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JJ: I am with Bill Woods at his home here in Bakersfield. I just read in a book last night that he is called the "Granddaddy of Kern County Country Music." And so we will find out a little bit about his own background.

Bill, where were you born? And tell us a little bit about growing up and how you got started in music.

BW: Well, Janna, getting back to the Granddaddy, I don't know what ...

JJ: I just called you "Granddaddy."

BW: Well, that's all right. I am really not a Grandpa yet. (Laughs.) But I did come to (Is this the mic right here?) Kern County when I was fairly young. I believe it was 1940 or 1941. I came to Arvin from Longview, Texas.

JJ: You were born in Texas?

BW: Mm-hmm. I was born in Dennison, Texas, about nine miles from Sherman, where Buck was born, you know. There is Buck Owens and Eisenhower, you know, was that close together.

JJ: I didn't know that.

BW: Eisenhower was born in Dennison, too. And anyway, I came out when I was fairly young and it was in the summer and I got a job driving a truck, hauling wine grapes to the winery. And I wasn't in music at that time.

I had been playing in church. My dad was a minister back in Texas. And so I finished the summer out there at Arvin and then we moved to Visalia. And I was playing, you know, off and on in church. I never had played professionally at that time except for a radio program in Longview, Texas one time. I ran off from home when I was about 14 and joined a band in Texas. We didn't play dances or anything. We played a radio show on KRRV in Longview, Texas. And then from Arvin we moved to Visalia and I went to work. My uncle was a carpenter when they were building the new Sequoia Air Base out at Dinuba out of Visalia. And incidentally, this has never been mentioned in any of the write-ups.

And so, it was still summertime and I decided I wanted to be a carpenter. I had tried just about a little bit of everything, service stations, you know and everything when I was back home. So I helped build that Sequoia Air Base. And then I went back to school. I went back to Visalia High.

And Woodlake is a little town about 14 miles, I believe it is southeast of Visalia. The Sequoia Mountains, my dad got elected to pastor the church out there, so we moved out there and I'd drive back and forth to high school every day and I would go in early and I would work in a café from about 4 or 5 in the morning until school time. And then after school, I would go down to the hotel, the Johnson Hotel and work in there running the elevator until about midnight. Then I would drive back home again. Over and over and over, you know. So that kind of saved me for the hard road of the music business that followed later. And I don't believe there is any business in the world. I have done all kinds of work. Slings a sledge, running a jackhammer, boiler maker. Everything. But, actually, there is no work as hard, mentally, as the music business if you really get in there and work, you know.

JJ: Success? The more success you attained, probably the more difficult it is to keep on top of it, you know.

BW: That's right. It's awful hard, you know, like some of the guys in Bakersfield that's on top right now, Buck and Merle. You know, they don't get there by just somebody kind of showing them the way. But they got to get there on their own. It's a lot of hard work. Hours and hours. And to actually get on top like you said, it is harder work than ever because you've got to be a little bit sharper than the thousands...

JJ: They expect more.

BW: They expect more and you've got to be a little sharper than your competition in order to stay there, because there is a lot of competition in the music business.

Anyway, I went back to school. It was Visalia High then. They have named it Sequoia High now. And this was back in when was this? In the second World War. And I went from Visalia to Los Angeles, me and a couple friends of mine. And we was going to go to work in an aircraft factory and we like to starve to death down there. So we made it back to Visalia and I left and went up to Oakland in Richmond, California where I went to work up there for Permanente Metals Corporation as a boilermaker helper. And boilermakers, I guess a lot of people don't know what that is. But you work with steel. You bend plates. You do a little welding. You do ship vetting, layout and everything and I was pretty young then and I got to be foreman at night on the

graveyard shift and I worked that for quite a while and then I went to US Steel Company as a boilermaker.

