

California State College, Bakersfield

San Joaquin Valley Oral History Project, Bakersfield Sound

Recorded History

INTERVIEWEE:	Giles Edward "Tumbleweed" Turner
PLACE OF BIRTH:	Wisconsin, on the Mississippi River
INTERVIEWER:	Janna Jae (Greif)
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PLACE OF INTERVIEW:	Mr. Turner's home in Bakersfield
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JJ: I am interviewing Giles Tumbleweed Turner at his house here in Bakersfield and he was telling me that he has been in this area for a long, long time. Where was it that you were raised, Tumbleweed?

GTT: Well, I was raised back in Wisconsin, right on the Mississippi River.

JJ: Well, that is not Bakersfield!

GTT: Well, you asked me where I was raised! I was born and raised there up until I was old enough to get out on my own, which was after I graduated from high school. That has been a long time ago and I won't tell you what date it was, either.

JJ: Well, Darn!

GTT: But anyway, from there, of course, I always was interested in Country Music, even in that part of the country, in Wisconsin at that time, Country Music was a big thing. And also, another thing, it was a highly German community. And they had the little German bands which was quite popular, but it wasn't quite Country Music. It was a little German band and they were playing for the dance. So you had two choices.

JJ: You mean like the polka bands?

GTT: Like the polka bands. They played polkas and they played waltzes and they played two steps.

JJ: Schottish?

GTT: Schottish. Oh, they used to just kick up a storm when they played schottish back then.

JJ: Isn't that where Lawrence Welk was ?

GTT: Yes, well, Lawrence, he was up in Dakota. See, Wisconsin is just down the road a piece, you would say.

JJ: Right.

GTT: From there. But the music back in that part of the country was either the Country Music and by the way, there was a lot of good old fiddlers back there at that time, also.

JJ: I'm sure.

GTT: And it was just a switch. Of course now, the Big Bands came through some of the bigger towns and once a week one of the big time bands like Lawrence Welk or Kay Kaiser, Guy Lombardo, they all made the circuit through there, a little town called Dubuque, Iowa about 12 miles away. Dubuque was a good-sized Iowa town. We used to cross the Mississippi. It was just across the Mississippi. We have went down there by boat. It was about 15 miles down the Mississippi River by motor launch to Dubuque, went to a dance, then come back in the moonlight. It is quite a thing. Three o'clock in the morning prowling around on the Mississippi River. (Laughs.)

JJ: That's pretty nice!

GTT: But anyway, getting back to Country Music and California, why I started out, actually I started out in Coalinga which is just about 90 miles north of here up in the valley.

JJ: How did you get from Wisconsin to Coalinga?

GTT: Well, I went to Indiana first. And when I was in Indiana, Uncle Sam sent me a little notification saying, "I want you." And I ended up in the Marine Corps. And when I got out of the Marine Corps in 1946, I came to Fresno. And in Fresno, at the time there, I had a couple of drive-in theaters out on the west side, down toward Coalinga and Huron, really out in the flats out there. And while I had this drive-in theater in Coalinga, I got talking to Vern Steadry. He was the owner of the radio station there in Coalinga. And one day I said, "How come you don't have a Country program on your radio station?"

He looked at me kind of funny and he said, "Well, nobody's ever sold one."

I said, "What do you mean, sold one?"

He said, "Well, you got to sell advertising so you can buy radio time to put it on the air."

So I went back down to the drive-in and I got to thinking about that, so I went over to Huron and a few little towns around there and I came back that afternoon and I had a... The next morning, I went back the next morning. I went out that afternoon and sold his advertising for him. And I come back the next morning and throwed contracts down. And he said, "Hey."

I said, "Here's your contracts. Now what do I do?"

He said, "Well, I think I can get you on the air about noon.

I said, "What do you mean on the air about noon?"

He said, "Well, you sold the program. You got to do a Country Western program."

This was back about 1950, you know. This is back years. And so I said, "Well, that sounds all right."

And he said, "What's your name going to be? You got to have a name, you go on radio, you got to have a name."

