

Dan Ager Transcript

CC. We are at the Alpena County Library, date is September 29th, 2015, we are ah, Cindy Kus, I'm Carol Cadarette, and we are interviewing Mr. Danny Lee Ager today. Dan, welcome.

DA. OK. Thank you. Ok.

CC. And thank you for coming.

DA. Mm hm.

CC. We've discussed a lot of things, uh, during these interviews and um, one of the things that we like to talk about with a musician is ah, of course how many years have you been involved in music, Dan, when did you start?

DA. 1973 I think – I'm pretty sure that's the date, I was about sixteen years old. My first paying gig, I was fifteen years old at the Posen Pub with ah, Rich Blackmore from Gaylord, he's a really good musician, songwriter – he played drums, but he was a really good guitar player, song writer. I can't remember the Cordovox player, though. The three of us, that was the first paying gig I had. Fifteen years old, so it would've been about 1972. I worked steady since I turned sixteen years old.

CC. And you worked steady and you worked with many, many musicians I'm sure.

DA. Yeah. Yep.

CC. Can you name any of them?

DA. I've got a list of people here, as I mentioned, Rich Blackmore is from Gaylord . . . Uh, look through the list of all the people – my first band I had, four piece band, Mark Bunce on organ, his mother was my Jr. High school vocal music teacher, Pat Bunce, she was a teacher there. Brad Moors on trumpet, he ended up becoming the youngest person to play with the Washington, D.C. Army Band – I think they called The Herald Trumpeters or something like that. Hilton Lamay on drums and vocals – everybody sang, I guess. We called our band New Century Two, that's 'cause Brad – Brad's brother Mike Moors had a band called New Century he decided to call it New Century Two, it was kind of, not very original, but . . . Let's see, see after that I played with a band called Crossroads, that was with Dave Tolan on bass and Mark Brose on drums. Let's see, before that, after high school, I graduated from high school, went to Olivet College for two years. Can't remember all the names of the band, but the one guy I remember in particular, he was a friend of mine, Kevin Powerrs – he ended up repairing Carey Deadman's trumpet – that's his business, he repairs brass instruments. He's a real super musician, too. Um, brass instruments, playin'. Uuh, other people – guitar player, Greg Pillsbury, goes by the stage name of Greg Hart. Bass player Hal Ostrander. Bill Bairley, I think it's B-a-i-r-l-y or something like that, not sure of the spelling of it. He was on lead guitar and keyboards. Interesting, him, he had a bunch of stuff hooked up into his guitar, he built into the guitar like a cigarette lighter, ended up shortin' out. He had it built in the guitar. (CC & CK: laughter) Pat Hardy on bass. Uh, Dale Eubanks on drums, couple guitar players

I played with, Larry Daoust and Joe Kowalewsky. Scotty Anderson on guitar, I think his Dad's name was Glenn, pretty sure. Let's see . . . For two years I played out in the Dakotas and Minnesota, first year, 1980, second year, 1981, we called our band Zane Grey. Yeah.

CK. And who was in Zane Grey?

DA. Uuh, let's see, me and Hal Ostrander on bass, and uh, all of a sudden I forgot the – Joe DiMarzo on drums at first, and then Dale Eubanks came in, took his place after a short time.

CK. Are these all Alpena people?

DA. Yeah. Dale Eubanks, I don't know if he's originally from, I think he lives in Warren, Michigan now. Donny Hartman's nephew, Dale Eubanks.

CK. How did you end up going out to . . . you said Dakotas?

DA. Out to the Dakotas – we got a hold of a booking agent out of, uh, Wisconsin, and he booked us out in, startin' out in Minot, North Dakota, at the Holiday Inn, playing there three weeks plus New Year's Eve, out there. I think we played there two years in a row. Yeah.

CK. So, for how long . . . were you living out there or you would just . . . ?

DA. Yeah, we traveled, you know, for two years. Longest time we spent out there without coming home was eight months. Just about went crazy, eight months of travelin'. That's the longest stint we played travelin'.

CC. One night gigs, Dan, or two?

DA. No, they're weekly gigs, usually.

CC. Weekly gigs.

DA. Easily six nights a week, usually, yeah.

CK. Did you have a van, or . . . bus?

DA. Yeah, we had a van, yeah.

CK. You all traveled together?

DA. We had a couple of vans. I think one time, when just the three of us, we traveled all in one van, then when there's four of us, Larry Daoust joined the band, then we had two vehicles then, yeah. Yeah.