But in between times, what started me in music professionally during the time I was with Permanente Metals Corporation, all these movie stars would come up. They had what they called Bond Drive programs, you know. Selling government savings bonds to help buy the shells and stuff. And people like Charles Stead? (You wouldn't remember him.) And Lola Lane, they were all movie stars. Victor Mature, I could go on and on. But they would come up. And I formed a little group that we played behind them on these shows downtown. And we would go to different defense plants and play and entertain them during their rest time or their lunch time and sell bonds, you know. So that.

And then, finally, I started playing one night a week on the side there and the first professional job I ever had was with a guy by the name of Elwood Cross. And he is still a DJ at KEAP radio in Fresno, California. And shortly after that, I started my own group but I still worked the job, too, you know. And then, I left there later and came back down to Fresno and organized a full-time band. We played places like The Barn in Fresno and different places. And then I got tired of that. You know, music was off and on with me. I always used it as a secondary thing. And then I went to work for Peerless Pipe Company driving a truck and hauling pipe two days a month.

So then I came, after Fresno, I came to Bakersfield again. And this was about the year '45, right in there. And I still didn't play professionally all the time. I got a job running the shipping and receiving department in Valley Office, and played music on the side.

Then after that, I left and went to Vegas and played over there a couple of years.

I could go on and on. But let's talk about somebody else.

JJ: (Laughs.) No, no. I want to hear everything you did. That brings us up to the time when you took over The Blackboard. I would just like some of your impressions of Kern County music, you know. Some of the maybe the big stars who came through and maybe what you did at The Blackboard to promote Country music and some of the stars you featured.

BW: Well, Janna. Before, I think we covered this earlier, before I went to The Blackboard, when I came back from Vegas, I played a place called Hank's Place and later on they changed the name to The Clover Club and then I played a short time at The Lucky Spot. And I went to work for Governor Jimmy Davis and I was gone for about a year and came back and then I went on the road for Tommy Duncan after he had left Bob Wills. And while I was on tour with Tommy Duncan, The Blackboard called and they wanted a band leader. They had a band, but evidently, they couldn't decide who was the leader and this and that. Then I turned in my notice in Seattle, Washington and came down. This was 1950. And took over the band at The Blackboard.

JJ: Okay. Was The Blackboard the spot, the Country Western music spot in Bakersfield? And what were some of the other ones in outlying districts?

BW: Well, at that time, way back there, really the going spot was Clover Club. And that is where I first met Bonnie and Buck. And, you know, they had just come to town. And then, the Lucky Spot was a real good spot. And The Blackboard. The Blackboard was a lot smaller. In fact, they enlarged it, I think, three times after I went there. And Buck and all the guys worked with me. And gradually, The Blackboard got to be the Number One spot in the early 50's and it remained that way as far as night clubs is concerned in Kern County.

Right across from The Blackboard there was a little place made out of a big, big boiler tank that was actually a nightclub across from The Blackboard and they called it Tank. So you wouldn't believe the spots at the time. They were, how would I compare it to other clubs, other towns? But they were, you know, just really dumps! You know what I mean? You know, the one I was on, too, I noticed a lot of the real hot clubs were more or less dumps.

JJ: Really dives!

BW: But it was the place that was doing all the business. But then The Blackboard emerged as the nicest and the most popular club well, I would say, anywhere between Los Angeles and Sacramento.

JJ: Who were some of the stars whose names, you know, most people would recognize who you had appearing at The Blackboard?

BW: Golly, that takes a long time because we, after well, I hired a drummer that was with Bob Wills by the name of Johnny CuvIELLO. And he was known as the Texas Drummer Boy. He recorded a song with Wills that was a big hit, a drum solo. And, see, the first band at The Blackboard, I believe, was Billy Mize and Cliff Crawford and I believe Jack Crandall on piano. Incidentally, Jack played on the first records that Bob Kaleb made on a little label called Pep. And, of course, from time to time, the guys would come and go and would change. Then Buck came along and went to work with us. And I think he was with us like, maybe five years and it just happened like maybe Billy Mize would go somewhere and Buck would work. And Buck would take off for a couple of days or a month and Billy Mize would work. But Buck was with me, I guess, like five years there.

