

Wayne and Gayle Bates Interview

CC. We're at the County – Alpena County Library, this is December 11, 2015, I'm Carole Cadarette, with me is, uh, Cindy Kus, and also with us and being interviewed today is Mr. & Mrs. Wayne Bates, Wayne and Gayle. We're going to start with Wayne, uh, Wayne's history, uh, goes back a little further than Gayle's does, before they, uh, got together and made pretty good music for the last twelve years. Wayne. How are ya today?

WB. Pretty good.

CC. Good. Let's talk about how ya got started.

WB. Uh, I probably was ten years old, my Dad played fiddle, just around the house, and house parties and uh, played a little bit of mandolin, and my Mother bought me a guitar for ten dollars at a pawn shop, and I learned from there playin' Hawaiian guitar.

CK. Huh!

WB. And, uh, then I had a friend, Cliff Wyman, that taught me how to play Spanish guitar, and him and I played out at Bolton Bar, was the first time I ever played in a bar, and I was probably twelve, fourteen years old. And uh, and I just started picking it up from there. Uh, my first real band I played in was Bussey String Band.

CK. Who else was in that band?

WB. Glenn Anderson. Before I – uh, he quit and I took his place.

CC. Ok.

WB. And went from there with uh, (long pause) the Drifters, with Willy Wildfong, Willy's dad and Willy's brother. And we left – Willy's brother quit, so we went to, uh, got Gayle's brother to play with us, Al, and we named the band, ah, The Drifters for a while. And Willy's dad quit, and we got Gayle's other brother, Ed, to play drums with us.

CK. That's Ed and Al Kirchoff?

GB. Yeah. Ed played guitar, though.

WB. Her brothers. Ed was playing guitar back then, yeah.

GB. Ed was played guitar at that time, yeah.

WB. And we played, uh – the name of the band was

GB. Westernaires

WB. Yeah, the Westernaires.

CK. What was Willie's last name?

WB. Wildfong

GB. (spelling) W-i-l-d-f-o-n-g.

CK. Thank you.

WB. Aaaand . . .

CC. Were you still just playing just at Bolton, uh, Wayne? Or were you spreadin' out

WB. No, we played out at Deer Hunt out in Roger's City. Um, played a few weddings, anniversaries, and ah...

CK. About what year would this have been?

WB. Sixties or seventies.

CC. Yeah.

GB. I think early seventies, 'cause Al would have graduated in '70.

WB. Yup, I believe seventies.

CK. And what kind of music did the-?

WB. Country.

CK. Westernaires -?

WB. Yeah.

CK. (and WB., together) Straight country.

WB. Oh, we played a variety, Al could play a few polkas and waltzes and stuff, but it was mostly the old time country. And uh, and we broke up from there, went to uh, got Larry Golbeck to play with us on the steel guitar and we played with uh, was it AK and the Outlaws, wasn't it?

GB. Mm hm.

WB. Was the same band, only we picked up a steel guitar player.

CK. And you called yourself AK and the Outlaws.

WB. AK and the Outlaws, yeah. Then we broke up from there – Al fired me (laughs). And Willie said, well you can play lead guitar, so I started playing the lead, and we got Hank LaFleur to play with us and we called ourselves Wild Country. My daughter, Maria, drums with us . . .

GB. Daughter-in-law. (louder) Daughter-in-law.

WB. Daughter-in-law.

CC. What was her name?

WB. Maria.

CC. Maria?

GB. Maria. Was it Kowalski?

WB. Uh . . .

GB. Her maiden name?

WB. Szymanski

GB. Szymanski.

CC. Would seem to me in that time frame, Wayne, correct me if I'm wrong but, probably one of the very first lady drummers out there, huh? In a country band?

WB. I think so, yeah. And that was about at the time when they had the tractor show out on 23 North, there?

CC. Yeah.

WB. And then she got, well she married my son, and they moved out – she had a little boy so they moved out to Montana, so she had to quit. And then we got um, Tammy Johnson to play drums with us, and her husband, Freddy, joined the band and played lead guitar with us.

CK. And you were still Wild Country at that point?

WB. Yes. And then, I think Freddy and Tammy got their band together – got a band together, and we picked up, uh . . .

CC. Bill Miller?

WB. No, we had . . . well, we picked him, there was ah . . . oh, cripes, can't think of his name . . . Tollen.