Well, Coalinga is all tumbleweeds and wind and sand. That's the only thing I ever found about up there. So, I looked out the window and the old tumbleweeds were rolling, you know. And things were just a blowing and I looked up and I said, "Hey, how about Tumbleweed Turner?"

He said, "Say, that is good." So I have been stuck with that ever since. That is where I got the name of Tumbleweed.

JJ: Do you know that I don't even know your real name?

GTT: You don't know my real name?

JJ: No, because I know you by Tumbleweed. (Laughs.)

GTT: How about that! I am not going to tell. I won't tell. I won't tell what it is because after I told my name, you would just say, "Why don't I just shut this thing off and quit?" (Laughs.)

JJ: So you are going to be Tumbleweed.

GTT: I am going to be Tumbleweed. From there, I worked, well I sold out my drive-in theaters. And then I came down to Taft, California which I am always sneaking up on Bakersfield, here. And I worked for KTKR over at Taft there for a couple of years. And while I was working over there, I got acquainted with an old boy over here in Fresno. And he said, "Hey, I got a station up here and I think it was station KMAK, I believe it was when it was radio here. So, I put a program on here for, oh, I don't know, about six months. In the meantime, I was looking around. I was always looking, you know, at that time. I was always looking for getting across the street. It always looked better over there.

JJ: Right.

GTT: So I went over one day to KPMC and I talked to Paul Berman up there. He was the Station Manager. And he said, "Yeah, I think maybe we can use you."

So that is when I went on Kern County Country Time. And I was on there just approximately ten years before they retired me. And through the ten years, KPMC was a 10,000 watt three channel station. We covered about 14 states at night with this program. And it was a very

popular program because, and the music I played, I played all old Country Music. One guy called up there one night there and he said, "Don't you have any newer records than that?"

And I said, "No, the last record I got was 1934."

And he didn't think very much of that. But anyway, I just always played old time music and I used to stomp the fire under the fiddle tunes and I guess, when you was a little girl up in Idaho, you could still remember Kern County Country Time, couldn't you?

JJ: That's right. That's right. That's how I first knew about Tumbleweed Turner.

GTT: But anyway, as I said, I was there for practically ten years at KPMC and then I got sick and they retired me. And so, I spent a year in the hospital and I came out and I got to feeling pretty good again. And as a pastime now, as I am supposed to be retired which really I am retired, I took up, well, I tell you, I run into Kelly Kurtsey. He is the head of the Old Time Fiddlers Federation, the judges.

So he said, "Why don't you become a judge?"

And I said, "Well, I don't know whether I am smart enough to become a judge or not."

And he said, "Oh, I think you are."

So we corresponded and we talked and I went through and I judged a couple of contests that he was overseeing. And he put me, he said, "Well," he said, "I think you are doing all right." He said, "The best way is to turn you loose and see if you get run out of town or not when the contest is over."

So that is how I got to become a fiddler judge for the Old Time Fiddler's Association. And I have judged quite a few contests. The fact is that I get about maybe 10 or 12 a year that I judge. Like last year, I had the honor of being selected as a judge for the Northwestern Regional Contest up in Spokane. That was quite a thing, Jen. I know you are quite a fiddle player. And I think you know quite a few of those people because, by the way, a lot of your old friends from Weiser, Idaho, I met them when I was over there.

JJ: Sure.

GTT: But they had 200 fiddlers and each fiddler plays three tunes. That is 600 tunes I heard from Thursday morning until we quit on Saturday night at 11:00. And do you know that I didn't care much about listening to fiddle tunes on the radio coming home? (Both laugh.)

But we, it is something that is really, really nice. And I have had, I have met so many people that... Now don't get me wrong. What I say about fiddling because there is always Country Music where ever there is fiddle contest. There is Country Music, there is Bluegrass. It's just about a cross-section of anything there is in the country when you go to a full time fiddle contest. And you meet the people from all over the country. Their whole aim, actually, is just to hear good fiddle music, good Country Music. Well, anyway, I do believe that Country Music is

going to be around for a long time. I know that it is going to be because it has been 100 years, 100 years already. I know that. Now how many hundred years? My goodness!