JJ: You actually started Buck's singing, didn't you?

BW: No. Well, as far as singing, Buck started as a teenager over around Arizona. And he was more or less like me. He played, you know like, gospel music and everything. And he had a band over there. I can't remember the name of it. But I think that Buck's professional singing started at The Blackboard because he never did like to sing. In fact, I hired him as a guitar picker. I didn't know he sang at all. But finally, one night, we talked him into singing and he sang at that time in a real low key. I think that Hank Thompson or some of those guys were some of his idols. But he had a real good voice, even in a low key. And we found out he could sing in a high key and we kept raising his keys and I think that Buck is still mad at me for him being so hoarse so many nights walking off the bandstand. But we kept raising his keys and he got to where he could sing tenor to Bill Monroe.

JJ: Yes, he could really hit those high notes.

BW: Oh yeah. He, Buck, he always liked to pick guitar. He would sit in the background and play guitar unless we just got behind him and said "Buck, just get up there and sing a song." And when he did, the crowd just reacted to where they all loved him. And he got to where he could do a Rock and Roll song just as good as he could Country. And, in fact, the first recording contract he had was under two names. One name was Buck Owens. The other one was Corky Jones. And...

JJ: Was Corky Jones a rocker?

BW: Yes, he was a rocker on the same label. And he recorded, I think, "Down on the Corner of Love," in the Country and he recorded something about "A Hot Dog Stand" or something as Corky Jones. And both of them were great. And at the time, during that time, you had to do about every kind of music so he would get up and do Rock. He would sing Rock. Just get his little Rich or those guys, then he would turn right around and do like the "Wabash Cannonball" or Country and just a great job, you know.

And, of course, we were there a long time at The Blackboard. Worked hard. Seven nights a week and two shifts on Sunday. And so then, of course, we will skip a little. During this time, we booked... Well I remember one artist that got real big, real big during this time. Buck knew him over in Arizona. A guy that had his first hit out on Columbia and we started booking guest cards every Tuesday and Wednesday nights. And Buck said, "This guy is a friend of mine. And I think we can get him over here." And I think, among the first personal appearances that Marty Robbins ever made was at The Blackboard. And I remember that he drove over from Phoenix to do this personal appearance. And he was a lot like Buck. When he came over there, you know, he'd get up to sing his songs 'cause he had to, but he wouldn't get off the bandstand! After he would get through doing his songs, he would play the steel guitar a while. And he would play the piano for the while and just make the rounds on the bandstand. You know, he just loved music. And that's lots the way Buck was because he would play all the instruments. In fact, he would rather play than sing at that time. And I guess now, he is kind of glad that everybody wanted him to sing because that is where he has made it big.

That is about as far as I can go, right now, without some questions.

JJ: All right. What about some of these other places like Pumpkin Center and some of the outlying districts? Weren't there some large dance hall type things and some of the big names actually, I guess, just played not as guest appearances or concerts, but for dances?

BW: Yes, there was, in the early 50s and late 40s, well, a WAY back there, there was the Rainbow Garden. And they had Country music. Well, they called it Western back then.

And they had, well like the Muntz Brothers, Johnny Muntz, and Fiddlin' Red Huckabee and there was a place down the street called the Rhythm Rancho, which was a little dance hall. Hodel Johnson was there. There was the Barn, which is the Moose Hall, Stockdale Moose Hall now. And then, but the most popular in the early days was (I'm saying in the early 50s) was the

Beardsley Ballroom. It was out on Roberts Lane. It burnt down later. But they had like Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys, and Johnny Lee Wills, T. Texas Tyler and all the big stars of that day. And that was one place that Merle was a kid then. And he said that he used to go out there and he didn't have the money to get in. He would stand up on his bicycle to see where he could see in the... They had a screen wall, you know. Up so high. He would stand on his bicycle seat and watch Bob Wills because he didn't have a dollar to get in. (Laughs.) I didn't know Merle then, but I guess Bob Wills would have had a fit if he had known Merle Haggard would be what he is today. Or even Buck, you know, playing over at a little club over there, for a little nothing.