CC. And you were how old then, Dan?

DA. I don't know, it was 1980, 1981, so I have to figure out, I was born in 1956, December 19th, ah, need to figure out how old I was back then.

CC. You were young.

DA. Yeah, mmhuh.

CC. Wow. Uh . . . any more? I mean-

DA: Oh, yeah.

CC. -your history is, I know, long.

DA. Yeah. You want to mention the different people I played with I can remember?

CC. Sure.

DA. Wrote down yesterday. Played with a band called Aurora, that was at Spratt Tavern. Mid 1980s, that was Rick LaCross on drums, Dave Amlotte on bass, Jane Brege on keyboards, and Ed Gapske on guitar. Had two singers that Naomi Thompson hired there, too. Tammy Lynn and Jeff Robbins. They sang there.

CK. Was it country?

DA. Uh, mainly, we did - I think we probably did some rock n' roll, too, I can't remember exactly, but a lot of it was country.

CC. Mm hm.

DA. Yeah. (Drums on table) Then when I first went to Nashville, that was . . . January of 1984.

I forgot to mention a guy I worked with back in mid – he's, he passed away, too, Paul Helisek, played bass. Pat Hardy passed away, too. Couple of people, bass players, I worked with. Went to Nashville first time 1984, met Joe Harris – at that time, nobody knew who he was, but he ended up becoming Garth Brook's exclusive booking agent. And uh, but this was 1984, before Garth was even, had a record out, anyhow. Uuuuuh, I ended up recording two 45 rpm records, "Reflection of a Fool," and the second one was "Reno and Me." And the session players they're supposed to be the "Class A Players" or something like that, they called it. Anyhow . . . Leader of that band was Paul Franklin on pedal steel guitar, he's played on a lotta hit records out of Nashville, like George Strait and Alan Jackson albums. He also toured playing pedal steel guitar for Dire Straits, a rock n' roll band. They did "Money for nothin' and your chicks for free." Yeah. The other guys that played in that session band were Hugh Hester on fiddle and acoustic guitar, he, he's with the Grand Ole Opry staff band playin' fiddle. Jerry Kroon on drums, I think he played with Ricky Skaggs. Uh, Jack Ross on bass and Gary Prim on piano – I've seen him on different albums, too. And Greg Galbraith, I think his name, on electric guitar, he played on the "Roll On" album by Alabama. Let's seeee . . . after that, I played in the Dan Ager Band with Ed Gapske on guitar and Pete Madsen on drums and Bob Madsen on bass. Then I played with Donny Hartman off and on. You probably know Donny Hartman on guitar and harmonica and vocals. And Joe Rings was one of our drummers we had too. Let's see, I think I had a band called, uh, Night Moves, that was with Lynn

Crawford on bass, George Bruning on guitar, Tami Perry on drums. Let's see, I meant - I forgot, two other people played organs back in – when I was in high school. When, uh, Mark Bunce quit playing with us – he went to college downstate – we had, uh, Paul Filipus on, organ and John Hansen I think played on organ for a short time. And couple other organ players we had were Larry Sawasky and Don Deadman, then a drummer I worked with, Randy Niemi. Trying to remember all these people I wrote down, all I could remember last night. Singin'- Sam Smith on guitar and singin'- acoustic guitar. And ah, Mark Ackley was a keyboard player with us at the Holiday Inn for a short time, we were playing like six nights a week there for a few weeks, with Mark Bates on drums. Hmm. Aah, let's see. More drummers I can think I worked with, Ken MacAnerney, Mark Williams - also worked with Shawna Thompson, she played a Martin acoustic and sang really good. Of course, Lloyd and Chris Douglas, you guys probably remember him, they both played with Grand Ole Opry groups- bluegrass bands. Um, Jim Seymour on drums, I played with him and Jack Venzloff on Sunday nights, 7 to 10 pm, at the Highway Inn in Hillman, Michigan. Let's see, Bill Ferguson, played with him a few times with him on guitar, comes in sometimes on a Sunday night. For a year and a half, I played at Sault Ste. Marie in casino Michigan, played uh, every Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday 8 to 11 pm. – with Barry Goehke on steel guitar, Gary Atlee on lead guitar, Jim DeLong on keys, and his last name on drums is Posh, I think it's – what's his name, d'you remember, played with the Kicker band, maybe you don't remember his first name.

CC. No, I don't.

DA. I think it's Rick Posh, but I'm not positive. I could get ahold of the steel guitar player, Barry, he'd know who it is. Aah, currently I play with the LBA, short for Little Band from Alpena.

