally retarded children."

I said, "What?"

She said, "Yeah."

I said, "Why?"

She said, "You wouldn't talk."

"I wouldn't talk? I don't know how to shut up now!"

"No, you wouldn't talk."

And about five years ago in the *Tulsa World*, there was an article about late-talking children. They're now doing a tremendous amount of research and they know that late-talking children come from musical families, and often are musically talented. And in the past years, many have been placed into homes for mentally retarded children.

And that explained many things to me. I was never encouraged musically. Everyone else in the family. I wanted to take piano lessons and up the road and up a hill the Lucas family had this big, old, old-time rock house, it's now been torn down, but she was a piano teacher. And my sisters took piano up there.

So I went up by myself and said, "I'm going to take piano." Second grade.

She had a sister who was a bit detached up in the head and she loved dogs, which means she had a good soul. She always picked up stray dogs and she'd lead them. You'd see her walking all over Ada with three or four dogs on leashes.

I went up one time after about the fourth or fifth lesson and those dogs came out after me. And I remember rolling down that hill, screaming like mad, with those dogs jumping all over me. I never went back for piano lessons.

And I guess I might have been sixth grade, seventh, I don't know, somewhere in there, my daddy had helped a traveling stove salesman from Muskogee who had been in a wreck. My daddy had taken care and, in turn, the family had become sort of family with us. They came down every year and visited out of appreciation for my mother and father. And I can hear him, he was outside the little door area, and he said, "Well, why isn't Guy William in there playing?"

And I can hear my daddy say, "Oh, he has no talent."

And I lived with that "no talent." Wanted to play the guitar. "You're not smart enough to learn to play the guitar."

So my brother had a guitar and every day in high school after school when others were doing homework John was working at the furniture store making money. I'd go home and I taught myself to play the guitar. So my guitar playing is strictly self-taught. As well as I had the privilege of knowing Eldon Shamblin, Tommy Allsup, and others. And I learned by watching. So I was the youngest.

And I tell people, "If you know western European folklore, you look at some of the children's stories, the youngest in every family is always considered to be the dumbest." Well, I was the youngest, and I also had this, "He wouldn't talk," and that "He should have been in a home but they wouldn't do it."

And musically in any western band, or any band in those days, the least talented always played the bass fiddle. So they bought me a Kay bass fiddle. And I learned to play the bass fiddle. I was about thirteen. Jean, Bobbie, my brother, and I, and then three others, we called ourselves the Western Seven. I should have said, they called themselves the Western Seven, because I was just this bass player back here.

And I'd watch my sister's hand, I knew what key she was playing by watching her on the piano. And I learned to play the bass fiddle by watching my sister's left hand.

This was prohibition days. Oklahoma was prohibition until 1960, and you bought through a bootlegger, or made your own, whatever. But these usually in town bought it from a bootlegger. And I should point out that the bootleggers in many communities were the charitable groups. In Ada, the primary bootleggers were the one who bought glasses, shoes, and took care of kids in school who needed help.

But anyway, I played the bass fiddle and we played at the American Legion Hut on North Broadway. Of course, I do drink, but in those days I said, "Man, you'll never see me take a drink." Because the things I saw, a thirteen-, fourteen-year-old. When we'd take a break they'd all go out to their cars, open the trunk, drink a lot of booze, come back in, and quite often that's where the fights started.

But one night, I'm up there standing, playing the bass, and a man fell out on the floor off of a chair. And a woman got up, took her shoe off, and hit him in the head half a dozen, I mean, just knocked the mortal fool out of him with the heel of her shoe. Put it on, went to the women's room.

He gets up, sits down, she came back out, looked at him, took her shoe off, hit him in the head four or five more times, put her shoe on, and they got up and danced.

I'm not smart enough to make this up. I'm telling you, I saw it happen. I said, "Man, you'll never see me drink." I was twenty-six before I took a drink and I shouldn't have done it then.

But anyway, that was the musical background.

John Erling: Did your father see you before he died, in music?

GL: Oh yeah.

JE: He knew that—

GL: Oh yeah, in fact, he bought a guitar and gave to me. And when I graduated from college he gave me a tape recorder because he knew I wanted to go out and play. He had changed his attitude.

But again, late-talking children, I tell the story because there are many people today who have late-talking children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, and they're doing a tremendous amount of research into late-talking children.

Chapter 07 - 2:25**Singing in Public**

Guy Logsdon: The way I started singing, I was not allowed to sing. And of course, in church and Sunday school an older brother and his friends always made fun of the younger one. “Oh, you can’t sing.”

So I grew up thinking, “Man, I have no talent, no anything. But I’m going to do it anyway.” And that’s part of my problem now. I’m going to do it whether they like it or not. Which means I’m still thirteen years old up in the head.

But in high school, my sisters and brother, they were gone. I was a junior in high school, and four seniors said, “Hey, let’s start a band.” We had a fiddle player, two guitar players, a drummer, and I was on the bass. Actually, one of the guitarists, Tony Wise, played piano, anything.

But anyway, we called ourselves the Diamond Dee Boys. We going to do a program for the high school one day. I said, “Would you let me sing a song?”

They said, “Well, yeah.”

And I’d never been allowed to sing. I said, “Well, here’s a song.” Because in those days Johnnie Lee Wills was at noon every day over KVOO, went all over everywhere. Cotton Thompson was the blues singer and he sang “Milk Cow Blues.”

[singing] “Well, I woke up this morning, looked out the door. Could see my milk cow goin’...”

I said, “Could I sing that?”

“Yeah.”

During that assembly I sang it and I got applause and I hadn’t been worth a damn since. I’ve been looking for applause ever since.

Junior in high school.

John Erling: First time you sang in public?

GL: Yeah.

JE: And in front of anybody, maybe?

GL: Yeah. That was it. In turn, Hank Thompson had a song that was popular in the key of D.

[singing] “I am a rovin’ gambler, I’ve gambled all around.” Well, that’s the song I taught myself to play the guitar. I’d sing it and play and I learned to play it. So that’s sort of my background.

In college, my friends were basically a year ahead of me. And I had friends who were the same age and all and younger, but I played music with an older group. But when I graduated from high school I didn’t have the best grades in town.

Chapter 08 - 3:50**Greatest Teacher**

Guy Logsdon: In fact, in telling my story, I want to tell that Art Harrison, Arthur D. Harrison, was a teacher in Ada High School. When I was a sophomore, this was when you went in and the teacher said, “Well, you’re going to take this and you’re going to take that.” And they signed. He said, “You’re going to take Chemistry.”

