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Interview with: Jon Corneal

Interviewer: James M. Denham

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JD=James M. Denham

JC=Jon Corneal

JD: Today is May 22, 2020 and I am here once again with Jon Corneal and we are here to talk about his memories of his music career. “Good morning John.”

JC: Good morning Mike.

JD: Before we get to California and Connie Smith, I’d like to ask you a couple of things that we may have forgotten about your earlier experiences in Nashville. What was it like when you first went to the Grand Ole Opry? What did you think, first of all when you first went in there.

JC: Well we waited in line all day long, got rained on and had to lean up against the building. It needed a porch but didn’t have it so we were just dodging the rain.

JD: Were you going to the show?

JC: Yeah, going to see the Grand Ole Opry. We thought we were gonna have to pay to get in and then Cousin Jake [Tullock] told us the bass player for Earl Scruggs sees us standing in line and he said, "Hey boys, do you want to come in the stage door with me?"

JD: How many days had you been in Nashville before you got to go to the Grand Ole Opry?

JC: Not long.

JD: That was one of the first things you wanted to do. Do you remember who was playing that night?

JC: Well I know Flatt and Scruggs, I'll tell you what was the impressive thing to me that really stuck. When we went through the door there was a fireman there on duty. He was the key of the highway my friend. His name was Mr. Bell and as long as you know....He remembered me as long as you called him Mr. Bell, Mr. Bell, Mr. Bell.

JD: So he was kind of an icon. Did he have a uniform and everything?

JC: Oh Buddy! A hat and the whole nine yards everything, he was a fireman back then in Nashville that was special stuff.

JD: So you go in the backdoor I guess.

JC: Back stage door

JD: So you go in the back door, better than the front door so you didn't get a chance to see the front door. What did you see?

JC: I saw Johnny Cash come through there one time back when he was skinny. He had the best dressing room of all of them.

JD: So you go in the back what was the back like? When you went in that first day, what was the first thing you saw in there that caught your attention?

JC: Well it was just a dressing room, with a Barber chair in there. That was his [Roy Acuff's] throne and there was always whiskey. Anybody that wants a shot, ya know, help yourself, ya know.

JD: Outside or in his room?

JC: Of course, in his room.

JD: Did everybody go in the room, coming and going? Or it was just special people?

JC: Just special people. When Sam Bush's Daddy brought him down from Bowling Green and he knew Roy. He's already a good fiddle player and Roy said, "Hey Son can you play that fiddle?" Yes Sir. So he said play me something. So he whooped out his fiddle and he played a couple tunes or two and he said, "That's alright boy. Next thing ya know his daddy says, "He's gonna have you as guest, and he said, "don't be nervous now. After that they went a lot and go hang out. He liked his fiddle playing and he liked seeing a kid play. Oh Roy he was something.

He'd always come out swinging a Yo-Yo sometimes two. He was a Yo-Yo aficionado.

JD: You mean a real Yo-Yo?

JC: Oh Buddy! He taught Nixon how to yo-yo.

JD: No kidding!

JC: Yeah! He gave him his own personal presidential Duncan yo-yo.

JD: Walk the dog and all that?

JC: He could do it all.

JD: Around the world?

JC: He had a million and a half dollar stradivarius violin. He would prop that thing on top of the very end of his fiddle bow and sit the fiddle bow on his forehead.

JD: I've seen that on television.

JC: Something else.

JD: Who are some of the other people that you remember that day?

JC: Jimmy Stafford had a box camera. One of those old black ones.

JD: Was he in the line with you?

JC: Oh Yeah! He had me taking his picture with all kind of celebrities. "Boop, boop, boop." Ah man, we got a chance to sneak in on Chet Atkins recording sessions on RCA studio B and back then they didn't have electronic locks and we walked in, right into the control room and the sound we heard; I never heard anything so good. Never, never, never. It turns out that Stafford's hero, was Chet Atkins was recording and producing his instrumental album. There was always Hank Snow who played a Martin D-45. He had his own way of flat picking. But anyhow back to the Grand Ole Opry.

JD: What was it like when you played there for the first time?

JC: You know how it is, you usually get butterflies.

JD: Were you thinking, man I made it now! I'm at the Grand Ole Opry?

JC: I was thinking more like, this has helped me get there. We were working with Roy Drusky then when that happened.

JD: Tell us a little bit about that trip. This is Jim Buttrum you said.

JC: Hillous Buttrum, the dude that played with Hank Williams. He turned me on to a lot of people, he introduced me to a lot of people. Benny Martin being one of them. He also introduced me to Jim and Sudy Baker who became dear friends, they were so good to me. They'd have me over for supper I even babysat for them when Jim was playing the Opry and Trudy was out playing with an all-girls band. She played bass She's one of the girls, in fact, it's her sisters, the Calloway sisters they were background singers in the movie, Music City USA. You could see them all standing up on the platform on one of those scenes. They had a house right on Vanderbilt Place which was on the western end side of Vanderbilt football stadium. There was one point in time after California when I didn't have a trailer anymore. In the early 70's when I got the job over at Glaser' I rented half of a duplex. I ended up going to a job in Huntsville Alabama. When I came back my car was gone, I thought someone had stolen my car but as it turns out they had towed it away. It was on a Friday and it was towed for the Vanderbilt football game. They had bought all the properties, they just eating it up, like Pac Man.

JD: So you are playing with the Wilburn brothers and then things had kind of run their course with the Wilburn brothers so you hear about Kitty Wells.

JC: Well yeah, there wasn't even a drummer, Leo Taylor had quit. Leo was married to Ruby Wright who was Kitty's daughter and they were having trouble, I think. So anyhow I went on the road with them and I had to be on the top bunk, which is number 3 bunk. You know what that does.

JD: Yes!

JC: I'd get sea sick almost.

JD: How many folks was on the bus sleeping like that?

JC: Well, just the band. I think Odell Martin was playing guitar. Bill Phelps was his special guest, he had one hit record. I forget the name. In fact Dolly Parton was singing on that first hit record on monument. Anyhow, John "Bobby" Wright who had been on McHale's Navy, he was the son, he was on it, anyhow there was a guy.

JD: McHale's Navy, did he play a character on the Television?

JC: Yeah, the young fella, the blond haired guy. They weren't shooting and he was on the road with his folks.

JD: Had you played with her before? Not really, Ok.

JC: So it was a political guy in that band name Paul. Paul was like a duplicate Chet Atkins. He tried to learn everything. Later on ...honored him. Johnny Wright, Kitty's husband was driving the bus. Paul was sitting behind him, whispering, whispering, Paul didn't like me, it had nothing to do with my playing, it was just personality, and he didn't like me. So he poisoned it with me, with them, with Johnny and all. I didn't last long with them.

JD: Where were the stops, where did you play, do you remember?

JC: I remember one for sure it was Newport News, Virginia. Another benefit besides the \$50.00 a day was they'd pay 20% on records sales. They'd have us hawk their records off the stage right after the show. Wilburn only paid 10% so I thought, "well, ya know, the rumor was that those guys, besides getting the 50 they made another 50 selling records. When I worked for the Wilburn brothers we did a lot of shows with Loretta Lynn. Loretta Lynn would sit in a steel chair right on the foot of the stage, at the foot of the stage. She signed as many autographs as you wanted we sold the records and she signed her autograph on the records.

JD: That really improved the sales, a thousand times I'm sure, right.

JC: She was so loyal to her people. She stayed there, the very last one. She's old fashioned the way stars used to be, they just loved their fans. So many now, a lot of them are snobs and they don't even bother, but the old ones did.

JD: So the Kitty Wells tour didn't last long.

JC: No, no it didn't.

JD: You go back to Nashville and you're still looking for work, right?