JJ: Seems like it really right on the top of things right now, too.

GTT: It is.

JJ: And changing a little bit all the time. But, boy, like you say. The fiddle has not died out in the least. It has increased, if anything.

GTT: I was talking. I was up to, as I said, I make so many of these fiddle contests every year, you know. I was up to where do they have the dam up here? The dam across the river, across the creek up there? Oroville? No not Oroville.

JJ: Yes, Oroville.

GTT: Oroville, that is where it was! I was up to Oroville and I was talking to an old fiddler up there. He said, "What's that thing you got there?"

I said, "That is a 5-string fiddle."

He said, "Let me see it." He played on it a while. Finally, he got used to the fifth string a little bit and he sat there and he said, "Well, I finally found a fiddle that will work out all right."

I said, "What for?"

He said, "Well, I have been playing a tune and I always run out of low notes. This is the first time I have ever played that I had enough notes to go all the way down the scale where it belonged!" (Both laugh.) It just kind of proves and shows that I guess there is an advantage to them, too."

JJ: It shows progress.

GTT: That's right. It's progress. Actually what it is....

JJ: Let's back up just for a second because I was thinking about I want to ask you a little bit more about what's been happening in Kern County.

GTT: Okay.

JJ: When you, back about, oh the time that, well, of course, Buck Owens and Merle Haggard are probably the two best known names from Bakersfield. But back when they, even before they got their start, there was Jimmy Thomason. Right? And, well, of course, you were on the radio, KPMC.

GTT: Yes.

JJ: Then, right during that time period, what was happening that you remember, you know? Like some of the bands, some of the big name bands that came. And some of the TV things that were going on, too.

GTT: Well, at that time, Buck was just getting started.

JJ: Right.

GTT: The fact is, I'm going to go back another year, before KPMC. From there, I am from Taft. I made a mistake. I didn't come to Bakersfield. I went to Tulare. And I was up to Tulare there about a year. And while I was up there, Buck came in with his show. It was Buck and Bonnie and they had some artist with them, but I cannot remember which artist it is. Now this is back in about '60, I guess, or '62 or '63 or something like that.

JJ: It wouldn't have been Loretta Lynn?

GTT: No, it wasn't Loretta Lynn at that time. No. Loretta Lynn hadn't got started yet. She was still becoming a grandmother or mother at that time. That was before the pill, I believe.

BOTH: (Laugh)

GTT: Anyway, Buck was up there for a show and he come into town and I knew Buck from Bakersfield, of course. And he played out here at the Blackboard. I met Buck and I had been friends with Buck for quite a while. And he come up there and me and him went out there and had supper. We went out to dinner. No, we had hamburgers. (Laughs.) So after the dinner was over, why they come back to do the show. What it was was they was doing a show/dance type of thing. At that time, you would go in and you would do a show. And then you would dance a while and then you would do a show. Fact is, the audience all stood up right at the head of the stage. They never done any dancing. But they watched the show. The show was good.

JJ: That's exactly what we do a lot of time.

GTT: Do you? Yeah, I imagine so. I imagine you do. But that is what the type of thing at that time what was "in" I guess they called it. So, anyway, I will never forget Buck. Buck used to get, he used to kind of get after me a little bit. I used to pester him quite a bit, you know. And every time I would go out and see Buck and he would say, "Well, what do you want me to sing?" I would go and put my hands up like that and say "How about 'Back in the Saddle Again, Buck?'" And, oh, God, it would just tear him!"

We was up there in Tulare and I had to pull it up there and we had a big crowd up there that night and he just turned around and looked and he said, "That dad-gummed Tumbleweed Turner is in the crowd somewhere there tonight!"

(Both laugh.)

I wanted Buck to sing Gene Autry's "Back in the Saddle, Again." He could have shot me! Anyway, we were all good friends at that time. Of course now, Merle hadn't started yet at that time. And the people at that time, there wasn't too many shows coming in here because there was no promotions on it. Well, there was "Cousin Herb's Trading Post" was on.

JJ: Right. Now what did Jimmy Thomason do? Didn't he...?