I said, “No I’m not.”

“Yes you are.”

I said, “No I’m not.”

“You’re going to college, you’re going to take Chemistry. You have to.”

I said, “No. I don’t think I’ll be going to college.”

“I don’t care, you’re taking Chemistry.” And he enrolled me in Chemistry and sophomore English. And he was the head of the high school annual, the faculty member in charge. He taught Chemistry and he taught high school English. He was the art teacher.

When I was editor of the high school annual, as a senior, working under him, I found out he had five masters degrees and was qualified to teach any subject in Oklahoma. He directed choirs, he taught Home Ec to the girls, he did a little of everything. If they needed a spot, he took it for that year.

Mr. Harrison had the greatest influence on me of any teacher I ever had. I think I made a D in Chemistry. But in English, I still remember, this is when you bought your own textbooks, sophomore English, first day, he said, “Take your books back and get your money back from the bookstore. You’re going to have a year of grammar because all other English teachers are too lazy to teach you grammar. They’re going to teach you literature. I’m going to teach you grammar.”

We didn’t look at Shakespeare, we didn’t look at anyone. We had grammar. And I’m not perfect, but I guarantee you, I know a little about grammar as a result of Art Harrison.

He taught Art. I had two years of Art with him. Like I say, I was photographer for the annual in my sophomore year. Worked with him there. English, Chemistry, anyway, he made me editor of the high school annual.

Art Harrison was an amazing teacher. And many years later, I was working on Woody Guthrie’s life, I go through the 1929 Panther Annual in Okemah, open it up, and there’s Art Harrison, who taught Woody Guthrie.

I went back many years later and interviewed him about Woody. And he taught Typing and Business. That’s where Woody—Woody was a speed typist. The man who helped him was Art Harrison.

I can go on about Mr. Harrison, tremendous man.

John Erling: Did he reference Woody Guthrie when you were in school, at all?

GL: I remember he mentioned him once because when *Bound for Glory* came out I think he sent Mr. Harrison a copy. I'd have to go back because, see, I interviewed him thirty years ago. And I don't remember all that he said. All I know is here is the high school annual and here is Mr. Harrison's picture. And I get over to the juniors and here's Woody Guthrie. Woody studied under him.

So, I feel honored that a man who taught Woody I also had as my greatest teacher. And a tremendous influence on me, because I was still a late-talking child in the minds of many. It explains many things that I even went through in high school. But I'm fortunate.

Chapter 09 - 3:15

Western Shop

John Erling: Did you have any inclination in high school as to what avenue you wanted to continue to study? Because you've gone on to much further education beyond high school.

Guy Logsdon: Well, it's hard to say. I really wanted to be a singer. I can remember I thought, "Man, I'd love to own a dance hall. But you have to sell alcohol. You have to let people drink, and I can't do that." Because I grew up in a non-alcohol setting. And I thought, "No, I can't do it." But I always deeply wanted to have a dance hall.

But, in Psychology, I wrote an essay and I thought, "You know, it might not hurt to be a psychologist." But then I figured you have to have more science and I wasn't interested in that.

I remember filling out, when you took your IQ test, and I don't think I ever did very well on those, but they had the occupation, you know, what you want to do. Well, as I was taking that I knew exactly what I was doing. I don't know if others do or did. And I made sure that it would come out that I wanted to be a farmer. Ha-ha-ha-ha. I said, "Man, what the hell else is there in life, I'll be a farmer."

But during this time my middle sister, Jean, still alive, tremendous fiddle player, learned from my daddy, she always wanted to be a cowgirl. Now, we always had at least two or three goats, a cow, and we had horses, at least one horse all the time. So we grew up with a little of the agriculture. We had two gardens.

But anyway, she wanted to be a cowgirl. She was a very talented artist and seamstress. So by the time she was college age she wanted to put in a western clothing store. This was back in 1947, maybe. There weren't two or three in the state of Oklahoma. But in those days, Ada had the third largest rodeo in the nation. We had the top rodeo performers in Ada. So it was not uncommon for young people to want to be in the rodeo world.

But my folks put the money together and put in, in the bottom floor of the old Juliana Hotel, very small, not much larger than this, the Western Shop. Western clothing, boots, saddles, you name it. And a month later she ran off with a cowboy. Ha-ha-ha-ha. They were married until he died a few years ago. They had six children.

But my mother had to take over the Western Shop. Every day at noon—this is when schools had an hour and fifteen minutes during lunch because we didn't have cafeterias—I'd go down and take care of the Western Shop while Mother went to eat. She's very religious and during the summer she had trips to make with the Methodist women, I took care of the shop, a week at a time.

But anyway, I had a great experience. I was wearing western clothes and boots, things like that, when it was not stylish. I still love it.

Chapter 10 - 4:00

Methodist Minister

John Erling: You went on and earned your bachelor's degree at East Central University in Ada. And got your masters degree, PhD in education—

Guy Logsdon: Right.

JE: Became a professor of education in American folk life at University of Tulsa, and you were head of the library science division. You were a fellow at the Smithsonian Institute.

GL: Yeah.

JE: This is all from somebody who is a late talker.

GL: Yes. Which, you know, is sort of surprising. Phyllis and I became very much wrapped up in the Methodist church. Not many know this but I love going to church camp, Camp Egan, which is out at Tahlequah. My parents loved it because I was gone for five days.

My brother was president of the district. I never got past recreation chairman. I taught folk dancing and you name it. I loved church camp.

But anyway, I had a girlfriend. Well, I was a senior in high school, or fixin' to start my senior year. She and I broke up one night and I was sitting there late in this big open area, and the preacher was talking to young people and all, and I'm just sitting there feeling sorry for myself. And I thought I heard him say, "Those who want to rededicate their life, come on down."

And I had always skipped all of that, I was not considered to be a potential minister. And I got up and I walked down. No one else is walking. And I thought to myself, "What in the hell have I done?"

And it was, "Those of you who want to be a minister, please come forward."

Well, I was one that when they told me I couldn't do it I always said, "By God, I'll show them I can do it."

And they said, "Well, Guy, you can't."

And I said, "Yes." And eventually I became a licensed Methodist minister, as a senior in high school.

I remember my first sermon was in Stratford. Sunday morning I'd gone down and gone through the test and was a licensed minister, which meant I couldn't do anything but talk. I went over to Stratford and I gave what I thought was a great talk. I'd worked hard and was a senior in high school. And a man on the front row went sound asleep.