JC: Yeah and that's when the Connie Smith opportunity come up. There was a big tour coming up. It seems like it might have started in New Orleans at the Civic Auditorium. I remember we actually played behind Bob Wills. Wow! By then he didn't have a 22 piece band. He had one guy with him, a guy by the name of Tag Lambert.

JD: Was that the first time you saw Bob Wills?

JC: First time I saw him in the flesh. We did a couple of big shows in Texas, the big cities, Dallas, Houston that kind of thing and Bob was on their show. But after that he wasn't on the California show.

JD: Did you all open for him? Is that the way it worked?

JC: No, our band backed him up. They contract one of the artist band and we were the band.

JD: Was Connie on stage too at that time with you all at that time or did she come out later?

JC: She'd come out later. We were backing him up and Bob had his fiddle and his cigar. He always had that tortoise shell cigar holder and a cigar in it and back then he didn't mind lighten that sucker. They didn't have all these laws like they have now. Let me tell you a quick story. I had a dream one night, and in my dream I was talking to Bob Wills and he was right in front of the back of this flex diesel bus the one that looks like a big loaf of bread with the big scoop on the back. It was dark metallic green colors, he was wearing gabardine shirt pants western, beautiful. All the accoutrements a matching belt, fine looking boots, a

Stetson of course. A lot like the one I'm wearing, a lot nicer looking. Anyhow, I said, "Bob how is it you ever make all those years one nighters and he said, "Wash n wear boy, wash n wear. [Laughter]And I woke up laughing. My wife is a witness.

JD: Did he still have it, did he still have it even at that point or had he slowed down a lot?

JC: Oh No! He was still in his prime then, ya know, in the dream, now this is in the dream.

JD: What about in the flesh when you saw him.

JC: No, he was an old man. It wasn't long after that I saw him in a wheelchair in billboard magazine or one of those news trades.

JD: So what was Connie Smith like to be around and to play with day by day, daily?

JC: Well we weren't around her that much for the simple reason she flew to all of them.

JD: I see

JC: Unless it was something short of a hop.

JD: So she wasn't on the bus.

JC: No, No, No! Back then we traveled, the whole band in a car. Five of us maybe, pulling an equipment trailer, it was a Pontiac wagon. We would pick her up at the airport and back then it was just easier to fly than have all the hassle.

JD: Did you all practice a lot?

JC: We had a nice long rehearsal, that was it, that's all it take if you listening and paying attention. Most really fine players, they don't even need that. I couldn't tell you the people I've backed up over the years and we never had rehearsals. They just bring them on and they be playing with a guitar and saying ... you had to read their lips.

JD: Where were the places you all went on that tour and how long did it last?

JC: Well I'm not exactly sure how long it lasted to be honest with you. We only had a couple of days off during that period. We had driving time days off and days we just had to wait. I remember going and playing miniature golf with everybody. Everybody went and played, that was something to do. One time we were in Austin, Texas, and we had a chance to do some jamming and uhh, I am not sure who came up with the ideas. ... Jamming at the laundry mat because it would be a place to plug in our stuff. We went to a laundry mat and asked them if

they'd mind some country music. They said, "Oh Lord, come on in." We made a bunch of friends and we played a while buddy.

JD: Was it good for business? Did people all of a sudden start bringing in their dirty clothes?

JC: They were already there in the early days in television all the women in curlers watching as the stomach turns and they got a T.V. monitor on the wall. Anyhow when we got out of Texas ... Well we had a San Diego gig in that big auditorium it sticks out in the harbor, big city auditorium coliseum looking thing. Then we went on up to Long Beach and we did a show there, that's when I looked up my Uncle Howard my mom's younger brother and he was from Orange County Harbor City which was next door to Long Beach and I invited Uncle Howard over and he invited me home. I had a Jug of Seagram's 7 with me and he drank 2 so we drunk a bunch of that and I felt like crap the next day but anyway he got me back before they left. Ya know they were checked in at a motel.

JD: Was that the first time you ever went to California?

JC: No, when I was about 13, my whole family went out there to visit relatives. Then we went to Fresno or Bakersville. We played both places but I can't tell you which one was next. But Fresno, we would usually go to a country joint in town somewhere, there always seem to be one that had a band. We'd go there we wanted to sit in basically and just had some fun and that sort of thing. Usually, Roy Clark was on that tour, he was a partying fool, buddy, Oh my. He'd always sit in and do his

thang, take and grab somebody's beer bottle and make a guitar slide out of it.

JD: You mean Roy Clark the fella that was on Hee Haw?

JC: Yeah, yes sir it had been a while since he had a monster ... "I had you right on the tips of my fingers but I let you slip right through my hands".

JD: So what was he like?

JC: He was nice, he didn't act like a big shot.

JD: So that was in Fresno?

JC: Well that was one of em', you know, he was a real entertainer, he just loved doing it. But anyhow, the band took a break and we were just sitting drinking, having a beer or whatever and when Wynn Stuart record came on the jukebox. It's called, "It's such a pretty world today!" Beautiful song, it went way up there in the charts. I don't know if it made it # 1 but it got close. That was Stuart's last hit. Stuart was one of the California artist that just really had a special singing voice you could hear and those California artists even included Merle Haggard.

JD: Yea that's what I was about to get to Merle Haggard. Were they out and about when you were there?

JC: No, I didn't see him. I worked a lot of shows over the years with Merle. You know we were on the same show.

JD: I'd really like to talk about that when we get to that point. So you didn't see any of those guys. Everybody talked about the Bakersville sound and all that stuff.

JC: Yeah oh yeah!

JD: So from Fresno did you go to Washington State or Oregon or anything like that?

JC: No, No, No!

JD: Pretty much back to Nashville after California?

JC: Yes.

JD: Ok, so that was probably what about 67'?

JC: Yes.

JD: Ok, so take me through, walk me through what you did after the Connie Smith Tour. What's on your mind in terms of where do I go from here and all that kind of stuff?

JC: I made the pilgrimage back to Auburndale FL my home town and I heard from Gram Parsons, he was their getting his allowance, which was chump change for him \$30,000 a year back then for him.

JD: So what had he been doing the last couple of years?

JC: Well he had been living in New York and Brooklyn and had that band that he called the International Submarine Band. They brought the whole band to California and they disbanded. It didn't take them long in California to find out that nobody wanted to hear a bunch of longhairs playing country. That's the way it was, if it wasn't blues.

JD: So it was kind of a flop in California.

JC: For them, but that's what happened; they had lost a base player and a drummer from New York. They and Barry Tashian and Bill Briggs put together the very first group of Flying Burrito Brothers playing R & joints.

JD: In California?

JC: In California and Gram basically, they moved to California, he had a record deal. He wanted me to come back real bad. He told me

everything I liked to hear. I had already recorded my recording session of the first country-rock session. I played it for Gram and he acted like he didn't like it and at the time I think he thought it was too rock! I hadn't been able to play drums like I really wanted to. So still in Winter Haven. They ended up flying me out there, we did the first session and I hung out for a few months but things weren't moving.

JD: So this is the Submarine Band.

JC: Yeah! Submarine band.

JD: They are trying to rejuvenate it?

JC: Yeah.

JD: They needed you to kind of rejuvenate it.

JC: Yeah, exactly, exactly. They really didn't have a band all they had left from New York. That John Nuese was crazy, he was a strange dude man. He was afraid to play in front of people. I don't know what happened to his head. We had a few rehearsals to go in the studio but John Nuese stayed in his room. I thought gee what kind of rehearsal is this, what kind of group is this? These guys, this cat, he doesn't want to play.

JD: Was he shy?