CC. Tollen? Kay

GB. Jimmy Tollen

CC. Jimmy Tollen

WB. Not . . . This, this was later we picked up Jimmy Tollen. Um . . .

GB. Hank LaFleur?

WB. No, we had Hank.

GB. (inaudible) Oh, Rose?

WB. No, we had Rose, but this was before. Not Tollen – it's . . . he comes out to the bar and plays with us, big guy-

GB. Oh, Paulie Nolan!

CC. Paulie Nolan, of course! Paul Nolan.

GB. Yeah.

CC. So it was you, Paul Nolan, and . . .

WB. Uh, Rose

CC. Rose, and who was your drummer at the time?

WB. Uh, we got uh, Paul Conger.

CC. Ok. And you were called what at that point?

WB. Wild Country.

CC. Wild Country. Ok

GB. They just kept switchin' musicians.

WB. Yeah.

CK. Did you all do vocals, or were there . . . ?

WB. Yeah, Paul Nolan was a vocal, he was good, I mean the kid was good. And Rose Cuddy, she could sing, but . . . she could sing.

CC. Um, I remember those days. Uh, you're getting into the point where I could, I could remember coming out and - and seeing and listening to you. Um, but I remember places now that you were playing, like the Eagles and some of the different clubs and different bars and out at

WB. Eagles and Elks, um, Corner Bar. I think at that time, it might have been Brother's Bar or something.

CC. Yes. Probably out on 32. That was a, that was a country bar.

WB. Yes. Jack's Bar.

CC. Would you agree with me, uh, Wayne, that seemingly back in those days, there was a lot of places to play, but depending on what your style of music was, is where you were playing.

WB. Yeah.

CC. In other words, you weren't playing the Owl -

WB. No.

CC. - somebody else was doing that. The country bands tended to, to gravitate to the ones that he just named - those, those were country-

CK. (inaudible)

CC. bands uh, that played in those places. The Corner Bar, Club, uh, Jack's Bar was Club 32

WB. Yeah.

CC. That's where they tended to play and they were made most welcome, and that's what they did - they drew the folks that liked that style o'music.

WB. VFW.

CC. Yup.

WB. Played there for quite a while.

CC. Mm hm.

GB. You play at Bolton?

WB. Bolton Bar, we played out there for seven years, I think it was.

CC. Did you play, was you in this game long enough to play both the old Bolton before it died and the new Bolton?

WB. A little bit of the old Bolton.

CC. Ok, ok.

WB. But when the, and then guy took over at Bolton, he hired us in there. And we played out there for . . . three or four years, and then he sold it.

CC. Ok.

WB. And then we played out there for about seven years, I think.

CC. Did you play - how many nights a week did you play?

WB. Mostly on Saturdays.

CC. Mostly Saturdays, ok. Do you think your style of music has evolved over the years, Wayne?

WB. No . . . Has it?

GB. Oh, yeah. From old time country to what we're doin' now?

WB. From old time country to old time country?

GB. Well, I know, but we've, I mean, we've graduated into, you know, some 50s and 60s music and - and a couple of the new modern

CC. Mm hm

GB. . . . pop songs,

WB. Well, now, yes.

GB. . . . which you *never* used to do.

CC. What about the sound equipment, Wayne, and the instruments?

WB. Oh, that's – uh, the sound equipment was, when we first started out, all we played with was the guitar and amplifier, and a microphone.

CC. Yeah.

WB. Now, you've got PA systems, ah, monitors, and it's a lot better, you can hear yourself – the sound is so much better now.

CC. Yep. Ok, besides your parents' inter- influences for you, uuh, who were your, uh, the ones that when you were listening to the radio then, who were you listening to?

WB. Uh, probably Jimmy Dickens, Ray Acuff on the Grand Ole Opry, and my, really, one I watched a lot 'round here when I was younger, my Grandma – Grandparents used to take me out to the old Bolton Bar, and it used to be The Madcaps was out there. Uh, Barney Morey, Mel May – Charley May's dad

CC. Yeah.

WB. And, uh . . .

CC. Jack Hepburn?

WB. Jack Hepburn. Tom, uh . . . can't think of his last name, played lead guitar. And I used to go out there and sit on the railing, ah, and watch Mel May play, you know, guitar. And I wouldn't take my eyes off of him, I just . . .

CC. Ok.

WB. But, I think - that's before I started playin'.

CC. But that was your influences, because that's what you enjoy doing.

WB. Yup.