When it was over he was the first one who got up and said, "Young man, that's the greatest."

And I thought, "You hypocrite." And so I kind of went into it with an element of hypocrisy.

But anyway, I stayed with it. And then Phyllis and I met at a Methodist church camp at Mount Sequoyah in Fayetteville, Arkansas. I was still going to be a preacher and wound up back at East Central. And I shouldn't tell this, but in those days, once a week each denomination in college gave a devotion, and it was my time, Methodist.

So I gave this devotion I thought was great. And it was probably February of '53. About four days later I get a letter from the local Church of Christ minister, handwritten, single-spaced, three pages, telling me why I was going to hell, if I didn't change religion.

I kept that for years but I think one of my sisters finally throwing things away threw it away. But—

JE: So you were going to hell because you were a Methodist? Or because of what you said in that devotional?

GL: I don't remember, just that if I wanted to go to heaven I ought to become a Church of Christ. I had all sorts of experiences.

But in turn, that fall, Phyllis came to East Central. I was a sophomore, she was a freshman. We met again. Then we were married December 28, 1953, two teenagers. I was nineteen, she was eighteen. We're still married.

Chapter 11 - 3:30

Woody Guthrie

John Erling: You're an internationally recognized authority on western and cowboy music. Bob Wills, poetry musicians, authority in the lifetimes and music of Woody Guthrie, so to talk about what you've done is going to take another session for sure.

Guy Logsdon: Well—

JE: But what drew you to Woody Guthrie may also be saying something about yourself.

GL: The thing is, we had music in our house growing up. We always, almost every night, daytimes there was music. Practicing something. But I grew up surrounded by music. And in college, my freshman year, that summer I'm over in the library at East Central and I find this John A. Lomax book, *American Folklore*.

And I took it and I read it and said, "Hey, the music I've grown up with at home is American folk music, fiddle and all." So I became very interested in studying folklore and folk music.

My brother-in-law, the one who married my sister out of the Western Shop, was just an old cowboy. After I had been given this tape recorder by my daddy, they said, "Daddy, would you play the fiddle?"

"No, no."

My brother said, "Get Bill to sing."

I didn't know my brother-in-law sang. My brother-in-law came in a little later and I said, "Hey, sing one of the songs you know."

And he did the old cowboy song, "Zebra Dun." Unaccompanied, he couldn't play an instrument or anything, just an old-time cowboy. And that sparked more interest.

So when Phyllis and I were married, someone in the family said, "Oh, you like folk music." See, I played a cowboy song on television before I'd ever seen a television show. Ada had the third television station in the state, KTEN. And they had a program where a lot of regional, maybe thirty-mile regional, would come in and do things.

And there was one program out of Claremore that, "Would you sing a song?"

I just went out and did it.

Said, "Have you ever heard of our local son Woody Guthrie?"

I said, "No."

Later I found out I had through Art Harrison, in a very light, casual way. But I got interested and the reason I have remained interested in Woody is I happened to believe as Woody believed. I believe in the working people of this country. I happen to believe that the destruction of the middle class and the working is killing this country.

And if we had Woody with us today he would be singing his heart out trying to save the working people of this country.

You know, I've had people say, "Labor unions are terrible."

Well, how the hell do they think the middle class came about? It didn't come through the generosity of the wealthy. It came through people joining together, demanding rights.

Well, I'm preaching now. I shouldn't—well, anyway, Woody's belief and he sang, he played, he had a very tough life. And yet, out of all of it, he overcame sadness and tragedy with humor. Woody had a tremendous sense of humor, and that I appreciate. If we don't have any humor we don't have anything left.

Chapter 12 - 11:30

FBI Investigation

John Erling: There's a point in your life that you were actually investigated by the FBI.

Guy Logsdon: Oh yeah.

JE: Because you had an interest in Woody Guthrie. So maybe you kind of need to lay the background on Woody Guthrie and how it was he was thought of to be a Communist.

GL: Well, Woody left Okemah when he was sixteen, at the end of his junior year in high school. Went to Pampa where his father was. Woody's mother had Huntington's Disease. That's the genetic disease that eventually killed Woody.

I tell people, "If Woody lived for no other reason he brought attention to Huntington's Disease," which had been called the "Closet Disease." If you had company and a relative with Huntington's you'd hide them so no one would see them.

JE: And the symptoms of that were what?

GL: Well, involuntary movement. You might have a cup of coffee in your hand and suddenly it flies out. And they said, "Man, she's mad at something." Well, she wasn't angry.

And then, it turns out that they learned through Margery Guthrie, Arlo's mother, that they couldn't swallow. The way Woody lived as long as he did is because Margery Guthrie said, "Feed him intravenously." And they kept Woody alive for many years through that because they can't swallow, talk, or anything.

But anyway, Woody was in Pampa. His mother had been committed to Central State Hospital in Norman. That was considered to be the insane hospital. But his father had been burned, his mother apparently had knocked kerosene over him. An older sister of Woody's had burned to death also when she was very young. And they said the mother created this, or that the daughter committed suicide because of her mother. All sorts of stories that Woody grew up with.

He winds up in Pampa with his father, because his father had been sent out to live with a sister who was taking care of him through his recovery from very serious burns. I can say, fire haunted Woody because the original house burned. His sister burned to death. His father was burned seriously. His daughter Kathy, Arlo's older sister, died from burns. And then Woody was severely burned before he went into the hospital.

But anyway, he's in Pampa, Texas, that's where he experienced the dust storms, not in Oklahoma. Because Okemah wasn't even in the dustbowl area and Oklahoma had the least amount of acreage in the dust bowl. Kansas, Colorado, New Mexico, and Texas had far more than Oklahoma. But that's another lesson in itself.

JE: John Steinbeck created—

GL: Well, part of it, but the word “dustbowl” came from a reporter, I forget the name of the newspaper, in Washington, DC. It's not in business anymore but his name was Geiger, I believe, and he was a reporter. He was in Guymon, Oklahoma, when a dust storm hit. This was in 1934. His article said, “Dustbowl hits...” and it had Guymon, Oklahoma, as the byline. And Oklahoma became the dustbowl state.

But anyway, Woody experienced all of his dustbowl experiences in Texas. He said, “You can go to Amarillo. That's where the wind blows, the oil flows, and the farmer owes.” Which is true.