JC: Aww, he was just weird, actually it turned into Advance OCD. We stayed at his house in Nashville back in 96 one summer. He was nuts he had ruined all of his doors and drawers in his kitchen going omp, bach, omp bach. You know the drawers were all ...he was nuts.

JD: You think he was on drugs or pills or something?

JC: No, he had mental illness that was never treated. And when he was finally diagnosed with OCD he didn't want to take the medicine. But he drank scotch and he asked me to go get him a jug of scotch. He'd knock off a quart of Chivas Regal every day. He asked me to go get him some and I said, "Man I don't buy myself any anymore more and I ain't gone buy you any! So he had his house keeper get his whiskey for him.

JD: Okay so you end up trying to get things going again, and there is Earl Ball.

JC: He was a studio player.

JD: Who were some of the other band members?

JC: Jay Dee Maness, played steel, Earl Ball played piano. The first section had Joe Osborne playing bass.

JD: Were you all recording songs?

JC: Yeah, We were making a record but we didn't get to finish it then. Months went by before we would get the next part of the money. I ended up after months of hanging out doing virtually nothing and I didn't last long. Gram was putting me up on his couch, with his girlfriend who was a high maintenance.

JD: I was gonna say, where were you staying? You were staying with Gram in his house.

JC: Yeah once we got a glimpse of her beaver it was enough. No more, I had to go sleep on the couch at Burrito manor . It wasn't much of a couch, it was sort of a bench, and it was not comfortable. It was Burrito Manor. It was up on Kirkwood just past the Houdini mansions. I'm not kidding the Houdini mansion. Over fifty hippies that had taken over Houdini's mansion.

JD: So was this the "Safe at Home" album?

JC: Yes.

JD: So this is the production of "Safe at home", which it sounded like quite an ordeal.

JC: Oh yeah, in fact there was a time, I remember when I went back in the winter or the fall to do the other part I stayed at Burrito Manor and they didn't have heat at the manor and it was getting chilly and me and

Barry Tashain went out searching for firewood and they did have a fire place so we could warm up a little.

JD: Were their other people living there too?

JC: Yeah, basically the whole band. Ya know, plus Barry Tashain and Bill Briggs.

JD: Did Gram own it or was he renting?

JC: Renting.

JD: So you got fed up and you came back to Nashville?

JC: Yeah I came back to Nashville where I knew I could work. I worked for a few months free lancing. I was playing in a place called, Mr. Eds. It was upstairs right next to Showbuds Guitars on lower Broadway. It was called Mr. Eds.

JD: I think I've heard of it.

JC: Mr. Ed was a Jerk, and he had never seen anybody with the kind of hair I was wearing of course I was letting my hair grow. People in Nashville still hadn't started letting their hair grow everybody was still wearing those pompadours like you saw in that movie I was in, ya

know. He didn't like me and finally and one evening he said to me, "We don't need your kind here." I had a glimpse of what prejudice feels like, my friend. Got a pay check when he was still Donnie Young, aka. Well I had an aka too, he had another name [Johnny Paycheck] He was in Miami, anyhow, Donnie Young he got writers credit for that great song "Touch My Heart."

JD: ... do you remember where you were going with that?

JC: Back then he had been a drummer for George Jones and he picked up a lot of his singing just being there. I understand how that could happen cause I learned about singing working for the Glaser brothers, cause all I had to do was watch Jim Glaser. I could see what a good singer looked and sounded like and what he acted like while he was doing it and I was just able to pull it off. The way he worked the mic, man I'm telling you it's incredible. Bless his heart, he passed away just a few months ago.

JD: So you are back in Nashville and Mr. Ed has told you to take a hike. So where do we go from there?

JC: Let me see! They called me to go back out and finish the Submarine Band album.

JD: So I am kind of confused here, you're still in the Submarine Band but you're at the Burrito Manor.

JC: No, no I should go back and finish the Submarine Band.

JD: Right, right, but Gram called his place the Burrito Manor.

JC: Yea, it was a different group by Burrito Brothers, but they weren't the recorded group. But Gram ripped that name off once they left and went back east.

JD: Okay.

JC: There's a book you can read called ... written by Ian Dunlop; it's a good book, boy is it good! You'd like it! I bet cha! But he and Barry, ... and Bill Riggs ... came back east ... One of them was driving a VW microbus loaded down with speakers just barely doing it. But they camped out. Ahh they go to the store and get a few things to make a stew and they'd go out and actually make a stew.

JD: Who was on the bus? Who was some of the fellas?

JC: Well, I can't remember who was driving the bus. One of them was a bus. I don't know what the other car was and I'm not sure who was driving. I saw a picture, you can see it in the book. A picture of them out on the desert and camping and cooking.

JD: Was Gram on that?

JC: No, no they left discouraged, they headed back east. That's when the name Flying Burrito Brothers had been floating around. Gram had been playing with the Byrds for a while. He got real tight with Chris Hillman who really was a nice fella he still is. I have a high respect for him. Actually he got the Byrds all talked into doing that country album.

JD: "Sweetheart of the Radio?"

JC: Yeah, and then he started talking to Chris about starting their own group together. That's when they decided to go ahead and use the Burrito Brothers name. They got em' a deal with A & M records, back then those record companies was giving money out to people who had a track record already giving them a cash advance so there was a \$40,000.00 cash advance which really the only part of that I got to see was I got my own Nudie Suit. My Nudie Suit was #5 but my Nudie Suit's not on the original album cover. I played on the record but by then ... and I had a disagreement about, he didn't want me to sing he just wanted to sing. He was jealous and all that.

JD: Who wrote all the songs on the Sweetheart album?

JC: Different writers. I think there was even a Will Carter song on there.

JD: Now, you recorded that in your recording sessions, right?

JC: Yeah, I played drums on some of the cuts.

JD: So then the Flying Burrito brothers come along.

JC: Yeah, I had gone to college for a while and it was like going back to High School, it was a nightmare.

JD: Where?

JC: Polk.

JD: Oh you went to Polk.

JC: Back then it was Polk Jr. College.

JD: How old were you then?

JC: Well I think I had been out on my own close to 5 years.

JD: Yeah, so you were probably 25 years old.

JC: Yeah, I was a grown up and these were kids.

JD: Yeah, I can see where that wouldn't worked for out too well for you.

JC: I was just not happy. For some reason I remember I was taking an Algebra class and I can't remember the reason why. I must have been

forced. I hadn't done well in junior high school in algebra and I had the second highest average in this Algebra class, I worked at it.

JD: Were you living at home or did you have your own apartment or what?

JC: I was living out at the big house. My momma still had it ... I was back in my old stomping rounds.

JD: Did you reconnect around here with any music people that you knew before, who were some of the people?

JC: Yeah! Actually come to think of if I couldn't tell you, except, oh it was a guy named Don Hannah, a real fine guitar player. His nick-name during the Rock n Roll days, name was, "Dump truck", but him and a lead singer named Buddy Owens had an old house rented. An old stucco house, it was on a little bitty lake, Lake Hamilton. I remember jamming with them but it never went anywhere. At that period of time I didn't really get anything going where I actually made any money. But I quit midterm grade time, but I did alright. Then I got a call from Steve Alsburg who was the bare-foot hippie manager for the Submarine band and he was now having some shoes and he was a manager sort of kinda a hippie manager for the Flying Burrito Brothers. Later he worked for Frank Zappa. He also worked for the Turtles. That's when I ran into him at the first Miami pot festival back stage, a gigantic stage, up in the air. They were passing around a Tampax joint. The biggest joint you ever saw, probably like a cigar man, ya know. They had all the cops paid off and no problem. What's a little smoke man?"

JD: That would have been in 1970?