CC: Mmhuh.

That's with Wayne Kendziorski on guitar, harmonica and saxophone and Bobby Rigg on drums, 'course we all sing. Before Bobby Rigg played with us we were called Copy Cats, with Greg Robbins on drums. Also played a few times with Jerry Ruczynski on drums and Stephanie on drums. Can't think of Stephanie's last name, I think it's a Polish name, her Dad plays drums, too – played in a polka band, he played with us about a month ago in Hillman, Sunday night. I can't remember her last name, though. Aah, we played in Ontario, Canada at ah, Stratford, Ontario and Windsor, Ontario. Trying to think of the name of the places – Bronson's was the name of the place in, uh, Windsor, and uh, I can't think of the name of the place in uh, Stratford, Ontario.

CC. Who'd you play with there, Dan?

DA. I was with ah, Ed Gapske and the Madsen brothers, Pete and Bob Madsen.

CC. Have a name for yourselves then?

DA. We were called Dan Ager Band at that time, I think.

CC. Ok. Alright.

DA. We also played in, uh, Fort Wayne, Indiana, Mt. Clemens, Michigan; but before we went there, it was about 1986, I think we played on the road a little bit in Canada, and Mt. Clemens, Michigan, and Fort Wayne, Indiana. Worked with Cathy Cole - Klimek is her married name now. Singer- plus, uh, Mark Hammond on drums, for Trick Rider. Before it was called Trick Rider it was called Silver Dollar Band with Tom Hart on guitar and pedal steel guitar. Other people I played with, uh, bass player, Neil Roland, singer and Vern on drums, I think his name was Velasko or something like that. Not sure how you pronounce the last name. Sorry, Vern, I can't remember how to spell your last name. Uh, then we played with Naomi, when Naomi Thompson, owned Spratt Tavern, she brought in Nashville artists, songwriters like David Wills – he did (singing) “I need a drink – here’s a twenty, bring my change in dimes” – it’s called “The Song on the Jukebox,” would be the name of it. I played also, she brought Freddy Fender and Johnny Paycheck and we played with Moe Bandy at a country – it’s a talent contest in Michigan, it was a national talent contest.

CK. What’s it called?

DA. Aah, I think it was called The Wrangler Showdown or somethin’ like that.

CC. Yeah. They do ‘em at the– did they do them up here in Alpena?

DA. They did it in Alpena at the bowlin’ alley.

CC. Yep.

DA. Then we won there and ended up going to the Michigan finals down in ah,— between Grand Rapids and Kalamazoo – Allegan County Fairgrounds.

CC. Before you move on from out at Spratt, didn’t ya have a lady that was brought in, too?

DA. I think I mentioned her – Tammy Lynn – didn’t I mention her? I think I did.

CC. Uh, there was one other one, I think.

DA. Jane Brege, she played keyboards.

CC. Uh, ok. Let me think there was another one, too, I missed her – Neil Madsen played lead for her. Maybe you weren’t there.

DA. Oh, I didn’t play there when Lorrie Morgan -

CC. There ya go.

DA. brought Lorrie Morgan, she played there.

CC. All right, that’s what I thought-

DA. I saw the rehearsal-

CC - maybe you did.

DA. Yeah, I saw the rehearsal there, like 6 pm before I had to play at the Alpena Holiday Inn.

CC. Ok.

DA. Yeah. Tryin' to think who else – they brought a saxophone player, too. I can't remember his name.

CC. Ok.

DA. Bob and Pete Madsen, I think Pete played with 'em. Um, um, before I forget, I'll mention these Nashville people she brought in – Naomi Thompson brought in – was mentioned before: David Wills, Freddy Fender, Johnny Paycheck, Moe – oh, Moe Bandy wasn't there, he was at the Allegan County Fairgrounds. Other (inaudible) people, Bruce Carrol, was a Christian country artist, he's won awards for that kind of music; The Kingsmen, he's Jack Ely, the lead singer, we worked with him - he sang "Louie, Louie" in 1964; Susie Nelson, Willie, Willie Nelson's daughter; Jan and Dean and The Drifters. The other people I can remember now is Pat Norkowski on drums, Melissa Baroni on, uh, vocals, Kath Engle on vocals – Kathy'd just sit in, singing with us few times. Bob Spencer, he played with us in Trick Rider band.

CK. That's quite a resume. Wow.

DA. Yeah. Yeah.