CC. Sure. Sure.

CK. And you listened on the radio? To? Different musicians back then?

WB. Yeah, always country music - that's the only radio station I'd ever, ever listened to.

CC. Yup.

WB. And when I – I played at the Armory when they had Bundy Mountain Jamboree down there-

CC. Yes.

CK. What was it called?

WB. Bundy Mountain Jamboree.

CK. Oh. Yeah.

WB. They played on Friday nights, and then Saturday, the winners from that, they used to sing on the radio Saturday mornings they had a country show.

CC. Were you silly like me, and went up against Hank LaFleur?

WB. Yeah.

CC. And ya lost.

WB. And I lost.

CC. Yeah, me too.

WB. I, uh – I won in, uh, the class that I sang in, and then I got to the finals, and I sang against Hank, and Hank beat me out. I think I finished third then.

CC. Ok. Same guy that he played in a band with.

CK. Was this the one where audience applause-

WB. Yeah.

CK. That's how they decided who the winner was?

CC. This was Butch Lyon's family that did this. Butch Lyon- that we've already interviewed. That was over at the Armory, and uh, they played uh, wonderful country music, with wonderful musicians.

WB. Played there for a few years - I can't remember how many years they played there.

CK. Can you put a time on it?

CC. Uh, nineteen, nineteen uh, fifies?

WB. Yeah.

CC. Yeah. 1950s, 'cause I was like twelve or fourteen, like that, maybe not even fourteen. So. 1950's. Yeah. Between '50 and '55 for sure. Yup. How about today, Wayne, what do you think about the dif-, we called country music back then, both you and I – how much has it changed today?

WB. Oh . . .

CC. Much?

WB. So much, I think. I, myself, I don't, uh, listen to it very much. I listen to the old – if there's an old station on it, like Willie's Roadhouse, then I'll listen to that.

CC. Sirius radio?

WB. Yeah.

CC. Ok. Ok.

WB. And they play the old – the old time country.

CC. And as we think back about the places back in - in the day, that there were to play when you were in all these different bands that you named, compared to back then and now, today, is there any comparison of places to play, places to ply your trade?

WB. Oh, yeah, I think so. Back in – when I was younger you could, of course the prices were cheaper back then, too. There was a lot of bars you could go in and play, like the Old Home Tavern and The Corner Bar. Uh, Bolton Bar, Spratt Bar . . .

GB. Weddings even hired back then, though.

CC. Mm hm. Do you remember what they paid ya? Do you remember what you made-

WB. When I first started out at Home Tavern, it was \$10 a night.

CC. \$10 a night. Ok. And that was a three or four piece band?

WB. Three piece, I think we had.

CC. Well, we haven't done very much better today, have we, when you think about it. Considering the costs were back then, and now today – and, uh, kinda limited, uh, do you think we're kinda limited where we can, where we can go play music now, uh, Wayne?

WB. Pretty much. Pretty much.

CC. Ok.

WB. Maplewood is probably the only one where everybody gets together-

CC. Yeah.

WB. -does a good job.

CC. Yep.

WB. And what we play, that Spratt bar

GB. Hoppe's Hut?

WB. Hoppe's Hut, for about seven – oh, more than that.

GB. Ten-

WB. Ten years.

CC. Ok.

WB. And then the new owner took over, and he didn't want a band, so we moved out to Little Town Lounge.

CC. Mm hm. And you're there what – every other Sunday?

WB. Every other Sunday, yes.

CC. Ok. And then special occasions that they hire you for.

WB. Yeah.

CC. Ok.

WB. And we're supposed to be out there New Years, I guess, this year. Again. A lot of bars don't have bands on New Year's Eve anymore,

CC. No.

WB. But I think they're startin' up again.

CK. What is the name of the band? The current band?

GB. Over the Hill

WB. Over the Hill Band.

CK. Did we talk about who was in that?

GB. No.

WB. No.

CK. Who was in that?

WB. Uh, Gayle, Al Zdan, John Marzean, Dick Laney, myself.

CK. And who's your audience? Who shows up?

GB. Over the hill people. (laughter)

CC. Fifty and over.

GB. Yeah.

CC. Fifty and over. That's my guesstimate.

GB. Mm hm, definitely.