JC: 68, I got to borrow a pair of hippie moccasins the kind that go up your legs. I was staying with my brother in law and sister and he was overseeing a 5,000 acre property down in Labelle and his daddy, Winston Lawless and Jack Berry cleared the land and planted 5000 acres of oranges. He was the overseer, he oversaw everything. I went down there for the New Year's holiday and that's about the time they had the pot festival and I got to wear my brother in law's, hippie moccasins. Many, many years later, over 50 years later I got a pair of those moccasins. They were nice, I had been saving them for a special occasions.

JD: Ok So Steve Alsburg called you up?

JC: When I first met him I said, "Alsburg, is that a Jewish name? He said, "yeah, but we eat ham" [laughter]. Good Ole Steve, he got a little money and they had a big feast planned at the Ole Burrito Manor. I had steak and artichokes, the whole thing so I got a chance to experience what it is like to dig for the heart, the hard way. He whipped up some nice sauce for it was ... we'd go hang out at night and have dubies up on the roof from the back until we heard the helicopter coming. Back then big brother LAPD had these search lights in their helicopter so we'd quickly get off the roof. We didn't want them to see us having fun.

JD: So you go back to California, you're back in California what are you doing there?

JC: Yeah! We went out their played on the Flying Burrito Brothers album.

JD: You making um “Gilded Palace of Sin?”

JC: Yeah and also between recording sessions, we played a few clubs around.

JD: What clubs did you play at?

JC: The Golden Bear, down in Orange County was one of them. The Whiskey a-Go-Go we played there at least twice. Van Morrison was on the bill one of the times. His band was down to a bass player, a flute player and him. It was right before “Tupelo Honey.” That really changed his whole world and then Taj Mahal. I remember hanging out in the dressing room with Taj Mahal. Every time we played there, Nudie would show up with his fancy suit, hat and his fancy car. He always wore 2 different fancy cowboy boots from two different pair. He was trying to sell stuff, he was a walking advertisement.

JD: He was a walking advertisement, now that was 68, 69 California.

JC: that was '68.

JD: California man, LA area lots of really amazing people there. Neil Young, Joanie Mitchell.

JC: Oh, yeah that was a perfect time.

JD: Peter Fonda was hanging around.

JC: Oh yeah! I could tell ya about him.

JD: John Sebastian, Dennis Hopper, right, all those guys.

JC: Oh Yeah!

JD: So tell me about those guys did you know them?

JC: Well, I hung out a little bit with them. To go backwards just a little bit.

JD: Sure!

JC: Well I came out there to do the Submarine Band album to begin with. Ah like the first full day I was there Gram said, "Do you want to go up to Peter Fonda's and go swimming with us?" And I said, "yeah sure" [laughter] I got up there and I was the only one that had a bathing suit. Everybody else was naked. I remember the first time I saw Bridget

Fonda she was 3 ft. tall and naked. Everybody was, you could count ole Peter Fonda's ribs he was so skinny.

JD: Bridget? Who's Bridget Fonda?

JC: Their daughter, who's a famous actress now, Bridget Fonda.

JD: So girls, boys their all in there naked.

JC: Oh Yeah!

JD: Was it like a pool, like a swimming pool.

JC: Yeah, there all kind of sunning themselves and David Crosby was there too, and it's all hanging out my friend. Everybody, Dennis Hopper, Larry Hagman was there.

JD: Larry Hagman.

JC: It was after "I Dream of Genie" was off the air. He was sort of a "has been", and they were letting him know it. [Laughter] I hit a few tennis balls with Dennis Hopper. That was my introduction to California.

JD: So, Did you ever see Joni Mitchell?

JC: Yeah, David was working with her.

JD: David Crosby?

JC: Yeah, working with her and the first time I saw her with him was down in ...apartments those apartments on Sweet Shore Avenue where Gram lived. Gram had an apartment upstairs and Bob was right across the court yard downstairs. Crosby brought Joni in, right about the time they recorded that album. Her first solo album Man it was some really beautiful music in there, aw she was so good. Another time we had gone up to swimming in Cass Elliott's pool.

JD: Cass Elliott's pool?

JC: Yeah, and everybody had clothes on then. There was a stuffed pig there. It was a big pig looking thing. I don't know if you were supposed to sit on him or what. It was a weird piece of furniture and that was Joni's. They came in they were talking about moving it or something or getting it to where she wanted it. I met John Sebastian there, he was in from a visit from the East.

JD: How long was it before Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young got together at that point or were they just getting together at that point?

JC: I don't think that happened until about 69.

JD: Yeah! Ok, it was about within a year, right?

JC: David had been paid this ninety grand to leave the Byrds. He could be a disagreeable person.

JD: Did you ever play along with him or play in the same group that he was in?

JC: No, but he jammed at my house on Ridpath Drive. Then later he snubbed me, real heavy at A&M studios.

JD: Ridpath Drive was in California?

JC: Up in Laurel Canyon, yeah.

JD: That was your house?

JC: Yeah I had a house up on Ridpath Drive. Right down the hill house was Billy James house where Jackson Browne lived when he was 16 years old.

JD: No kidding!

JC: He was a whiz of a young fella.

JD: Was he kind a like the prodigy, everybody knew he was going to be great.

JC: Yeah, he was so good. Singer song writer, wonderful singer, song writer, he was a nice kid. One of the two drummers at Mad Dogs and Englishman (Joe Cocker). His name was Sandy Conacoff... he lived at Billy James's house. Billy would take in people. One time he had been the #1 man at CBS records in CaliforniaRecords. Then he dropped acid and dropped out, so I knew him then. Up the hill from me was a guy named Barry Friedman who ran Elektra Records, he had a house full of hippies too. Penny Nichols was living down the hill.

JD: So when did you get the house, your own house?

JC: Early probably 68, we drove to ... John Neuse had come to Nashville, we'd been there for a few weeks together. I think he had been there a week or so, I don't know but that's when Gram and Bob Buchanan came on the train from Coconut Grove, where they had been hanging out with Fred Neil. They road on the train, and they wrote "Hickory Wind." I picked them up at the train station. They came over and crashed at my place at least for a day or so. Then I took them down to Union station and they got on a sleeper train to LA. I took them down there and we actually got on the train and checked out the room and Gram said, 'if you guys want to come, you can", I'll pay your way. I said, "I can't, my cars on a parking meter." Not that I would, I had obligations, I had a home which I ended up losing over the whole thing. I ended up selling it to support the band until the junkies took over my house and that's when I moved to Harbor City. My Uncle Howard's place. Anyhow, I stood it as much as I could.

JD: Yeah! Too much party, too much ...

JC: Well I had never been around smack heads and I couldn't understand why they all... Barry McGuire was one of them. He had already had a giant hit, "Eve of Destruction." He had two or three real big records with Christy Minstrels he was the lead singer.

JD: So how many years if you added it all up? You're in California 68-71 wouldn't you say?

JC: Off and on.

JD: Off and on, did you come back to Florida?

JC: Yeah, Well I had come back to Nashville and scoped it out.

JD: Did you have a place in Nashville you could come back too?

JC: Nah, I did some couch surfing.

JD: So you kind just got tired of that whole scene and decided to go back to Nashville.

JC: Yeah, I was paying the rent.

JD: Well at this point you are trying to decide what to do and all of a sudden you get up with Gene Clark, right? Gene Clark and the Byrds? Can you reflect a little bit on that?

JC: Yeah! When I went back there in 69. I remember I drove the southern route, went by myself in my Fairlane 500 wagon and when I got there it was a new Burrito Manor and it was a new group of Burritos and full of groupies too. Anyhow they let me sleep on the floor for a while and then, Oh yeah the big tour for the Flying Burrito Brothers where they drew so much money put them in the hole, with the record company. Phil Kaufman who was their executive nanny. He was the road manager for...4 years. He was a good Old boy, funny guy, nice guy. He was good to me, kind to me. But anyhow he had a girlfriend named Janet Akers they had a place in Silver I

Lake, an apartment affectionately call it "KaKa Courts" it was some little apartments right close to the La Bianca's, house. Remember him, Charles Manson?