But anyway, Woody married, had two daughters, and they had a son on the way. And went on to California that summer of 1937. He had decided, really, that that he'd like to sing. And his cousin Jack Guthrie, three years younger, who was born here in Oklahoma, not far from Bristow, had a radio show. And Woody was out and they were singing over KFED Hollywood. And Woody had experienced all of the dust storms and knew what was happening.

And on this radio show he had some songs like, “Do, re, mi, if you ain't got that do, re, mi, better go back to Oklahoma. Lots of folks back East they say, are headin' California way.” He did a lot of those.

While he was there, Jack quit the show and a friend of Jack's that Woody had met, Lefty Lou Crissman, was tremendous singer. So it became the Woody and Lefty Lou Show.

Then, in '39, I forget which socialist, there's a book he came out with, but Woody heard some of this. He was already critical of the hatred of migrants and the lack of work. And the artist who played, umm (stumped sound), can't think of his—I can see him, but anyway, he heard Woody in the show. And then Cisco Houston, they took Woody and booked shows up and down the coast, talking about the dust storms and the migrants and singing out.

But the man who had the social influence had a program and Woody heard him. And Woody's songs started more and more along that line. And then he wrote for the Communist newspaper in California. And as Woody said, “I didn't join anything.”

Pete Seeger, the same way.

So when the war started, Woody had gone to New York City. There he became a hero, early 1940, because he could sing dustbowl songs. Alan Lomax took him down to the Library of Congress and recorded. Bit by bit, they started identifying anything Woody did or anything Pete, different ones did, as being Communist.

Of course, communism had become the dead. If you're a Communist you're not worth anything.

They sang some songs, Woody became a part of the Almanac Singers. I can go on and on, but my deal is, if I took Phyllis, and we had two daughters at that time, I was singing, I'd learned about Woody, but didn't know a whole lot, took them to Norwalk, California, a suburb of Los Angeles. You see, in Okemah you couldn't find a copy of *Bound for Glory*, Woody's autobiographical novel. And in Oklahoma you had a hard time.

So I found one in the Los Angeles Public Library, checked it out, read it. I said, "Man, this man is a brilliant writer. He's great!" And I found an old ten-inch folkways recording that had "This Land Is Your Land" on it, which was not popular. And I said, "Man, that's a great song." So I learned it. This is while I'm teaching school.

JE: Right.

GL: In Norwalk, California. This was in the spring of '57. And I was pickin', I'd learned all sorts of songs playing the guitar. So they asked me to sing for a civic club in Norwalk.

So I did, one day at noon. And I got applause and it didn't mean anything until many years later. I said, "Here's a song written by Woody Guthrie." And I did "This Land Is Your Land," and they all just sat and stared at me. And I thought, "Hmm (thoughtful sound)."

JE: What was it about "This Land Is Your Land" that they froze?

GL: Well, it's Woody Guthrie. The name Woody Guthrie. It wasn't the song, it was the name Woody Guthrie. Because, see, the Hollywood directors, the Hollywood Ten, I forget what they called, anyway, McCarthy had this long list of dirty commies.

JE: Senator Joseph McCarthy—

GL: Yeah.

JE: ...out of Wisconsin.

GL: Yeah. One school year in California was all I could take. So we came back and Phyllis and I did songs in Okemah. We did a show or two featuring Woody's songs at the Crystal Theater. And there were some people in Okemah who didn't like it. But basically, because Phyllis's mother and father were highly respected they kind of overlooked me and let it go.

But then, in 1960, I go to Arizona and teach school. Was there three years and it was there that the John Birch Society turned me into the FBI. But I was told by a person that the FBI found nothing wrong with me. I wasn't a Communist or anything.

But those were the deadly years against communism. Many people were ruined. And I can say, with some pride, I taught high school English, junior and senior, and was a school librarian. And the leader of the Birch Society, one of the leader's son was in my class.

About four or five years ago they had a class reunion out in this little mountain town and invited us. Phyllis and I went back and that son of that man said, "I want to thank you." He's written some books and done some things. And he said, "If it hadn't of been for you I never would have done this."

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

GL: I said, "Hey, Woody Guthrie wasn't all dead then." But the hatred of communism.

And I can point out that my last year of '62-'63, we were out there three years before coming back and earning a Library Science degree at OU, they were really after me as an English teacher. I taught grammar, that was my primary goal, like Art Harrison, but also literature. The *Atlantic Monthly* had a deal at for fifty cents any senior could have three months of *Atlantic Monthly*. I said, "Anyone who wants to do it, fine."

All but one, it was not required. They came back and said I forced it on them and that there was a poem in there that was filthy. I still have some letters out in my file. They were filing charges against me. I got word they were going to get me canned.

I wrote the editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* and said, "It looks like I may be going to court. And if I do, you're going with me." Because the poem, it was a poem, they said was teaching filth. I forget what was in it even, but I was teaching filth and dirty things.

I get this letter back that says, "Fine, but that poem was written by a Jesuit priest."

And one of the leaders was a Catholic. So knowing that they were going to slip into the school board and have me fired, Celeste and I and some friends supporting me were there waiting for them when they came in.

The board started, and when it came my turn I read, "Jesuit priest."

And this Catholic said, "What's a Jesuit priest?"

So we knew this was the John Birch Society and they had turned me name in. The FBI didn't find anything. All I was doing was singing and teaching.

Chapter 13 - 6:27

Woody and Merchant Marines

Guy Logsdon: Woody joined the Merchant Marines with two friends, Cisco Houston and Jim Longee. During World War II, he was on three ships, two of which were torpedoed, in the Merchant Marines. And then he was drafted and went into the Army the day Germany surrendered. So Woody served and he served the country because he loved it.

But, at the same time, one story that I love telling, Nora Guthrie, Woody's daughter and I were one evening in New York City years ago with Jim Longee, three of us sitting up in the restaurant eating, visiting. Jim said, "Woody, one night we were in the bottom of the ship," because they had to go down to the bottom to sleep. "Woody was there and said, 'Hey, did you read my novel?'" The librarians have classified *Bound for Glory* as an autobiography, but it isn't, it's an autobiographical novel. And Woody should be studied in college and in high school as a great writer.

But anyway, he said, "We were there, it was dark, and Woody said, 'Hey, did you read my book?'"

And Jim said, "Yeah, and it's great."

He said, "Well, you know, sometimes I think what my mother had, I have. If I do, only Jesus can help me."

And Jim said, "Woody, I didn't know you were religious."