GTT: Jimmy was with, Jimmy, at that time, he was with the Cousin Herb. He done some fiddlin'. Now Jimmy was a pretty good fiddler. And Jimmy always more or less had a band of his own and Jimmy played a lot of gigs. I mean, he did. He played a lot of gigs. And Jimmy would come over to the program when I was on KPMC. Of course, I interviewed everybody. Buck used to come over. Don Rich, him and Don Rich would come over there and we just spend an evening. That is one thing about the program I had. It was very home-like. It was very relaxed. I am telling you. And, of course, spend the evening. Buck was just getting started and he was, oh let's see. What in the world was that one together again on that first album that came out? That first album he did?

JJ: Oh, when they couldn't decide ...

GTT: They couldn't decide which way to go. But we wore that one album out. I know that.

JJ: Wasn't that "Act Naturally?"

GTT: Yes, "Act Naturally" came on that. And probably another Baglin at that time. He was...

JJ: "Tiger by the Tail" I think came a little bit later.

GTT: "Tiger by the Tail" that was the next one. That came right after that because...

JJ: "Love's Gonna Live Here."

GTT: "Love's Gonna Live Here." Again, that was a biggie that put him up there. And I know him and Don would come over and he would stop by once in a while because they weren't too busy right at that time. Of course, after things got going, every once in a while if he got a chance, he would call me on the phone. At least he kept in touch anyway.

And that was in the early part when Buck was starting out. Then, I think, a few years later, then Merle started to...

JJ: He started, actually, with Buck.

GTT: Well yes, but.... Well, he did. Well, they played together and they sang together. I mean, they worked together in the first. But, Buck, you know, he started out here at The Blackboard. He was just a guitar picker. Just a guitar picker. And

JJ: Bill Woods is the one he credits with....

GTT: Bill? Oh, yes. Then there was Bill Woods. My old buddy, Bill Woods. Of course, Bill and I have been friends, I guess, too, for 20 years. And, well the same as the whole works. And all of these fellows that have been in the business a long time like Bill, Jimmy Thomason, Buck, Merle. Every once in a while, Merle would call me. When Buck wants something, he will call me. I mean, I don't bother him. He knows if he wants something, I will hear from him soon enough. But anyway, I mean, that is real nice that way. You don't go bothering these people. If they want something you have, they know you are here and they know they'll get it. And I really believe

that is a fine relationship to have because these people are actually busy. They are actually busy. They just don't know what in the world they have to do to keep up with the image that they have and it is just almost impossible to see them. And so, I always figure, if they want me they can call me. I am usually home. And the relationship that way has been very well. Very well, indeed.

JJ: How about some of the big name people like, well, some of the bands who came through? Were there any bands that played the big dance halls like Bob Wills?

GTT: Oh, Bob Wills was here. Yeah, Bob Wills was here. I wonder how I missed that!

JJ: Did he use some of the local musicians or did he pretty much keep his own entourage?

GTT: Well, he pretty much, on tours, he carried his own band.

JJ: Yes.

GTT: Because he had his own style of music, just like Hank Thompson, when they'd come through. Hank has his own style. No one in the world could... you know, Hank Thompson...

JJ: Well, there were a lot of, a lot of those artists weren't there who played, who appeared just as artists at the Blackboard?

GTT: Oh, yes. The Blackboard, but still, there wasn't too many. Ferlin Husky and of course, later, Dave Dudley. And you know what I mean. The guys, they have all appeared in here. But most of them went I mean, most of your big show was at the Palomino in Los Angeles because of the size and the amount of people. Now here, they would bring people in here yet. They bring them in here. They got an off night or something. They will bring them in here. But you don't get them on Friday and Saturday night, though. It is usually a week night or something like that.

JJ: Well now, did Bob Wills play in the dance halls or in the... Now he didn't play like at the Blackboard?

GTT: Oh, no, no. At a dance hall.

JJ: Where were some of the dance dance halls?

GTT: Well, it used to be the old... what the devil was the name of that place out here? The Rainbow Gardens. The Rainbow Gardens. It's gone now. The Rainbow Gardens and ...