JD: Oh yes! Yes!

JC: It was up on the hill.

JD: Was that before all that mess broke out?

JC: Yes this is before. Phil had to go on that trip and he said," there's a spare bedroom at my house if you want. His girlfriend was still there, Janet, I dated her sister. But anyhow, I stayed there while I was looking

for a place and then I finally found a place, not far from there. Right on Sunset Blvd apartment kind of an art deco thing inside. I really liked that, the only reason I gave up that apartment was my parking place was over a block away and it was up on the steepest hill you ever saw and you absolutely had to park against the curb or your parking break would quit. There was a donut shop down on the corner and I really just didn't want to wipe out that donut shop with the car. Eventually I gave that one up and got a studio apartment up in the Hollywood hills which was a real chore. Because they had an elevator 4th floor at the other place. This place had stairs and I only took my drums up the stairs once, which was enough. Oh yeah! My introduction of Gene Clark is this way. I was sitting at the bar at the Troubadour. I don't know how Gene knew who I was, but he did. He came up to me and he said, "Hey man you got any drums with you?" I said, "Yeah!" I always had drums, always, ya know, still do I been putting Drums in my car for over 60 years. He said, "Go get some drums, you want to play the next show with us", I said, "sure". So I ran out toward where my car was parked. Just in the Beverly Hills, just across the street. I think I was illegally parked too cause I got a parking ticket. I got a snare drum, sticks and brushes. I just had to walk from my car. So I set up Bernie Leadon was on my left, David Jackson, the bass player was on my right. Doug Dillard and Gene Clark was in front of me on stage at the Troubadour. They didn't tell me they had dropped Mescaline. But they went through their whole repertoire like it was a medley. They did a little piece of this one song and they'd go to the next. They finished the whole show in probably less than five minutes. Doug looked at Gene and Gene looked at Doug weird like and they just kind of walked off stage looking like Zombies. You know the way they looked. I looked at Bernie, he looked at me. It was like, what's this about, I looked at David. So we followed them up to the dressing room. Doug Weston that ran the Troubadour. He came up there and boy, he was hot, he was hot! He

said,” I know you all are on drugs.” He said, “You’re supposed to have the rest of the week but you only got tomorrow night and if you blow it you will never play the Troubadour again.” They had their work cut out for them, so they had better be good boys. What’s interesting is they didn’t rule out Tequila. In fact we had a ride in a brand new Cadillac that happened to be Mae Boren Axton’s Cadillac and Hoyt was driving it. He peeled on out of there and went to the light and turned left and crossed Santa Monica Blvd right around the corner, he had a little very small single apartment and a gallon jug of Tequila. We sat on the floor and burned one and passed a gallon jug of Tequila. You had to drink it like you use to see moon shiners doing it back when they used the big glass jugs. They quit that and went to mason jars. Anyhow it was between shows, we came back and did a show. Ya. know, it wasn’t that bad, a bunch of old drunks.

JD: So the next day did you go out with them again or did you?

JC: Oh yeah!

JD: You’re in the band now. So you’re in!

JC: Oh, I’m in, boy am I in!

JD: So are you recording “White Lights” at that time?

JC: No, We did a few gigs around and then we started the session.

“Through the Morning, Through the Night Album”, that’s the title song, Gene wrote it. I was with him through that. We recorded it at A & M that’s where we had that rehearsal down at Charlie Chaplin’s projection studio. It was his whole lot, the whole A & M complex was Charlie Chaplin movie studio. The sound stage they had was for Charlie Chaplin but that’s also when they formed Crosby’s Stills Nash and Young. David Crosby came in at the end of our rehearsal and said hello to Gene and invited him to come over and check them out. Well I couldn’t wait, I thought we were all invited. 1968, Crosby was nice to me and acted like I was somebody. By 69 he was a big shot again. They had a roady guy, he was a big dude, and he was also a bouncer. I saw Crosby’s eyes look at this guy like, get rid of this dude and they asked me to leave. I just thought I had been invited.

JD: Was it kind of like a party?

JC: No! It was a rehearsal.

JD: A rehearsal, I’m sorry.

JC: Yeah! Yeah but still.

JD: Gene was playing in it with them?

JC: No, he was playing with us. We had a rehearsal and we had just wrapped up the rehearsal. I came back the next day for another

rehearsal there and my drum stool was gone. I found out that Sergio Mendes and his group had followed us into the thing and he stole my drum stool. And then I stole one from A&M. But it was a four-legged stool not a three-legged stool. You ever cut off one leg of a stool and try to even it out? It got shorter and shorter and shorter, use that hacksaw, it never was right. So it rocked and that was irritating, I left it along the way somewhere, I couldn't even tell you where. Anyhow, Crosby made an enemy for life out of me. I couldn't really tell you anything good about him. He and Roger McGuinn were both kind of jerks.

JD: Roger McGuinn?

JC: Yeah! Arrogant.

JD: Roger McGuinn on stage has that kind of persona, I think. I'm not surprised.

JC: He was a jerk! I had made arrangements with Chris Hillman's wife, Connie when they were doing the 50th anniversary at the ...Theater. She was going to take me in to see him during a break at intermission. As it turned out Roger wanted to run over something and I think he knew, he had overheard when Connie told Chris him that I was there. He dissed me one other time too. I got his number, Eddie Tickner married his ex-wife. Road manager was a personal manager for Gram and the Byrds and a whole bunch of people. And Emmylou for a long time until he got sick. The son Henry the grandson, he was there in Nashville when I went to see Eddie and I asked him for his Pop's phone

number. And he was living in Indian Rocks beach then. He gave it to me so I called him and I thought he would remember me or even care maybe. By then I was connected and I could supply a band for him if he ever needed one. Anyhow, he answered the phone and he said, "How did you get this number"? I was just so floored by that I couldn't...

JD: Roger McGuinn said that?

JC: Yeah! I was floored by it and embarrassed. So, I didn't even give him a retort. If I had been drinking a little bit I could have given him a retort.

JD: Yeah, I had heard he lived in the central Florida area.

JC: Yeah, just north of Disney, that town where everybody is rich. I forget the name.

JD: Okay, so tell us a little bit about your touring with Dillard and Clark, how long did that last and long was your relationship with them and where did you go?

JC: Okay, well the tour, we left LA on Route 66, headed to Chicago in cars. My car, ... the bass player.

JD: Two full cars?

JC: Yeah, well my little wagon and Gene's Business manager told him he needed to get rid of those Ferrari's and get him a Volvo cause he kept getting speeding tickets and he was about to lose his license. There were a couple of guys in the Byrds. Him driving those Ferrari's really made them jealous. David and McGuinn both.

JD: Now where did he get the money for those and they didn't have the money?

JC: Song writing money!

JD: Song writing money.

JC: "I'd Feel A Whole Lot Better When You Are Gone". He was the writer for all those guys.

JD: I guess with the royalties coming in he could afford the Ferrari's.

JC: Three different Ferrari's he had, and trade up. I was surprised by it, I had heard about him but he was that kind of big shot. He told me one time, he said, "Yeah! You know I had a house and I had 18 girls there and they were all my girls. He said, "I had him camping in the front yard and the back yard." None of those other guys drew girls like Gene Clark. He had the most beautiful girls that you saw today and he'd take her somewhere and then he'd see another one and he'd think, How could I get her home? Bless his heart, he really had a problem for that.

JD: That wasn't all bad for you right?