And getting way back to Rainbow Garden and places like that, before the Beardsley Ballroom was so popular with Wills and all the fake Western names, Maddux Brothers and Rose appeared at the Rainbow Garden. And then, later, they had a hall in Pumpkin Center called the Pumpkin Center Community Hall. And the Maddux Brother and Rose and Ray Price and a bunch of them appeared there.

At that time, Willie Nelson was fronting the band for Ray Price.

JJ: Is that right?

BW: That's a way before Willie Nelson ever had a hit song or a hit record.

JJ: He is big right now. We just came back from his home country, you know, Texas. And everybody was talking about Willie.

BW: Yeah, well Willie, you know, made it real big several years ago and then he went in to Nashville and got lost in the shuffle for a lot of years. And he just sat back there for all those years and kept getting madder and madder and so, finally, he just said "The hell with it." He went back to Texas and he thought Nashville had won out because he went back to the 19 and 40's music back to the first big hit he had, "Blue Eyes Crying in the Rain." We started doing that back in Las Vegas in the late 40s. Just an old song.

JJ: And the following year, the young kids actually went back to the real old stuff and he's getting all the young kids.

BW: Yes. He is playing the old genuine what they called Western music background and seems like his following is the young kids. College kids. All like that, you know. I guess because they think he is a renegade.

JJ: (Laughs.)

BW: But he has a lot of talent. A fine songwriter.

JJ: Yes, he is. I was just looking at some of these people you had told me were guest artists at The Blackboard. Some of them like Lefty Frizzell and, of course, you just mentioned Marty Robbins, Hank Thompson and George Jones and Rose Maddux and Tex Ritter. It goes on and on and on. Who are some others that you remember?

BW: Let's see. Where were you there? Rose Maddux, Tex Ritter, Johnny Vaughn, Tommy Duncan, Merle Travis, Patsy Kline, Connie Smith. Johnny Horton did his first appearances in his career at The Blackboard with us. That was when Buck was with me. Jim Reeves, Bob Bloom, Del Reeves and Chester Smith.

JJ: Wade Ray

BW: Wade Ray

JJ: Jimmy Dickens.

BW: Jimmy Dickens.

JJ: Little Jimmy Dickens.

BW: And, golly, Rose, did I say Rose Maddux?

JJ: Yes, you did.

BW: Rose made a lot of appearances there. Lefty Frizzell. Well, you just name anybody that was big in that time between the 50s and the early 60s and we had anybody that was any name at all. We booked them. And of course, well, we had the Canadian Sweethearts and Buck had met some of the people over in Arizona when he was starting out over there. And he had heard of a lot of them. So we got our heads together and we decided who we wanted in next and we had a big waiting list, you know.

Well, you figure, well Buck was with me about the first five years. But over a period of 14 years at The Blackboard, we booked guest stars two nights a week for 14 years. So you figure it out.

JJ: You had plenty.

BW: And some of them, quite a few of them we had return engagements, but I guess we just booked about everybody in the business.

JJ: Right. What do you think of Bakersfield being called the "Nashville West?" Or "Little Nashville?"

BW: What do you mean, "What do I think?"

JJ: Well, do you think that is accurate? Do you think it is like a Nashville West? Or do you think it is because of Buck and Merle probably primarily? I know it is not as big as Nashville. Bakersfield is not as big, but it seems like maybe from Buck's success and now from Merle's success it is called that.

BW: Well, yes, I would agree with you 100%. I don't know who started that, and I can't remember what year they started calling Bakersfield the Nashville West or the Nashville of the West, but I will just give you a few examples. Now, you take, well, we will say Hollywood. There is like maybe 300 recording studios there. There are possibly a couple of hundred night clubs

that are going full force. There is, well just anything in the music industry, you know, is probably 1000 publishing companies.