JJ: What is that, the Pumpkin Center?

GTT: Oh, you're talking about Pumpkin Center! That's out just the other side of the Weedpatch Highway, Pumpkin Center is, you know.

JJ: Now, that's a town now, but they used to have a big dance hall there, didn't they?

GTT: Oh, yes. Yes. It burned down and then they put up a Quonset hut out there. And it was, the fact is, the Quonset hut now is a used furniture store. They just quit having them. You know, as times improved, TV come out and things like that, people would rather seem to sit home and watch a set in their front room than to go out and really attend one of these functions and I guess I noticed that some of the programs or some of the shows that has been in here, it's the same principle that they want to you to bring in a good band, a good show, but they all stay home. They don't go to the show. They all wait and then catch them on a rerun on the TV or something like that.

JJ: Well, in Bakersfield, then, they had that one era, sort of, when they had all the big bands and actually Country Music wasn't too big then, around here. Or was it?

GTT: Yes, it was the most of any music that there was, Bakersfield has always been Country. I don't care. In other words, you have your philharmonic. They have their own situation there. And then they have their own association that brings it in.

JJ: Right.

GTT: Or society, I should say. And, but your big bands now also they bring in once in a while they have got, I don't know if it is through the college or where it is, but anyway they've got some deal where they bring in the Big Bands once in a while now. Like Jan Garber for instance, that type of thing.

JJ: Community concerts.

GTT: Community concerts. I think that's it. But

JJ: But still, most of the people are really Country...

GTT: It is mostly Country, because if you take a majority of all the places you have here... Now you have like some real nice restaurants here. You've got the Black Angus, for instance. It's a nice place. You have Lemucci's down here. The Tam O'Shanter. Now they play a little... They don't play hard rock. It is kind of soft. Just in-between and a little.... And they even play a Country tune once in a while. They even force them into playing a Country tune once in a while. And the same way at the now, the Bakersfield Inn, of course, they have a regular show there and but that is strictly now.... If I had two places to go and one had Country Music and the other one had a Rock band in there, I would go to the Country Music because I was never much of a Rock fan. The fact is, it drives me bugs. It is loud. Of course I probably, that Country Music could get just as loud. They turn it up good so you can hear. But anyway....

JJ: That's true. But you think most of the people in this area are, the majority of people, are probably Country oriented.

GTT: I would say because you notice, when you go, the fiddlers, the local fiddlers here they got a group of their own here. They've got a good get-together group and I notice that here, each month (they have this once a month) and each month there is always a few more people showing up. They started out, there's about six or eight people and now they get about 100,

couple hundred people to those things. And I believe that... of course, now, I might be a Country Music nut or fiddle nut or something like that myself, which I probably am, but I do like other music. I like Classical Music. I like Big Band music. Fact is, I've got records in there of Big Bands and Classical and everything else. But I don't know. I still end up listening to Country Music when I end up listening. Of course, as I said, I play one or the other, but it really does...

JJ: Well, I know that many, many more people are listening to Country Music now than ever did before. But, I want to ask you, too, what do you think the main reason is for Bakersfield fame as Nashville West, you know? Or some of the other names they have "Music City West" or you know, they have dubbed Bakersfield with all sorts of titles. And you go back to Nashville and they just are asking all sorts of questions. LA people, too, are asking all sorts of questions about Bakersfield. What do you think is the reason for that image?

GTT: Well, I think the image comes directly from Buck and from Merle. I do think between the two of them, I sincerely think that the image is shown there because when Buck is out on the road, it is always, "Buck, where are you from?" "I am from Bakersfield."

It's a whole story. "Merle, where you from?" "I am from Bakersfield."

And the Country it has just heard Bakersfield so much that the minute you see Buck Owens or Merle Haggard, it is associated with Bakersfield. And Buck does have a new studio over here and I understand his sound is terrific. He has very fine sound there. And I know that Merle and Buck have done the most for Bakersfield as far as making it the Country Music Capitol of the West, which we used to call it, too. Because, it is an association. They are well-known. They put on good shows. And they are really appreciated when they do go somewhere. And I sincerely believe that the whole thing stems from Buck Owens and Merle Haggard being the stars they are. And I think that they really do deserve the credit for making Bakersfield the Country Music Capital of the West. Now that is my sincerest thought about them, Janna.