JC: That didn't run out on me. I was just a cracker, a stupid cracker you know, I don't know, my skills were way low.

JD: In that department?

JC: Yes sir buddy! I had a lot to learn.

JD: So from LA to Chicago on Route 66 did you all play any places in between.

JC: Not really, we went up there around Chicago. I remember one of the motels we stayed in was right across from the Cubs Stadium, Lakewood Park.

JD: Wrigley Field?

JC: Yeah! I remember we played the Beavers Club down on Rush Street. While we were there one of the guys in 3 Dog Night, a guy named Danny Hutton. One of the three guys, he was an old friend of Gene's. He looked him up while we were playing at the Beavers club. Then we played at the Aragon ballroom. It was the big ol' beautiful ballroom that was done in the 20' and 30's the big... bands played there. We opened for the Jefferson Airplane. That was before Grace [Slick] got heavy and she was good looking boy and she had a short satin dress. I remember they had two brand new Lincoln Limos outside. That's how

they brought them around. I guess they had their road crew probably in the truck. I don't know I didn't see the truck but anyhow we went up to Wisconsin and played some college in Wisconsin. Jackson, Michigan, ya know, I can't remember all the dates. But anyhow we did all our dates then we headed back.

JD: So you just went to Chicago and back, okay.

JC: Yeah, back to LA. Then as it turns out Doug wanted this fiddle player name Byron Berline when he got out of the army Doug wanted him to come and join the group. Actually before long, it was more bluegrass than Gene could handle. Gene was a singer, songwriter and they really needed to feature him more. They did a little, but not enough, so one day he walked. The album was just released and he walked. Now, my hindsight today tells me I should have gone to Gene and said, "Hey Gene, you want to start a band?" I'll be your drummer. I should have, but I didn't. I didn't even think of it. Then one of the complications during that period of time was they had at the time that Sharon Tate and that Manson crap was going on and everybody in LA was scared, just scared and I didn't have a gun in California.

JD: I would imagine that would have just chilled everything. All of a sudden everything's really going great and people are having fun. Then all of a sudden when that happened, fear.

JC: Oh Yeah! Fear, fear. LaBianca murders was just up on top on the hill right next to the apartment building that I lived in and right next just right across KaKa Courts.

JD: Had you ever heard of this crazy guy before, Charles Manson?

JC: I hadn't.

JD: Had you ever heard of these kind of thing going on? This cult was going on?

JC: No! No! But I knew Brandon DeWilde and he knew them. In fact when they lived on the Spahn Ranch.

JD: I guess after the Tate murders everybody kind of freaked out about it.

JC: All of LA was full of fear. I remember, by then I lived in that hole up in the hills. Hollywood Hills Apartment, it was a studio apartment. I slept with a ball-peen hammer for protection no gun, no firearm at the time. I had my firearms back East.

But anyhow when Gene left the band it was kind of like a gut punch, ya know. I thought, it's no use to staying here now. So I was missing all my people. I missed my Nashville people, I missed my Florida people so one day I woke up and I made up my mind, I am getting out of here. And buddy I was out of there by evening. I packed my car up and went to Ralph's market and got a 6 pack of Heineken and a pound of sliced Smokey edam cheese I headed out, I had a six pack of Heineken bottles sitting between my legs and I was popping those tops and headed east. Right before I got to the California line, it was out in the desert, I picked up a girl hitch hiker and she had been on uppers or something and she had been stumbling around Hollywood Blvd. She's homesick too. I

asked her where was she headed and she said, "Oklahoma City" and I said, "I'll take you there and I did. I took her straight there and the only time we stopped was to get gas and I sure wasn't eating anything because I popped them speed, diet pills or something; so I drove from LA to Oklahoma City, and later on I headed to Nashville.

JD: Okay, and you got to Nashville. How did that go?

JC: Ahh, this was around 69 and I played hopscotch back and forth between Florida and Nashville until I got settled in. Warren Zevon called and offered me the job with the Everly Brothers while I was working for the Glaser Brothers but I had signed a writer's contract. I was afraid they wouldn't pitch my songs if I wasn't around. Of course they didn't pitch my songs when I was around so I turned it down and shouldn't have really, now that I look back on it. Later in winter of 73 early in the year when I did get out there, when I finally did I took Kyle Tullis the bass player had agreed to be on the Grievous Angels tour. Gram just hired him right away. He was alright, Warren picked me up. He had an apartment on the south side of Santa Monica Blvd right around the corner was Waddy Wactel's apartment. They both quit the Everlys before I got there. The Everlys had already left so I missed my opportunity with that. As it turned out they put an army cot in the hallway in a shot gun apartment, and put me up for a few days. Then Warren was drinking real heavy then. Two six packs of tall Olympic beers a day, and a quart of Chevis Regal every day, every day. And by the evening he wouldn't eat anything all day. He'd start out the day with coffee and then drink. His wife would come home from work and fix something to eat. He'd eat supper but by then he was whoosh. But anyhow he and she argued and they had a fight and he left and went

over and checked in to the Tropicana Hotel, which is right down from the Troubadour. The Tropicana was where Janice Joplin died.

Anyhow so there I was staying in the house with his girlfriend and being a good boy. I couldn't stand thinking a friend who brought me in losing his trust. But as it turns out, I think he probably thought that I did mess with her, which I didn't. But she took me to see a lawyer named Jerry Cohen, and he was sort of into the music business he was interested in my music. He really liked it, he did a little work for me but we got nothing out of it. She helped me set up a "Hoot" to play, it's like a writer's night at the Troubadour. I got Kyle to come and play bass at Waddy Wachtel's apartment. Later on he played with Stevie Nicks, everybody. He was Mr. Rock and Roll guitar on records. You probably saw him, he was a blond guy with a big afro. He's a nice fella but anyhow we did a hoot at the Troubadour. Phil Kauffman called me, I don't know how he knew I was around and he called me over at Warren's and he said, "Hey man, you need a place to stay?" I said well! It probably would be better if I came to your house. He gave me a room, well not right away he didn't come to think of it. I slept on the living room floor between two gigantic Great Danes, Alice and Bighead and they farted a lot, and the gas was unbelievable. Until finally, swishee guy didn't need his room. This room next to Phil's in the house, he left for a while, a guy named Tom. So I got his room for a while. That's when Gram was starting the rehearsals for the Grievous Angel tour with Emmylou. Gram didn't know I was coming to California then. Anyhow as it turns out they used my drums. I took my equipment trailer so I had my drums and my PA and they just borrowed them for the rehearsals. They had a credit card from Warner Brothers. Nobody ever thought of paying me to rent my instruments. I did get room and board, so to speak but I wasn't bitching about it. But anyhow, so they asked me to play drums for the rehearsals for the beginning part. Then

N.D. Smart came and I was able to set up a showcase for the No. 2 guy at Warner Brothers for the guy name David Burson. Russ Titelman came to hear me at the "Hoot" and he liked me. He wanted to get me a developmental artist deal with Warner Brothers. He thought we could get one and ahh, he's the one that set up the showcase and by then Neil Flanz, the steel player I had called from Nashville for Gram, he was a good player, he played on it too. Kyle Tullis, Waddy Wachtel and Neil Flanz played on my audition. They were really interested the problem is my holding out until the fortitude was ...when it was all over, when all of the rehearsals were over they said on that trip, the Grievous Angel Tour and they brought a 4104 GMC and parked it in Phil's yard and they had a super party. A big giant send off and hired a group called, The Oily Scarf Wino band that had a guy playing a flugelhorn and he was wearing a yellow slicker hat and a yellow slicker. They had a guy playing Tuba and a guy playing Baritone horn and a guy sitting on the floor playing bed pans. Tuned the bedpans sounded like a Marimba sort of, more like bed pans. Boy they had a whoop Di Do party, my friend. That Baritone horn player got so loaded at the party. I remember, he headed out to his car and he shouldn't been driving but he was headed out to his car, I think he was parked out on the street side. He had the Baritone in one hand and the case in the other. He was stumbling around going across that yard and there was a bunch of Great Dane Holes. Ya know dog's big holes. Great Dane holes are almost a foot deep. He stepped down in one of those and you can see him trying not to drop and hurt the Baritone horn. Yes, it was really something to see. Well he didn't bend it and I thought it's miraculous he didn't. When it was all over they all got on the bus and drove away. I thought, "My friends just left me."