CC. Well, we also have at the table - and we can come back to you, Wayne, if there's anything at special stories you'd like to share with us, um, we can certainly do that. But we have an unusual circumstance here because we have a – we have a musician, and a musician that are married folk, Wayne and Gayle, and Gayle comes from a musical background, and she has her own history to talk about, I know she does. So let's talk with Gayle and we'll give Wayne a little time to think about if there's anything he'd like to add, and uh, Gayle.

GB. Yeas.

CC. You and I are fairly new friends.

GB. Mm hm

CC. Fairly new. But you've been in this music scene a long time also. When did you start, how did you start, and with who?

GB. Well, I was probably five when I remember the first time singing, playing, um, my whole family was musical, minus one brother – he never took interest. And my dad, Alfred Kirchoff, taught himself to play guitar and then was determined that we were going to play. So, the three older, my three older siblings all took lessons, and then when it got to me, it was like, 'well, you can learn from your siblings', so I've – I stumble through playing music, I'm not the greatest guitarist or piano player, by no means, um, however I do enjoy it. I – I really have a good time. Um, we always had

all the equipment set up in the house in one room, so it was, whenever you wanted to play something, you'd go in there and play it. And my Dad had a lap steel, so I played with that all the time and um, as a family, that's what we did. Then my older brothers um, started their own band. Um, and to be honest with you, I can't remember the name of it. It was a three piece band. They ventured out and did it. And us girls, you know, my oldest sister never did get into a band until later in life, and I never did until I met Wayne, but I always sang and played a little bit here and there. And when I turned sixteen, Bob Edwards had heard me sing, contacted me and said, 'If I can get you a recording contract, what do you think?' And, being sixteen, of course that was right up my alley, I'm like, 'how wonderful', 'cause that was my dream – Loretta Lynn was my idol. And I'm like 'Yes, I want to do this', but still scared to death at sixteen.

CK. And Bob Edwards was the . . .

GB. Radio announcer at WATZ at the time. So, he contacted Porter Wagner, and we did a taping of two songs that I had written, and got local musicians, um . . . I'm trying to think of who they were – do you remember, Wayne?

WB. Uh-

GB. Carol Hopp was still

WB. Chuck Bruning

GB. Chuck Bruning

WB. Carol Hopp . . . uh, Bonnie

GB. Chuck's wife at the time, Bonnie

WB. Bonnie.

GB. And who was the guy that played bass, stand-up bass?

WB. Uh, Bruce . . .

GB. Bruce – you don't know?

WB. I can't think of his name

GB. I can't remember his name either. Anyways, we did a reel-to-reel tape, recorded the two songs and sent it to Nashville to Porter Wagner. And he immediately called back and said 'I want her!' Stupid me - and um, he said, 'If you want to do the record the way it is, with your band, it's \$5,000, however, if you choose to come to Nashville, I will produce the record with my band, I will take you on tour and we will make you a star. Well, I was going, 'til I realized I was going by myself at sixteen and I would have no daddy to go with me, and I got cold feet and I got scared. So we just did the record for the \$5,000 and it was sold around the area here, which I have 500 copies left and there

was only a thousand made! (laughter) And they sold for a dollar apiece. So, I kinda put that on the back burner, and then, probably six months later, Lonzo and Oscar came to Lincoln, and Bob Edwards hauled me up to Lincoln, put me onstage with them and I did one song, and when I got done, they wanted to take me back to my house and get permission from my parents to take me on their tour bus, and again, there was six men on this bus, and I'm seventeen at the time, and I'm looking at the odds, thinking, you know, how do women make it in this business and do I want to go down that road. So, I declined again, and just kind of left it go, but still kicking myself because I felt I could've made it. And then, approximately a year after I was married, um, Porter Wagner's producer called my mother and begged her again, and my mother said, 'well, that's up to her', and I just – by that time I had a baby and I just said I can't. I just - just couldn't do it. So that was the end of my singing career 'til I met Wayne.

CC. And how long a gap in between was that, Gayle?

GB. Um, that was probably 37 years?

CC. 37 years that you never - you never sang, went out, sang at a bar, none of that, never played music.

GB. No.

CC. Ok.

GB. Maybe not quite 37, maybe it was 'bout 27.

CC. Ok.

GB. 27, yeah.

CK. Did you still play with family, though? Or . . .