And then, you take Portland, Oregon, for instance. It is the West. There is like 30 night clubs there. Thirty Country night clubs. With steady bands. I could name a lot of places, even Phoenix and Las Vegas. Well, Bakersfield. There is no studios here outside of Buck's that I would say, that I would agree that could cut a quality master. And up until then, we had one little studio out here that was a pretty good dub studio. And then there was another little studio. But we'll say that there is one recording studio here in Bakersfield. And of course, it is comparable to anything anywhere, I think, quality wise. And so, there you are, you know. One recording studio.

Okay, there are probably ten clubs that play weekend Country music. There are three clubs that go steady. There are about 12 Country musicians playing steady in clubs in Bakersfield compared with hundreds in Vegas, Hollywood, Phoenix, even over on the coast there is quite a bit of action going on over there. So, I would say that strictly, I mean strictly, the name Nashville West came when Buck got so big. And you know, Buck arrived to the number one spot about eight years before Merle ever recorded, see? And

JJ: And he kind of arrived at a good time, didn't he?

BW: Well, yeah. At the time Buck came along, we was fighting Rock music—Little Richard and Fats Domino. Of course, they were great in their field, you know. And, but, I guess there was—you couldn't give a Country record away at this time. The Blackboard was going seven nights a week, but Country records wasn't selling anywhere, maybe two or three artists. Maybe Eddie Arnold and a couple of the old timers, Tennessee Ernie, some of them were selling a few records, but Country music was dead. And the time that Buck came along, he had a real refreshing, different voice. He had different materials. He had collaborated with a guy by the name of Harlan Howard and he came out with some real good, fresh material. And incidentally, the funny part about all that, during this time, well there was the Talley Studio. Fuzzy (Owen) and Lewis Talley was shopping around for material and I remember one day Harlan Howard was sending a lot of songs to Fuzzy Owen and at that time, they was trying to cut kind of a Top 40, Country Top 40, you know. And they didn't want, he looked over these songs that Harlan Howard had and turned them all down.

Okay, like "The Blizzard," "Heartaches by the Number." I could go on and on. He turned them down. I said, "Fuzzy, you'd better think twice.

He said, "Oh they are good songs, but they are just not what are selling today."

So Harlan and Buck got to be good friends. They started collaborating on songs. Buck recorded some songs on a little label called Pep Records. And on a little unknown label, he started getting hot as a firecracker. You know, refreshing voice, refreshing material. And everything like that. And at this time though, Buck was playing lead guitar for Tommy Collins and even some of the Pop artists like Nat King Cole. He couldn't resist.

And I know every time we would go down to Capital, Tommy Collins would say, "Ken," (talking to Ken Nelson) you ought to sign this boy. He is good."

You know, at this time they wouldn't sign anybody hardly. And then, after Buck made a big dent with his little label, you know. He was fighting these big labels with a new artist on small labels. He was tearing them up on the radio, you know. These disc jockeys was playing the hell out of his records everywhere. So Columbia offered him a deal. They all came at once. Columbia offered him a deal and Capital offered him a deal. And he picked Capital and you know the rest. You know.

JJ: Yes.

BW: He came along at the time that they had to have something different. And that is what fledged him. He started scattering the Rock and Roll music everywhere. And then, of course, some of the other artists followed through. And then, Merle came along and it just all added up. Buck went to the Grand Ole Opry as a guitar player for Tommy Collins. So it just, you know, when Buck started making appearances all over the world and everywhere, they just started focusing, you know, on Bakersfield. And then Merle came along. And, you know, the two of them...It just really...

JJ: Yes. Got going. It was both of them from here. Well it really, I think it did have something to do, though, with Bakersfield being, you know, it is such a Country area. In the mid-30s they had all the people, all the Okies, people from Texas and Arizona who came out to seek their fortunes in California. And Buck and Merle both had such similar backgrounds in that their families were completely destitute.

BW: Well, Buck was picking cotton in Casa Grande, Arizona and Merle was picking grapes in California. So, you know...