Woody said, "Yeah, I like them all. I just don't have a favorite. But my favorite people in history were Jesus Christ and Will Rogers."

Now, does that sound like a Communist? And a man against this country? He was religious. Woody was an extremely well-read man, and I have decided that I think he had a photographic memory. And I also believe that Woody was one of these like LBJ and others, they could take a twenty-minute nap, work three hours, take a twenty-minute nap, because all of Woody's friends said, "He'd work all night long writing."

John Erling: Did you get to be around him at all, Woody Guthrie?

GL: Oh no, I never met him. He was hospitalized and he died October 3, 1967. But by 1960, he was basically hospitalized and out of it. And I didn't have any money to go up and see him. But I interviewed some of his friends.

One thing, when Phyllis and I and the family, their two daughters at that time were living in California. Back in the spring of '57, there was a Pete Seeger concert at the Wiltshire Theater in Beverly Hills. And I knew about Pete at that time. So we went.

And afterwards, I went up and I told Pete that I was from Oklahoma and I loved Woody Guthrie. And we have been friends ever since. In turn, I just didn't have the money, but got back to Okemah and interviewed one of his very close friends. And I think I'm the only one who interviewed him. But there were a lot of people who did not want to talk about Woody at that time.

But I met his brother Roy, older brother, I knew him. And Roy's widow is still living. Woody's sister, Mary Jo, lives in Seminole. She's pushing close to ninety now, and has a manuscript that should be published but takes a lot of money to publish what she has.

I've tried to help her find a publisher and I'm still trying.

And Margery, Arlo's mother, Arlo's a good friend. We've known him—

JE: Is he—

GL: ...since he was a teenager.

JE: Arlo, the son of Woody.

GL: Arlo Guthrie. When they were filming *Bound for Glory* United Artists flew us out because prior to that they sent David Carradine, he and his daughter, Calista, were here in this house. It seemed like three years during one week. They sent him here to learn how Oklahomans talk. And Lord a mercy, I can tell stories about David Carradine here.

But anyway, we're out for the filming and met Woody's first wife, Mary, and he had one daughter surviving at that time, Susan. We met her and she was in the stages of Huntington's. His two daughters and his son, Will Rogers Guthrie, all three are dead. Two daughters from Huntington's, like Woody, and the son in a car wreck. And Woody knew they died.

His first daughter with Margery, Arlo's mother, and Woody's second wife in New York City. Margery was a dancer with the Martha Grand Troupe. That daughter died from a fire.

And then Woody's third family, one daughter died in a car wreck at the age of eighteen. Three children of eight children survived. That's Arlo, Jody, who lives in California, and Nora, who runs the Woody Guthrie Foundation in New York City.

But my point is, Margery is the one we met. Margery used to fly in to Tulsa. I would pick her up at the airport and she was pushing Congress and the medial world to start studying Huntington's Disease. It was called Huntington's Korea at that time. I drove her around Oklahoma. And since it was a closet disease I would sit in the car while she would visit with a family with Huntington's. Or if it were in a hotel or motel I'd sit down in the lobby and she'd go to the room and visit with them.

I don't think I ever met any family that had Huntington's. But this state had many families with Huntington's. I'd say Woody brought Huntington's out of the closet, but it was Margery who opened the door. I'm proud to say she was a very good friend.

They called and said, "She's dying," and I flew up and was there with her three days before she died. She died of cancer. And she came out of coma long enough to have a little visit.

So I can say, no, I did not meet Woody physically, but I met him intellectually and family-wise.

JE: Yeah, sure did.

Chapter 14 - 8:25

Oklahoma Hills and Cousin Jack

John Erling: Talk about the song, "Oklahoma Hills," that Woody wrote that's been adopted as our—

Guy Logsdon: Yeah, our state folksong. Woody was in California. I have his story he wrote that was published in a little songbook in 1937. Or it might have been '38. There's no date in it so we don't know the exact year. But he's at the Crissman family, Lefty Lou Crissman, the singing partner on 312 Magnolia and whatever part of California that is. And he said, "I was on the back porch tuning my banjo," 'cause Woody played the guitar, banjo, fiddle, bass

fiddle. Woody played a lot of instruments, self-taught, although not completely. His uncle was a fiddle player and he learned from others, but basically self-taught.

And he said this little boy came over, about thirteen, redheaded, said, "Where you from, Mister?"

And he said, "I got to thinking about when I was that boy's age back in Okemah, Oklahoma, and I wrote this song because good things to remember are excellent. But the bad things, forget."

So he wrote "Oklahoma Hills," and he used an old tune. Woody didn't write melodies, he wrote lyrics and adapted other melodies.

Lefty Lou, I even have a copy of what she had because I was with Lefty Lou two times through the years, made copies of what she has.

He said, "I thank you for accepting this song, and you can do anything you want to with it, just remember, it's not how much you have, it's what you do with what you have." And that was the end of that little statement.

So Jack had a wife and son but he also had a girlfriend. And she bought a nudie suit, dressed him up, and made arrangements at Capitol Records for Jack to have an audition. Hired four musicians, they went in and recorded some songs and one of the songs they recorded was "Oklahoma Hills."

They took the demo to Capitol Records and they said, "Hey, this is great. But we want you to do the same songs with the same musicians." And "Oklahoma Hills" became the number one country western hit in '45, I think it was. The war was still going on.

Jack had been drafted and was in the Pacific when it was out. Woody had been drafted, '46, and he heard it on a jukebox in New Jersey and said, "Hey, that's my song." Called Capitol Records. They—so Jack said it was his, "That's mine." So Jack told Woody, "Hey, Woody, if I hadn't recorded it no one would know it."

So it carries today. Jack Guthrie and Woody Guthrie. But I have sheet music that say Jack Guthrie only. They recalled all of those and reissued the sheet music as Jack and Woody. But I found one of just Jack.

But anyway, Jack's career went on and he died in 1958, I think it was of TB.

Margery told us—Margery was Woody's wife in New York City, said, "He came in one evening with a box full of one dollar bills because Capitol paid him \$1,000 for his part of the recording of the music." Said, "He came in throwing one dollar bills in the air, saying, 'We're rich! We're rich! We're rich!'"

She said, "I picked up one dollar bills from under the chairs, behind the sofa, under the bed," said, "he threw one dollar bills everywhere 'cause he was so excited."