JJ: Well, I have to agree with you. Tell me just a little bit about what you are doing right now. You talked about you have been into radio and judging fiddle contests and so forth. What are you doing right now? You say you are retired now. But you aren't quite retired.

GTT: I retired. I just sit around all day and look out the back window.

JJ: What do you do for fun?

GTT: Well, for fun now that's different. Oh I do a little promo work for a company that I have been with ever since they started out back in 1963. We started out in a little room just about the size of this dining room. And now, we're moving into a 90,000 square foot plant in December.

JJ: And who is that?

GTT: That is Marcus Berry, Incorporated. It makes sound. They make this fiddle that you play.

JJ: Well, you don't realize it, but probably you really do play a big part in everyone's mind, as far as all the Country Western people and probably other people, too. They always know

Tumbleweed Turner is right there and can supply them, you know, with whatever needs they have. So you really are a key factor in our industry, really, right now. So we are not going to let you retire.

GTT: Not going to let me retire? Well, they kind of put me on the spot, there, when they retired me because you just can't... I just can't go like I used to. And, I mean, it's ... If I stay fiddle around and don't mess around too much and take care of myself, go to an old fiddle contest now gives me spirit. I guess it is spirit or something. Why, I usually feel pretty good. But as far as going out, and of course, you know, I used to emcee a lot of shows.

JJ: Well, you still do.

GTT: Oh, yes. I go out and do maybe two or three a year. And I judge ten or twelve contests a year and I... Oh, by the way, I will tell you something else that I think you was back cutting Hee Haw in June last year or something. Anyway, but I tell you a place that I went that I think you might be interested in is the Colorado Country Music Festival. They have a solid week of Country Music and it is in Denver. It is in Denver every year. Gladys Hart, she is the President. She's been the President for 13 years. Last year was its 13th year. And it is a full week of Monday through Saturday night, and there was, last year, there was groups, and I mean good groups. These were all talented groups come in there and perform two or three nights of the week. No one gets paid for it. Not a soul. Everybody pays their own expenses. And they have the biggest get-together and there was never, the building we had holds 700 people. It was the Denver Continental Hotel where it was. And the room held 700 people seated and they figured they had 1000 people in there every night. The rest of them was standing or going or coming back to the chairs or something. It was the darndest thing you ever saw. And it was one of the most fabulous Country Music shows for a whole week. And it is just family. Just like we was sitting here talking at the table. That's the way you talk to someone at the next table and that is just the way it is. It is just people like that.

But that is something else that I think is going to be a coming thing when some of these Country Music Festivals and things like that because I went up there. This is the second year I was up there. And I really enjoyed it because you meet so many people. In fact, there was gospel groups even came in. I mean, from as far as Melin, Tennessee. That is down where you was down there.

JJ: Right.

GTT: And they were from Chicago and some Illinois in there. A gospel group came all the way out there to sing two nights and then turned around again and went back just to say they went to the Country Music Festival. And, publicity-wise, it is very good because, well, fact is, "Box Office" was out there. Let me see, what's that news? "Nashville News?" No. Oh, that good newspaper out of Nashville, she was out there.

JJ: I know what you mean.

GTT: Betty Cox. She flew out there. And, I mean, all the trade magazines make it and they usually stay about three days there, taking pictures. It has got to be quite a thing in Denver.

JJ: In Denver. Since Bakersfield is the Country Music Capital of the West, I have a good project for you in the next few years.

GTT: (Laughs.) Oh, now, Janna!

JJ: We will have you put on a big show, a Country Music festival on KKris Radio ???

GTT: I think that might be a wild idea.

JJ: I think that might be just right for you.

GTT: Well, the people coming from all over the country like they do, this has been, it's really been set up now and Gladys Hart does wonderful job on that because everyone knows Gladys Hart anywhere in the country you mention Gladys Hart, well they all know her.

JJ: Right.