GB. Mmm . . . Yes. Yes, I did quite a bit. Um, and then once my dad passed away it seemed like the family get-togethers stopped and we just didn't play. I never played in a band or . . . was not the type of person to go out, 'cause I was a homebody mother that was going to stay home, take care of her kids and raise 'em. At one point, Wayne had called me um, and he was lookin' for a rhythm guitar player, and I just said I you know, just can't do it. I just, with kids, I had teenagers and stuff, and I just didn't feel comfortable at that time, so I just stayed home. Then we met, and um, they were playing at Hoppe's Hut at the time, Bob Wodkowski and Wayne, Jim Eller, Al Zdan, Dick Laney, and who was the steel – or the violi – fiddle player?

WB. Um-

GB. Pokrczynski?

CK. This was the Over the Hill Band?

GB. Yes. That was the starting of it. So, they asked me, 'do you want to sing a song?' And I'm like, 'yeah, I'd love to.' So I got up, did two songs, and sat down, and the next week Jim Eller's called me and said, 'hey, we have band practice out at Al Zdan's, this is how you get there - we expect you to be there'. And I'm like, at that time I was single and I'm a little nervous, you know, with all these men, so I said, ok, I'll see, maybe if I can get one of my sons to come with me, I'll be there. So that's where it began with the Over the Hill Band – I played with them on Wednesday nights for maybe a month or two, and then Bob Wodkowski said 'would you like to join us?' And I'm like, 'heck, yeah'. (laughs) So that's where my singing started then.

CC. And that was how long ago do you think, Gayle?

GB. Um, twelve years ago.

CC. Twelve years ago. Ok. And of course, we know – we know by joining that band, that also, uh, gave you a – a whole lot more closeness to the gentleman setting here that you married.

GB. Yes, indeed.

CC. I don't know how long it was that you dated before you were married, but you've been married for a while.

GB. Mm hm

CC. And you're still playing and singing in the Over the Hill Band, that personnel has changed a little bit

GB. Yes

CC. I do know that, but you're still doing that and - and uh, yeah.

GB. Yep, great group of guys.

CC. Yep. So.

CK. That - that's a wonderful story. I'm glad you're - I can't wait to hear you.

CC. You must, uh – was this with Porter before Dolly or after Dolly?

GB. Um, after Dolly.

CC. After Dolly – because I know he was really lookin' – see, you would've been her replacement.

GB. Yes, after Dolly.

CC. Ok.

GB. Um, I can't really say I regret it, even though a little bit of me does, but I think had I had a support system to go, I would've went. But I was just too scared at sixteen, and . . . all the drugs and horror stories of sex and stuff, I just - was not something I wanted to get into.

CC. Yeah. Women were treated pretty shabbily back then.

GB. Exactly.

CC. If you read any of the stories, uh, and talk about their backgrounds - Loretta Lynn could tell ya, Patsy Cline could tell you, they were treated pretty shabbily.

GB. Yup.

CK. Were you, was there anyone giving you advice? Or were you kind of sortin' through this on your own . . .

GB. Um, well, my parents were, but you know, they - it was more or less like they said, 'Dad can't quit his job to take you to Nashville,' and um, you know, who do you go with at that point? There was no one else, and Dad was my leaning post, and when he said he couldn't go, then I was like scared to death, 'cause I'm like, I'm not flying out to Nashville by myself and, you know.

CC. Sure. Well, can either one of you talk about anything, special stories you have, or memories you have, about your career - you definitely both have had a career and still do. Um, special maybe - I can remember you do some playing outside in very cold weather. I wonder how you, I often wonder how you do that - like the Elk Festival, when you go there, it's got to be something else trying to stay warm and play outside.

GB. Yeah.

CC. What do you do?

GB. Wear cut off gloves.

CC. Wear cut off gloves.

GB. So your finger tips are - Al Zdan actually plays with brown jersey gloves on with the fingers in.

CC. Yeah, yeah.

GB. Whole lot of working to keep the instruments in tune.

CK. Yeah, that, that is a very special circumstance, isn't it-

CC. For sure

CK. To northern Michigan?

CC. For sure. Yup. Cindy, have you got anything more? Um

CK. No, it was a pleasure, though. I really enjoyed hearing your stories, you backgrounds, and look forward to hearing you play.

GB. Thank you.

WB. Thank you.

CC. We want to thank you very much for being here, both Wayne and Gayle Bates, and for their, for allowing us to look back with them in their very, very rich history in the country music field. Thank you very much.

GB. Thank you.

WB. Thank you. And we both have CDs.

CC. We're gonna have to have them. We'll copy 'em.

GB. Ok.