Jack was very talented, a good singer, and an Oklahoman as well. His story is also interesting. I interviewed his sister out in Sparks, Nevada, and she did not like Woody.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

GL: Anyway, the way it became the Oklahoma folksong is the coalition down at Okemah, now that Woody is bringing money to Okemah, a few years back, I'll say three or four, I forget the exact year, the coalition said, "Let's get help." They took it and I forget which representative presented it with the story. And I think I wrote the story for them. They voted to make "Oklahoma Hills" Oklahoma's official song.

JE: In what year?

GL: Two thousand one.

JE: But I suppose, if you had tried to have done that in the '80s—

GL: Ohh.

JE: ...it still had a backlash, Woody Guthrie's name.

GL: Yes. We came here in 1967. Woody died shortly after, and I was asked to do a Woody Guthrie show at the city/county library.

JE: In Tulsa?

GL: In Tulsa. It was to be one Sunday afternoon after church. Phyllis, our daughters, we were at the Piccadilly Cafeteria going through to eat lunch before I'd go down. And behind us, I mean, right next to us this woman was saying, "Did you read in the paper that someone's doing that Woody Guthrie—" I mean, she was just raking me over the coals and Woody Guthrie.

Phyllis said, "Aren't you going to say anything?"

And I said, "No, what good would it do?"

And there was a man in Okemah, he's now deceased, and I have photos of what he put in his windows and all, he hated Woody with a passion.

But Woody Guthrie served this country. He loved Okemah. I tell people he loved his parents, he loved his siblings, he loved his cousins, he loved Okemah, he loved Oklahoma, he loved the United States. He did not like greed, poverty, and some of the evil that others perpetuate and put down on lesser individuals.

As far as I'm concerned, Woody Guthrie was an excellent, outstanding citizen of this country. Again, it's a shame we don't have him with us today.

JE: Could you do a little bit of "Oklahoma Hills"?

GL: [singing] Many a month has come and gone since I wandered from my home in the Oklahoma Hills where I was born. Many a page in life has turned, many a lesson I have learned, while in those hills I still belong. Way down yonder in the Indian Nation, riding my pony on the reservation in the Oklahoma Hills where I was born. Many a page in life has turned, many a lesson I have learned, while in those hills I still belong.

See, that verse "Where the oil flows and the cotton grows," Bristow, Oklahoma, thirty miles a little northwest of Okemah, had in 1925, the first real strong radio station. It later was purchased and brought to Tulsa as KVOO. That was '28 when they brought it here.

From '25 to September 1928 it was *the* station. KVOO stood for Voice Of Oklahoma. Rollestone was the oilman who started it and a year later Skelly went in with him, and then Skelly bought it and brought it here. But they had a big listening group.

Bristow's motto was "Bristow, Oklahoma, where the cotton grows and the oil flows." So Woody Guthrie's chorus had a part of the Bristow motto.

JE: He took their motto, didn't he?

GL: This was 1925 when Bristow had it. Woody took their motto—

JE: Right. Right.

GL: ...and put it into his song. Oklahoma had a tremendous influence on Woody.

JE: Heh—(sort of laughter sound)

Chapter 15 - 2:20

This Land is Your Land

John Erling: Let's talk another song that Woody did.

Guy Logsdon: Okay.

JE: And that is "This Land Is Your Land." What was it that inspired that song?

GL: Woody did not like Irving Berlin's "God Bless America." He felt like it was limited to a few. It seemed like it was for the wealthy instead of the everyday working person. He didn't like Kate Smith's singing style. He loved the Carter Family.

I like to tell people, and I'm the only one who believes it, I guess, but if Mother Maybelle Carter had been singing "God Bless America" chances are Woody may not, I'm just saying, may not have written "This Land Is Your Land." But he took the melody, adapted the melody, "This World Is On Fire," a Carter Family song, and that became the basic melody of "This Land Is Your Land."

We have to keep in mind, there was no middle class at one time. There was either wealth or poor. Some people forget that's really what brought people out of England to this country. They wanted to try to find a life of their own instead of being dominated by the wealth in England.

That's just my interpretation, but he let "God Bless America" stimulate him into "This Land Is Your Land."

JE: And I think they said that in the final verses he was actually protesting against what you talked about, the class equality.

GL: Yeah.

JE: "As I went walking, I saw a sign there." Can you say that part?

GL: I've never really sung that except when I have the lyrics before me. The one I like is, [singing] In the squares of the city in the shadow of a steeple, by the relief office I seen my people, as they stood there hungry I stood there asking, "Is this land made for you and me?" As I went walking, I saw a sign there, and on the sign there, it said, "No trespassing." But on the other side it didn't say nothing. That side was made for you and me.

Now Pete Seeger started doing that verse and Arlo does it. They're the ones who brought those two verses to attention.

Chapter 16 - 2:50

Union Maiden

John Erling: Woody and Pete were together out in New York and somebody coined the word "Hootenanny."

Guy Logsdon: Oh yeah.

JE: They had Hootenannies—

GL: Oh yeah.

JE: ...together out there—

GL: Yeah.

JE: ...and they sang folksongs—

GL: Yeah.

JE: ...didn't they?

GL: Yeah. The word "Hootenanny" basically came from them. But when Pete and Woody met in 1940, Woody had gone to New York City and was singing. And they loved him because he was the dustbowl singer and knew what he was singing about.

In turn, Pete wanted to travel with Woody and see what Oklahoma was. So, they're in Oklahoma City and they're at the home of a Communist and he had a bookstore.

They went to a meeting that was trying to unionize and organize and that's where Woody wrote, [singing] "There once was a union maid who never was afraid of goons and ginks and company thinks and deputy sheriffs who made the raid. She always got her way when she struck for higher pay. And a union man with a union wife leads a happy life. Oh, you can't scare me, I'm a stickin' to the union—"

Well, Woody wrote that in Oklahoma City with Pete Seeger. And Pete has told the story well, but a few years ago, I forget what we were promoting, it was in Edmond, doing a little song. Some men were there and they said, "Aren't you goin' to sing 'Union Maid'?"

And I thought, “This is Oklahoma and people are still saying, ‘We want to hear “Union Maid.””

So I’m proud of it, but Woody wrote that with Pete. He and Pete remained very good friends. They traveled together, and again, I’d like to say it’s Pete and Arlo who kept Woody’s music alive.

JE: I have a story here. They said that Woody was not radical enough to be a Communist. But the Almanac Singers, which—

GL: Yeah.

JE: ...you referred to became the Weavers. They wrote and performed the pro-labor and anti-war songs. Franklin Roosevelt had a program to build the economy.