GTT: But she is... she really takes care of it and she has built it up from just a little get-together of about three bands of thirteen years to now it is about as I said talent from fourteen states and also there is a couple of groups from Canada came down this year. So, it is quite a thing. But I think here, locally, I think let's go back to Buck and to Merle, they are the assets of the community that has made Bakersfield so well-known throughout the Country Music field. And it doesn't have to be just the Country Music field because if you just mention Buck Owens and Merle Haggard they are from Bakersfield.

JJ: That's right.

GTT: I think that image has been implanted on people's minds and I think in years to come, well, I actually don't think it will ever be a Nashville because of the size of our town and the foothold that Nashville has had in the industry....

JJ: That's true, we keep it that way, too.

GTT: That's true, we keep it that way, but I do think that it has done a lot, Bakersfield has done a lot for Country Music. As time goes on, I think it does more because Buck and Merle are always out fooling around.

I would like to also mention that some of the other people that were from Bakersfield and that came to Bakersfield, I should say. Of course, there was old Red Simpson, "Old Truck" himself. "I Am a Truck" himself. Red, I have knowed him for, well, let's not go into that, either. People will think I am getting old or something like that. And then there was a lovely that came in here and her name was Susan Raye and Susan, I think I done a show with Susan. Also, I done one with Yolanda, LaWanda Lindsey. We were over at Taft here. This has been three or four years ago, I believe. And me and her really got to cutting a swath and I am telling you, when you get a hold

of that girl you got a hold of something, boy. She turned you every way but loose. Boy, I tell you! But it was fun and we had a real, in fact it was a real good highlight of the show as far as I was concerned, because they were changing bands. And her and I got out there and we was doing a little ad-libbing and it got wild before we got done with it. But anyway, we sure killed the time while the band changed in there.

JJ: I'll bet. I bet. LaWanda is a character.

GTT: And then, of course, old Doyle Holly, he was with Buck a good number of years also. And he was one of the finest bass players, I think, in the country. And he was also the comedian of the band at that time.

JJ: Well, he is doing a lot of work on his own now.

GTT: I know he is. He's got his own band now. I think he is up in Washington or Oregon. I believe that is the last I heard that he was up in there. And, of course, any kind of Mayf Nutter, that is something else. That guy there, he is something else. Mayf is still a Country Music man, but Mayf has also done quite a bit of acting. He has been in quite a few of the shows. I notice every once in a while, you'll see a credit for Mayf Nutter in there and I'm kind of surprised. He doesn't look like he is when he is out here playing a fiddle or a guitar or doing an act or something.

And, of course, then our good friend, Tommy Collins, was always a good friend of mine. And Tommy was quite a song writer. And, also, he done a lot of shows and I believe, I believe Tom is back in Oklahoma now. I think he is back in there, some part of the country back in there, anyway.

And, of course, then there was a kid. The first Toys for Tots show, held in the Auditorium down here, I was one of the M.C.s for that first Toys for Tots show. And at that time, of course, Buck was putting this on. At that time, a kid come over to him and said, "Hey, I want to sing."

Buck looked at him and said, "You're kidding."

He said, "No. I want to sing."

So Buck said, "If you want to sing, go ahead."

So his name happened to be Buddy Allen which was Buck's son. And he sang and that kicked him off on the career that he is on today. Buddy Allen. And that is how he got started.

JJ: And he did very well, too.

GTT: He got started. And so, that is how he got started. I was there the night he started up.

And Buck said, "I didn't know that kid could sing a lick." He did! He never knew a thing about it until he just got up and sang one.

And, of course, old Bill Woods. Now, Bill and I have been old buddies. Bill was one of the finest piano players in the business. He plays violin. He plays guitar. In fact, I don't know any instrument that Bill Woods doesn't play. But Bill had the misfortune here, about three years ago, of having some trouble with one of his hands. And something went wrong in it. And he has had a series of operations. The last time I seen Bill, I said, "Bill, you doing any playing?"

He said, "Well, no." "But," he said, "I am practicing."

And I said, "Well, I thought you had practiced enough."