JJ and BW: (Laugh)

JJ: And just in Bakersfield. They didn't go to Nashville to earn their...

BW: That's what I started to say a while ago. You got to hand it to those two guys. Both of them. I remember Buck, when he first started getting hot, he was tearing everybody up in the business. You know, I mean, music-wise. And that is the first time Nashville started reaching their hand out and trying to bribe him and everything else to get him to go back there, you know. And so I know Buck told me one time, he says, "You know, that Nashville is a big place and a big music scene, but you know, if I went back there, I wouldn't be there a month and I would be one of them."

And I think he really used his head by staying out here. And then, when he went back there, they looked up to him, you know.

JJ: Yeah.

BW: And Merle did the same thing. They was asking him to move back there and I think that both of them really used their heads by staying here. And then, when they'd go to Nashville, why, you know, all those supposedly Big Wheels, they meet you at the bus. I noticed that.

JJ: They don't take you for granted.

BW: That's right. After you're back there, you know, the minute an artist gets a foothold, they try to swallow him up.

JJ: Right.

BW: They get him back there and promise him the moon, and when they get back there then they are just another little fish in a big pond. You know.

JJ: Right.

BW: And I would say, getting back to the question, I would say that really, Buck and Merle, first Buck and then Merle, I think that together, they are the only reason really, that Bakersfield was even called the Nashville or the Music Capital of the West. And the reason, I think, was because the nation's, I mean the world's top Country artists were Buck and Merle and they lived here. So, outside of that Bakersfield is nothing, musically, I'll tell you that right now.

JJ: A lot of people are disappointed there. Country music forced...

BW: Like, people call me, you know, and they are getting a record out or something and I will say, "Man, don't come to Bakersfield if you are getting started and want to make a living here. I said, "Merle and Buck were outta here, but the only stuff they do here is benefits. But they go back where the big Country like is: Detroit, North and South Carolina. Do appearances. But you can't tell those people that. You know, most of them think when they die, they want to go to Bakersfield. You know. Because Buck and Merle is here. But, you know, just because Buck and Merle is big, it's not that easy.

JJ: You almost have to be involved with their organizations.

BW: You got to either, you know we have even had several artists that when they would get their first records out on major labels would move to Bakersfield, you know. They would stay for a while, and then leave, but it is a rough place if a musician is thinking about making a living here, you know. Unless he is already in. Unless you are a member of one of the steady bands here. And then it is just a living, like \$200 a week, something like that. But it's not as most ever make it big. A record is the way to go, you know. Then if you get big and want to move to Bakersfield, that's fine. You know. But there is not everybody that can hit it like Buck and Merle, you know.

JJ: One thing we didn't cover, and maybe you can just tell me a little bit about the radio and TV things. What were the very earliest radio, Country radio stations? I know you had a big part in them.

BW: Well, there was before TV, there was radio. Country radio. And way back in the 40s, the first radio show I remember hearing here was a 15-minute noon time program featuring strictly Bob Wills' music on KERO, which later on was Channel 10, which was one of the first TV stations here. And then, later on, I can name you a lot of DJs. I had a DJ show.

JJ: On about every station.

BW: Every station, over a period of years, every station in town except KLYD. They are a newer station, you know. And then, well, heck. I brought Ferlin Husky into town. I met him up Salinas when I was with Tommy Duncan. I talked him into moving here and took him out and helped him sell radio time and he got a disc jockey show. So then he did real well around these parts before he went to record for Capital.

JJ: That was on KBIM, wasn't it?

BW: Yeah.

JJ: And you told me once... No. KCMC was kind of the pioneer of Country music you said.

BW: Western music back in the 30's.

JJ: Early, early 1930s. And then KZIS is the one where you and Ferlin and Lewis Talley,

BW: Fuzzy Owens, Oscar Whittington, there was a bunch of them. We would just follow each other. You know, we would be on like maybe 30 minutes and we would be talking and the other one would take over, you know.