GL: Yeah.

JE: Involved killing every fourth cow and plowing under every fourth acre.

GL: Yeah.

JE: So they wrote a song “Plow under Every Fourth Soldier,” which—

GL: Yeah.

JE: ...offended many people.

GL: But then they changed. Pete says he was never a member of the Communist Party. Indeed, they did write that and it caused a great deal of trouble and the Almanac Singers were immediately dropped from radio.

But when they reorganized, that was Pete and Lee Hays, the Almanac Singers, there were four of them, Harold Leventhal became their manager. Harold is the one who brought folk music to Carnegie Hall, New York City. And Harold brought them back after they had been banned, I’ll put it that way.

Chapter 17 - 2:30

It’s Been Good to Know You

Guy Logsdon: Nineteen fifty they were singing “So Long, It’s Been Good to Know You.” That was a major hit.

John Erling: Can you sing it?

GL: [singing] “I’ve sung this song but I’ll sing it again, of a place where I lived in the wild windy plain. The month of April...” and it goes on, “So long, it’s been good to know you. So long, it’s been good to know you. So long, it’s been good to know you. So long, it’s been good to know you. So long, it’s been good to know you. But this dusty old dust is gettin’ my home and I got to be driftin’ along.”

The one I like is, [singing] “The telephone rang, it rang off the wall. That was the preacher, he was makin’ his call. He said, ‘Kind friends, this may be the end, this is your last chance at salvation of sin.’ Well, the churches were jammed and the churches were packed, but the dusty old dust storm was blowing so black, the preacher could not read a word of his text, so he folded his specs, took up a collection and said, ‘So long, it’s been good to know you. So—’ I love that verse.

But that was Woody and his humor. He overcame sadness, tragedy, and an extremely hard life with humor. Again, very few people ever suffer the life that Woody did.

At fourteen, in Okemah, going up and down the alleys picking up scrap iron to sell, living alone, supporting himself, living with different families later. When you’re fourteen, fifteen, and yet, you have a sense of humor. He said that he never was in any of the plays at Okemah High School, but during the intermissions he would go out on the stage and just start talking. He said he never had anything planned, he said, “But I’ve have them laughing, and that’s what counted.”

Here’s a man with an extremely tragic life, up to the day he died.

JE: How old was he when he died?

GL: He was born July 14, 1912, and died October 3, 1967. He was fifty-five. But he was hospitalized by 1955. And he was still writing, but the arms jerking so much that there’s some things that you cannot figure out what he was writing because the movement up and down was so severe.

Chapter 18 - 3:56

Woody Most Creative

Guy Logsdon: I annotated the CDs produced by Smithsonian Folkways, the Smithsonian Institution. I did, oh, maybe ten CDs with Woody on them, not all, but many. And I’ve written some articles. I’ve given many, many programs around the country about Woody Guthrie. Of course, I did it with cowboy music too. People forget Woody’s father was a cowboy. Came to Indian Territory as a cowboy. And Woody knew many cowboy songs.

He was an all-around person. Wrote over three thousand songs and poems, two autobiographical novels, and a couple of books that haven’t been published, one I know of. It was a proletariat novel. Drew over five hundred illustrations. Woody was quite an artist. His oil painting of Abraham Lincoln hangs at the Smithsonian in the Folk Life and Heritage division. Recorded hundreds of songs, his own and old folksongs. And how many people have done that in about a seventeen-year period of life? Nineteen thirty-five basically to 1953, ’54, that time period.

There's one song he recorded just before his days were over, I love it. It was never officially issued. He wrote it while he was in Pampa. He had some songs he had typed out. He also was a sign painter during those days. And while he was in the Army they had him painting signs.

There's a poem, he said he was reading about kissing, "So if it's midnight and you're in the shade, just remember what I did, I gave her [singing] kisses one, kisses one. I gave her kisses one, kisses one. I gave her kisses one, she said that it was fun, so I kept on kissing on and kissing on. I gave her kisses two, kisses two. I gave her kisses two, kisses two. I gave her kisses two, she said she wasn't through, so I kept on kissing on and kissing on." It jumps to, "I gave her kisses four, kisses four. I gave her kisses four, kisses four. I gave her kisses four, and then she begged for more, so I kept on kissing on and kissing on."

There are about twelve verses to that song, but he wrote that in Pampa. And Woody wrote children's songs. Said this is the ironic part of the Birch Society and McCarthy and all of these people who hated Woody, and they destroyed so many Hollywood people.

But while they were criticizing Woody, *Captain Kangaroo* was on television and many of the children's songs that they were singing were children songs written by Woody Guthrie.

Phyllis normally does these, but [singing] "Put your finger in the air, in the air. Put your finger in the air, in the air. Put your finger in the air, hold it about a year..." You know, on and on. The NEA, the National Education Association and recording industry gave him awards for his children songs in 1946, I think it was. Yet, while the children were singing his songs, no one knew they were written by Woody.

John Erling: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

GL: So I love it. Woody Guthrie was this state's most creative native son, period. And as far as I'm concerned, he is this nation's most creative native son. Who else has written and recorded as much as Woody Guthrie, in such a short period of life?

Chapter 19 - 2:40

Cowboy Songs

John Erling: We could talk to you about other areas too. We could talk to you about Bob Wills.

Guy Logsdon: Yeah.

JE: We could talk to you about cowboy songs.

GL: Yeah.

JE: In the very beginnings, you know. I've often wondered about why we have cowboy songs, were all these people singers too? But we don't have other professions—

GL: See, cowboys were also writing and citing poetry. But songs was recreation at night as they sat around campfires. Hollywood and others, oh, they sang to the cattle. Now tell me what herd of cattle stampeding could hear a cowboy singing. In turn, one old cowboy said, “Most cowboys if they sang would start a stampede instead of stopping one. But Hollywood created the guitar and the cowboy.

If the cowboy had a musical instrument in camp it was a fiddle. The fiddle is the musical instrument that opened the frontier of every phase of this nation. Where would you carry a guitar on saddle?

I’ve seen Gene and Roy and Tex, give me a break, there’s no place to carry a guitar. This was nighttime singing and cowboys sang without accompaniment.

I did an album called “Traditional Cowboy Songs.” It didn’t go over too well. I didn’t know how to promote it, for one thing.

But a woman from California, a rancher’s wife, sent me a letter and it said, “I bought your CD out in Cody, Wyoming, and listened to it and it’s the worst thing I have ever heard. Everyone knows that cowboys played the guitar.”