Ya know, I had that feeling, in the mean time I had been invited to come over and stay at Bruce Logan's house. Now Bruce was a film

maker from England. Since then he's done real good. He's done some big movies. He and his partner or friend, Dick Alexander who is English too; they both brought their Mini Coopers with the right hand drive to LA when they came. At the time Bruce was working as a camera man he could work for a grand a week anytime he wanted to back then. He was living with Janet Akers who was Phil Kauffman's ex. She had Phil's baby. O Ryan was his name so the baby, the little boy. He was a little boy, a toddler back then. He just took me in, gave me a room that had been his sisters and she had gone back to England. I remember it had Peter Mac sheets on the bed, it was an iron bed frame. Which, by the way one morning I woke up, it was like a Saturday morning and there was a trimmer and I was in the bed and it rocked to the left a foot and then it rocked all the way back to the right about a foot and then back. Anyhow while I was staying there, he liked to drink too so it was the first place I was ever around where you could actually order liquor and they would deliver it. He was kind enough to say, "Well what would you like? I said, "how about some Watneys Red Label"? I had got turned on to that in England when I played there International Country Music Festival in 72 at Wembley. I drank 21 there that night in London at the Royal Garden Hotel.

Anyhow they were really good to me. I was on Ventura Blvd in my Pontiac, I had a 69 Pontiac and I threw a timing chain and I drifted and had to turn off the road. But I was able to drift into a mechanic shop miraculously, and they rebuilt my motor. I paid for it with my Master card. It took me years to pay it off but I did pay it off. They let me use a VW bug convertible those were the days. So they gave me a car to drive while I was getting the other one fixed. But you know by that time I was thinking, "Ya know, I mean I know I got a deal pending with the Warner Brothers people but I missed my people."

The home sickness moved me again. So I walked away from a Warner Brothers Record deal and Emmylou wasn't even signed then. As it turned out, right after Gram died she was signed to Warner Brothers and actually she's had the career we all wanted. She's really had a wonderful career. She's shown nothing but integrity through the whole thing and now she is in the Country Music Hall of Fame. She had probably over 50 albums. She's a sweet person.

JD: Now she would have been in that party that got on the bus and left, right?

JC: Yes! She left with them.

JD: Was that kind of her first exposure? Did she do some recording with them before they jumped out? Or did she just join the band as a singer right off the bat?

JC: Yeah! That's what it was. Later on she did. Next time they recorded he used her for a couple of albums.

JD: So the name of their band when they let out?

JC: The Grievous Angels was the name of the band.

JD: So you coming back after you left the Warner's Brothers opportunity. You just decided not to stick it out any longer, you got tired of sitting around waiting for them to come across.

JC: Yeah! I just felt really alone, really alone. I had a couple of appointments at publishing companies but I was already signed to

Glaser Publishing. I had an appointment with Duane Eddy who worked for one of the big publishing companies, MCA Publishing, I think it was.

JD: Back when Grievous Angels let out was there a chance that you would go with them.

JC: Not with N. D. Smart

JD: What?

JC: N. D. Smart was actually the original drummer for Barry and the Remains who did a Beatles tour in 66. They are from Boston. Barry Tashian, he was in that band. They were on Epic records they had a record called "Do Wah Diddy" I think.

JD: So you going back to Nashville or you coming back to Florida?

JC: Well I went through Nashville and things weren't really shaking there and I thought well so I went back to Florida and I started my own band that was in 1973. That's when I started my own band and I pretty much had my own bands ever since for however long that is.

JD: So how did the Glaser brothers fit in here?

JC: Well they were 71 and 72. It was after I left them that I got the call from Warren the second time.

JD: So what was your experiences there? Did you have a good experience with them?

JC: With the Glaser's?

JD: Yeah!

JC: Ah, I learned a lot.

JD: You learned a lot. Was Waylon Jennings in that outfit too or was that later on?

JC: No he hung out a lot at the studio, he recorded in that same studio. He and that whole Outlaws album was done there.

JD: Now, was that before you got up with them or after or about the same time?

JC: No, while I worked for the Glaser's I played on some of their records. I did hundreds of demos for them but they had me on salary so they could work me as hard as they wanted.

JD: So did you ever run across Waylon Jennings when you were there? What was he like?

JC: Well before he got all coked out, he was a pretty nice fella. I remember when he first came to town I was at a DJ convention but they had a CBS show down in the auditorium and I got to see them. That's when Waylon introduced us to Jessie Coulter. Most people don't know but she had previously been married to Dwayne Eddie under the name of Miriam Eddie. She even had writers credit for a song or two as Miriam Eddie. But that's Jessie Coulter, I think she and Waylon both moved back to Phoenix, Arizona. When his diabetes got so bad and his legs were marginal, actually he was a double amputee.

JD: Waylon Jennings?

JC: Yeah, he never came out of the hospital. Same for Johnny Russell, same thing.

JD: Johnnie Paycheck?

JC: Johnny Russell, red neck white socks, Blue ribbon beer, Cat Fish John...He also was a writer, he wrote, "Act naturally", flip side of yesterday with the Beatles. You have any idea how many records that was? He said what it did for him was it got the IRS sicced on him and then he had to start averaging, doing the income average, when you got to pay ahead like you are making money.

JC: Yeah!

JD: Yeah, that's rough and then you're not making money.

JC: See I met Johnny Russell originally when I worked for the Wilburn Brothers because he pitched songs for surefire music and then he pitched songs for the Glaser Brothers and that's when they told him about me as a drummer. He knew me and he recommended me, and as it turned out I got the job. I worked for them for a year and a half. I liked Johnny a lot, he was a good old boy. I never seen anybody, you talking about sexual harassment. Ya know he had such a way about him. He would say stuff to the secretaries in these places that I would have never dreamed of saying but he got away with it because he's funny, the way he'd do it. He was a married man and all that but back then they didn't name it ("harassment").

JD: Now Willie Nelson, did you ever have any interaction with Willie Nelson?

JC: Just a little bit. During a period of time his original bass player, Bee Spears quit for a while. I think his wife was encouraging him to come home or else and I guess the else didn't work. But anyhow, Chris

Ethridge who played on the Submarine Band Album also played on the Flying Burrito. He was an original Flying Burrito Brother. He was a bass player so when Willie played at the Lakeland Civic Center, he was staying out at the Huntley Inn. It was right at the end of interstate 4 across from the Ho Jo. So I went and hung out with him a couple of times. They had a day off so I got hang out with them so the first day I got over there, I ended up finding him at the hotel. They invited me to ride on the bus down to the auditorium, and I did. Then they invited me to supper and they had a chef who had Porter Wagoner's old bus. New York Strip, real good salad, baked potato and New York cheesecake. We ate real good that day and then we went back to hang out on the bus before the show. You'd never believe who was sitting at the table; it was a bus booth table, James Garner and Lauren Bacall.

JD: No!

JC: Yes!

JD: Right here in Lakeland?

JC: Right here in Lakeland! Behind Lakeland Civic Center, sitting on the bus talking to Willie Nelson.