JJ: Right.

BW: Then, TV, there was a guy out of Tulare that started KAFY radio which I was a disc jockey on it when it was out in an old Army barracks out on 24th Street. It was a Pop station. But I did a 30 minute Country show every morning. And the guy that owned that... TV was coming and everybody was jumping for it. KPMC had the first choice because they were one of the first experimental TV stations in the United States. But when the TV grants came along, well they turned it down. They didn't want it. So the guy that owned KAFY radio started KBAK Channel 29. And at the same time, KERO got a grant for Channel 10. And I am not sure of the time difference, but KAFY...

JJ: It's awfully close.

BW: Channel 29 went on the air first and, if I am not mistaken, I believe Jimmy Thomason had the first TV show.

JJ: Right

BW: And then, shortly after, Cousin Herb got the second one on Channel 10.

JJ: You were on a long time, weren't you?

BW: Yes, about 10 or 12 years. And the...

JJ: What was your group called? Cousin Herb and the...

BW: Trading Post. And, of course, we continued on booking at The Blackboard. And we would have a deal that the guest stars that appeared at The Blackboard would appear on Cousin Herb's TV show to plug The Blackboard, which worked out great, you know. And then, The Blackboard picked up the tab. So it was real great.

And there was several TV shows after that like Country shows. Jimmy had one. I had a TV show two different times.

JJ: Tony ??

BW: Yes. Tony had the latest one here. And then there was—Billy Mize had a TV show at one time. Jelly Sanders had a TV show at one time.

JJ: Is that right?

BW: Golly, I can't remember. I can't remember. There is another guy had a TV show here for a while.

JJ: Then, of course, national TV. I mean Hee Haw kind of brought a lot of things to Bakersfield as far as that, too.

BW: Oh, yeah. But then, of course, well Jimmy Thomason had the last long-running TV show, I think. He was on several years, I guess 4 or 5 years. And then Tommy Fox had a show, his was on cable which didn't reach out to get everybody covered. You know, the metropolitan part of Bakersfield. But all in all, Country music really, I mean speaking club-wise, TV show-wise has covered more or less had gone to pot really, here in Bakersfield.

There was no daily TV show and there is only three steady clubs. You know, it is not making any headway.

JJ: It is not part of the national scene, anymore.

BW: Yeah. That is right. Hee Haw came in and there is so many country shows you can get, you know, like the Buck Owens Ranch Show, Hee Haw and you know, the ones coming out of Nashville. The TV stations can buy them cheaper than they can hire a local band and it has the big names on it. So there is the difference.

JJ: Well, there are some stars, though, who live here. I mean kind of propagated by Buck, but like Susan Raye and Luanda Lindsay who just moved. And quite a few, oh, like, Nate Metters. Doesn't Tom Brumley still live here?

BW: Yes, Tom still lives here.

JJ: I think that maybe some of them got their start through Buck and ended up staying.

BW: Yes, he brought a lot of the, you know, when he started the Omak Corporation, he brought a lot of the big stars in here to live and work out of here like Freddie Hart. He's one of the biggest that comes to mind right now. And of course, there is...

JJ: Do more people live here? They pretty much stay, I mean, live where ever they were when Merle started his band, don't they? Then they just go on tour with him?

BW: Well, when Merle first started his band, it was local guys that played the clubs with him. And up until the last year, everybody that played for Merle lived here except well, now, they live everywhere, you know. But his drummer and Roy Nichols and Lewis (Talley) and Fuzzy (Owen), they live here. But they are scattered out a little bit now. They do most of the personals back East. So they just, when they get ready to go, they join up, you know. Or record or whatever.

JJ: Well, I think we about covered everything and I really want to thank you. You certainly are an encyclopedia of knowledge about Bakersfield Country music, that's for sure.

BW: Be sure you her name Jackie Kennedy.

JJ: Don't I wish! Okay. Thank you.

(Bill Woods was born on May 24, 1924. He died in 2000.)