Give me a break. They didn’t know what a guitar was in those days.

JE: So it was Hollywood who added the guitar?

GL: Yeah, oh yeah.

JE: The singing cowboy, Roy Rogers—

GL: Oh yeah, yeah.

JE: ...and all those?

GL: Folk music, I won’t say most, but all areas, there weren’t that many people who could play a musical instrument. They sang unaccompanied. It’s just like gospel music started with the shaped-notes singing. Where you’d see a note and almost develop perfect pitch in some people. They had no instrument, they had no organ or piano on the frontier, so they had to learn to sing this way.

That was true with cowboys. Makes no difference. Someone said, “Well, they played the harmonica.”

The harmonica wasn’t around until basically after the trail drives and the legend of the cowboy industry on trail drives was over.

Chapter 20 - 6:50

Bob and Johnnie Lee Wills

Guy Logsdon: Bob Wills, I have worked on Bob, but I’d like to point out Johnnie Lee. Everyone says, “Cain’s Ballroom, home of Bob Wills.”

I'm sorry, but the photos I have all say, "Cain's Ballroom, home of Johnnie Lee Wills." Bob's a legend because he had charisma, and Herman Arnsperger, his partner, told me this. Herman was Bob's first partner and he lived here in Tulsa, died here in Tulsa. Bob brought him up, and I won't go into all of that, but I said, "What was the difference between the two?"

He said, "Very simple, he couldn't play any instrument, he was a singer."

Well, was Frank Sinatra ever a leader of a band? No, he was a singer and add to it.

Bob had charisma. He could walk into a room with a thousand people and everyone would stop and look at him coming in. But he left in 1942, and it forced Johnnie Lee into having a band. And he made Johnnie Lee take over the KVOO radio show every day at noon, plus Saturday, and Thursday and Saturday night broadcasts in Cain's Ballroom. It was Johnnie Lee Wills who kept western swing alive.

John Erling: Yeah.

GL: That's my opinion. I have other bigoted opinions too.

JE: I remember up in North Dakota at noon, the Sons of the Pioneers—

GL: Oh yeah.

JE: ...coming on. Did you listen or have any interest in them?

GL: Yeah.

JE: Or the songs they sang?

GL: Yeah, but we saw them more in the movies. I grew up going to the Saturday movies and the Sons of the Pioneers. Roy Rogers was originally in the Sons, and then they went to Lubbock, I think it was. I forget all that happened. I booked them here, we had them out at the Fairground in 1974. Lloyd Perryman was the head of it at that time. I've got a photo of them down there they all signed for me.

This was the first western swing festival held in the nation. I talked the Fairgrounds into doing it. And we had the Sons. We had the River Road Boys out of Houston. We had Leon McAuliffe and Johnnie Lee. They lost money so it was never held here again.

But I had the Sons of the Pioneers, and Doug Green was writing as a freelance writer for the *Country Music Hall of Fame and Music City News*, and he was up here covering it. And he said, "I never was a Roy fan but Lloyd Perryman was my hero."

I knew Doug from some previous folk music gatherings and he said, "Would you introduce me?"

So I took him backstage and introduced him to Lloyd Perryman. And he was so excited that he went back to Nashville and within a year was organizing the group now known as Riders in the Sky.

JE: Umm (thoughtful sound).

GL: He's Ranger Doug. So I can say I had a little bit of a hand in Riders being here. And Doug has written about it a time or two, meeting Lloyd here and that I had introduced them.

I guess I was more interested in those who were soloists than in the group. Because I was never in a group, as such.

JE: So then, your favorite soloist?

GL: Well, Gene is great, I do some of his songs.

JE: Gene Autry?

GL: Yeah. Gene Autry. It's hard to say because in college I knew I wasn't a good singer but I took voice lessons every year I was in college. And I listened to some opera singers, I listened to music of all kinds and appreciate many, many vocalists. I don't have full appreciation of what we call rap and hip hop and some of this stuff. But favorite vocalists, it's just hard for me to say other than Cotton Thompson, Leon Huff with Johnnie Lee. Leon was a great singer, better singer than Tommy Duncan.

And I guess when it's all said and done, I like Woody Guthrie as a singer. This may sound strange, but when we came back from Arizona and I enrolled at OU to get a degree in Library Science, and that was the fall of 1963, I also said, "I'm going to sing." I took voice lessons from one of the great voice teachers that OU ever had. At the end, when I was graduating, I was offered a scholarship to study opera. And I couldn't afford it.

But singing requires more than just noise. It requires a placement of tone and all. I also was singing with a men's, I wouldn't call it glee club or anything, a group of male students there at OU. We sang at one of the OU football games, halftime, and I did a solo of a cowboy song that was involved. I did the lead, so I can claim a lot of things.

And actually, Phyllis and I were married. We had one daughter in Ada, wasn't a year old. And an agent from New York City came and said, "I'll take you on as a customer or whatever, but you have to promise one thing."

I said, "What?"

"You have to promise that you love being on the stage and singing more than you love your wife and your daughter."

I said, "I can't do that. I wasn't reared that way." So I turned it down. I don't know what would have happened. I had two opportunities and turned them both down. So there is laughter in life.

JE: So if there was a song, a favorite one, we close out our session, you'd go into what song?

GL: [singing] "Well, I woke up this mornin', looked out the door. Could see my milk cow goin', I could tell by the way she load. If you see my milk cow, please drive her on home, 'cause I ain't had no milk or lovin', ooh, since my cow's been gone."

That's the first song I ever did publicly. That's a Johnnie Lee Wills' song, that's the one I did in Ada High School with the Diamond Dee Boys. And I hadn't been worth a damn since because I got applause. Once you give applause to a young person you can pretty much kiss them goodbye.

JE: Well, thank you, Guy, for this time—

GL: Well, thank you, John.

JE: ...here today and what you've done. This is great. There are so many areas you're to be respected for what you've done in preserving history. We admire your work very much.

GL: Well, thank you very much. And I admire your work as well.

JE: Yeah.

Chapter 21 - 0:33

Conclusions

Announcer: This oral history presentation is made possible through the support of our generous foundation-funders. We encourage you to join them by making your donation, which will allow us to record future stories. Students, teachers, and librarians are using this website for research and the general public is listening every day to these great Oklahomans share their life experience. Thank you for your support as we preserve Oklahoma's legacy one voice at a time, on VoicesofOklahoma.com.