He said, "No, it was therapy". Playing the guitar was giving his hand therapy. He said, "It is not just like it should be. "But," he said, "I believe it has helped. Now maybe one more operation and it will be back again."

I hope so, because Bill really is a fine piano player. He can really play guitar, too. It doesn't make any difference.

JJ: Well, he has done a lot, too, to encourage the development of new talent here in Kern County.

GTT: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. He is always trying to help somebody.

Then we come to a little girl here that I had, the fact is, maybe I was instrumental in her starting out. And that is Marcia Nichols. Harold Cox in the Sooners here in town, I used to do all the, do all their M.C. of all their shows. They were just a young group starting out. Harold was about 16 I guess, or 15. And he run onto Marcia. And Marcia was one of the finest little old guitar players that ever hit the country. I mean as far as electric guitar, she just ate it up. She just EAT it up. I mean, just nobody in the world could stop her. And she played lead with Harold. And we used to go out on these different gigs and I would always front the show for them because Harold, he didn't want to, and so whenever they played something, we used to go up to the Tehachapi Prison and just tear that place up there. We had them hanging from the rafters and every place else up there! Of course, we did have an audience that couldn't get away from us anyway. That was for sure.

But anyway, they really enjoyed it up there. And Marcia, there was a misfortune here, her having an automobile wreck and she was killed in the wreck. I was sorry to hear that.

JJ: Just very recent.

GTT: Very recently, she had it. And we had another young lady here that was very good. In fact, she is still, she has some records out now. And, of course, that was Debbie Hawkins. And I always liked the way she belted out a song. She was a little bit of a thing, but man, I am telling you, there was more song and volume came out of that little frame than anything I ever saw.

JJ: It is amazing. You wonder where it all comes from.

GTT: Boy, she started out on a song, she would tip you right over the front. If you were sitting in the front, she would tip you right over backwards. And, of course, then last but not least, I want to mention, of course, that is another very good friend of mine and that is Bonnie Holmes. Now Bonnie and I have been friends for... Well, Bonnie, before she even started singing, was working at The Blackboard as a waitress in The Blackboard. And I knew her then. And she has come a long ways in music because, I don't know, she just had a way about her singing that I always liked to enjoy. It was kind of a, it never was actually a real sad song. It always just had enough into it that it would make you want to sit and listen to it.

And Bonnie now, of course, is married to Merle Haggard and I understand that also, I just heard the other night that she was going out and doing a few... at times she retired, you know. She was going to work in the office. I didn't think that would last too long, really, you know, because Bonnie was a great entertainer and I think she liked the way she liked people. I think that she just kind of got back into it and I am glad to see that she did. She is going out doing a few now. And she did travel with Merle there for a number of years.

JJ: Well, she has always been there behind the scenes in one way or another, doing backup vocals or singing solo work herself. And also, I think helping with songwriting.

GTT: Oh yes, oh yes. She is very good.

JJ: I think it is to her credit, you know, that both of her husbands, Buck and then Merle, do realize the fact that she has been instrumental in their careers. And, of course, she is a fine artist herself.

GTT: That's right. She sure is. But that's a few of the local people here that I think have done well. And it goes right back again to the same old thing. Why you ask a question earlier in the interview as why do people think of Bakersfield? Well, here is another reason. All these people are from Bakersfield. If they ask you where you are from, "I am from Bakersfield." It goes right back to is Buck Owens from Bakersfield? Is Merle Haggard from Bakersfield? Yes. Well, it all ties together. And I think that is why they have more or less have dubbed Bakersfield the Country Music Capital of the West. That is my own personal opinion of it.

JJ: We will hope it continues to grow.

GTT: Well, I do too. And it has been a pleasure having you by here today, young lady.

JJ: Well, thank you.

GTT: And I don't get to see much of you, but at least I got to see you for a half hour or so today, anyhow.

JJ: Right. Well, we really appreciate your time and also your efforts to continue Country Music in Kern County and we are glad that you are a part of our history.

GTT: Well, thank you very much. I always knew I would be a part of something. I like to be history. You take care now, Honey.

JJ: Okay. Bye-bye.

GTT: Bye.