JD: That's crazy what were they doing here?

JC: Who knows, but they came to see Willie and of course Willie put out the red carpet. Man he had friends everywhere.

JD: Would this have been the 70's

JC: Yeah! I think I was already married by then.

JD: Well you got married I see here in 1981, right?

JC: I think so.

JD: Okay, so you come back to Polk County or did you stay in Nashville? When did you actually pull out of Nashville altogether and move and sell your house or whatever fulltime?

JC: I sold my house during Submarine Band days to support the band.

JD: Okay.

JC: Gram sure wasn't doing it he was out with the Byrds. He walked away from the group. With him a commitment was something that we made, but not him, he couldn't live by a commitment. He didn't want to miss his chance to be a star. "Join a band and be a star". I think in a way, he probably thought he was gonna be a star when he left the Flying Burrito Brothers to go hang out with Keith Richards.

JD: So you come back to Florida.

JC: I started my own band!

JD: You started your own band, Jon Corneal and the Orange Blossoms special in 1974, right?

JC: I had a band together before 73 was over and I've had my own band ever since.

JD: So what did you do, did you play around here, did you go touring?

JC: No, back then there were joints everywhere that had bands. Before they changed the DUI laws. They had about half the deputy sheriffs back then than they have now.

JD: So let's go back to 74, 75 when you were going to Florida, what were your favorite places to go in Florida if you were on the circuit in Florida?

JC: We had a regular weekend gig at a place called the Red Chimney. Well actually I started at the Red Chimney as a single. I played drums, rhythm guitar then I got to hire guitar player and a bass player and that was where I started some long Sunday jams like Saturday night 12 o'clock to 12 o'clock Sunday morning.

JD: So what were some of the locations you would play like that?

JC: Just about every weekend was at the Red Chimney for a while.

JD: Where was the Red Chimney?

JC: Real close to Carters Corner. Coming from Auburndale its right before you get to Carters Corner on the right.

JD: On 92? Okay.

JC: It's sort of a car lot and a junk store and they sell RV's.

JD: Okay, so where else would you go?

JC: One time I had a gig up in Lawtey, Florida, at a joint called Bobby's Hideaway. I drove by their a few years ago and grass growing in the parking lot, you know what I mean. I don't know what happened to Bobby but that's Lawtey, Florida where they have the speed trap.

JD: Like Waldo, right, near Waldo?

JC: That is Waldo!

JD: Ok, Lawtey, Florida, Waldo.

JC: That's what I meant, Waldo.

JD: Yeah Okay.

JC: That was during the gas crisis in 1974 and you had to make sure you had enough gas to get up there and back. That was a pain in the butt.

JD: Did you play Daytona Beach, did you play Tampa, and did you play Jacksonville?

JC: No, no, no we really didn't do much touring, we just played local, pretty much.

JD: Tell me about meeting Debbie.

JC: Oh buddy! A friend of mine, a realtor in Auburndale named Buddy Johnson and he's always been good to me. A lot of times, he really showed himself to be a friend. He had a studio apartment. He had a triplex behind his house on Lake Lena in Auburndale. The other end of the triplex, he had a studio apartment and the end apartment was where Debbie lived, my present wife. Well the only wife I ever had and ain't looking for anybody else. She is a wonderful person. Anyhow, I needed a place to stay for a while and I really come to Florida during that time to make amends to my parents. I owed my daddy, I did a lot of embarrassing things. I had to somehow win him back over, make amends. Which I did but anyhow, Buddy showed me that apartment and he said you can move in tonight if you want. I said, "Aw I don't have the money yet he said, "Ah don't worry about it you can pay me when you get some". For 6 months that was the routine. Every time I get a little rent money to go and pay him he'd say, "Nah you need it worse than I do". Actually, he had seen my conversion he could see it, I was a different guy.

JD: So where was this location?

JC: Auburndale, Lake Lena, right behind the Walmart on the Auburndale side of it. A triplex right behind his house on the lake and he said, "move on in", and I did.

JD: How did you get to know this fella?

JC: As a kid.

JD: So you have known him your whole life.

JC: Oh yeah!

JD: You were friends and when you got back to Auburndale, Florida, you reconnected with him.

JC: Oh Yeah!

JD: What was he doing at the time, was he a business man?

JC: He was a realtor by then, his brother Charles Johnson who was mayor. He was a barber, his brother Bill Johnson was a barber. Both Charles and Bill became multi-millionaires selling real estate. They left barbering, they had another brother named Tom who was a barber, and they all went to the barber school up in Jacksonville. Then real estate got hot and they got into real estate back when you could really make some money, he did really well. I had known Buddy in my high school years.

JD: So he kind of rescued you in a way.

JC: Oh yeah!

JD: It seems to me, you've come back to Florida and you had tried to come home and had it with Nashville in a way and you had it with LA for sure.

JC: I'd had it with my way of life too, I was a drunk. Ya know actually I had my first DUI in 73. I had one in 74 and I had one in 76 so I did my 3 DUI's and I'd paid my dues.

JD: So you are kind of drying out, would you say, almost?

JC: Yeah! I think I was 2 years sober when I came home and that is when I met Debbie. Two years later we got married. But anyhow, he told me about Debbie. I remember I was praying for the right mate. I use to pray a lot back then ya know. "Lord I need a beautiful girl, please I finally got specific. Let her be beautiful and have a lot of musical talent. Buddy had told me about a girl that lived in the 3 apartments named Debbie and that she was attractive and she plays and sings. I remember when she got out of that Gremlin she come in from work. She was gorgeous. When I met her she had the biggest callous I ever saw from pushing a repediograph. She was a pen and ink artist and she worked at a silk screen company, she was really good. She put the pen down once we got together. I put her on stage and she had never done what I taught her to do. She said what about rehearsal. I said you just get up there with a guitar and you'll learn it as you go. She did of course, she forgets how good she got. She quit me a few years ago, but I don't blame her. Around the 90's the work that I had, back then I got to doing a lot of good convention work and it paid real well. Those were 2 of the most prosperous years and we got to eat New York Strip. She was with me. New York Strip three times a week back then.

JD: So it was the Jon and Debbie Corneal show.

JC: Yeah, yeah it was. Well before we called it that, it was Jon Corneal and the Limousine Cowboys. But she played in that group too. Then later on I changed it to the Jon and Debbie Corneal Show. By then we were both doing the Ernie Lee Show. We did a couple of hundred of them. Started out on Thursdays then it was Wednesdays and Thursday.

JD: That was in Tampa?

JC: Yeah! On Channel 13, “Ernie Lee, its goooood fer you”. “That Ernie Lee!”. Ya know Ernie took us out to eat breakfast every time. One time, we’d ride with him. He drove like an old man. Just about 20 feet before you get to the light and he would just slam on the brakes. My gran daddy drove that way, almost drove me crazy. But anyhow he pulled in the back part of the lot, the front comes right up to the sidewalk, ain’t no parking in the front. We got out of the car and headed to the restaurant and it just blew me away, here comes Pete Rose and he grabbed Old Ernie by the hand and he said, “its goooood fer you. Ernie had a lot of fans, he’d be eating in the restaurant with these guys that kinda look like bookies.

JD: Pete Rose?

JC: Yeah!

JD: Pete Rose, he knew the bookies.

JC: Yeah, the guys sitting with him was kind of Latino looking, Italian.

JD: I’m trying to think, that would have been in the 80’s or 90’s and Pete Rose was a manager.

JC: Yeah, Mid 80’s

JD: He played for the Phillies, probably in spring training.

JC: No, he was with the Reds at that time. They trained in Tampa.

JD: Ok we are concluding this side of the tape and also concluding for today, today is May 22.