CC. OK- it is a resume. And so, Dan, what do, what do you say about Dan's style of music, or in your case, styles of music.

DA. I like all kinds of styles because my Dad kinda weaned me on uh, Country music. He liked Country music a lot.

CC. And you play Christian music – I know you do.

DA. Yeah, yeah, I enjoy doin' that.

CC. Bluegrass music? Bluegrass?

DA. Yeah. Ok.

CC. Ok.

DA. Mm hm.

CC. Aaah, I'm s- have you ever played with a polka band?

DA. I did at the Polish – at that place called Posen Pub. I don't think it's open anymore, I heard somebody say it's closed.

CC. Ok. Now, did you always play guitar, Dan, or is there another instrument involved in your life?

DA. Yeah, I played bass guitar, too, and uh, when I was in high school I played – well, junior high I played baritone horn and high school I changed to tuba. Played tuba at Olivet College, too- uh, in the bands there.

CC. Ok. I think you play a little keyboard, too, don't ya?

DA. Yeah, a little bit, yeah.

CC. Ok. All right . . . over the years, do you think – do you think your music has evolved to . . . from whatever to whatever? I'm sure it's gotten better, it always does when you're in it for a long time, but do you think the styles of music that you've played has evolved over the years? By that, I mean, uh - we're certainly not playin' all acoustic anymore, we certainly have - we're amplified and thinks like that.

DA. Yeah.

CC. Has it made it easier? Playing your style of music? Over the years, has it gotten easier for ya?

DA. I think so –I'm tryin' to think style of music, of course, I'm playin' Sunday nights, a lot of it's classic country from the 60s and 70s, I don't know if we do stuff from the 50s, probably that old, but, uh, I'll mention one thing, too, I didn't – I sat in with Lloyd Douglas and Chris Douglas, just playin' a few jazz songs, I really loved jazz, especially when I went to Olivet College after high school for two years. I went to see a lot of jazz players in East Lansing and Ann Arbor, went to see a lot of people. Big bands, like Stan Kenton and Maynard Ferguson, uh, Buddy Rich, other big bands, uh, Thad Lewis, Mel - Thad Jones, Mel Lewis Orchestra. I'm trying to think of all the people, I've seen a lot of solo artists, too, in jazz, I mean, after high school, that two years.

CK. When, you know, when you were at Olivet College, that article said that you studied technical aspects of music?

DA. Yeah, I went there as a music major, took music theory and private vocal lessons and private tuba lessons. Uh . . .

CK. Tuba?

DA. Tuba, yeah. Biggest brass instrument I think there is.

CK. (chuckles) See? There's another one.

DA. It's a bass instrument. Yeah.

CK. Uh huh.

CC. Yeah.

DA. Mm hm.

CC. I kinda stopped you and I apologize – your influences, you said – your Dad.

DA. Yeah, starting out, yeah, he liked country music a lot – he took me to see Johnny Cash a couple times and lotta people, uh . . . The only person I regret, he wanted to see Marty Robbins, one of his favorite singers. Several times Marty Robbins had played downstate, every time I told him, he was playin’ downstate, he couldn’t go- he was workin’. Then him and Marty Robbins and Merle Haggard played together at Cobo Hall, I saw it advertised in the *Detroit Free Press*, I told him a week after it was over with. He said, “Why didn’t you tell me?” I said, you could never go, anyhow. You always work. He said, “I was laid off,” so I felt guilty for a long time. He didn’t get to see Marty Robbins, his favorite country singer.

CK. Where did you see Johnny Cash play?

DA. Pine Knob. Down by, is it, Clarkston, Michigan? Near Pontiac, yeah.

CC. On the, uh – I know, uh, I, I remember, Dan, that you were leaving one time to go hear, uh, gospel presented by, uh, Ricky Skaggs, right? Didn’t you go . . .

DA. Yeah, I went to see him in Gaylord. Yeah.

CC. Ok. Ok. And that was a gospel show? Yes?

DA. Uuh, he did a little bit of gospel, he did mainly his, his gospel albums – not gospel, bluegrass albums.

CC. Ok.

DA. He did one small section where he did gospel music off a one gospel album he had out at the time.

CC. Ok.

DA. But the majority of it was bluegrass, all acoustic instruments. Like a six-piece, I think it was a big, maybe six people or more in the band, I can’t remember. Mm hm.

CC. Ok, thinking back, ah, Dan, over the many years that you’ve played – um, there, it sounds to me like there was a lot of places to play back then. Um-

DA. Mmhuh.

CC. - has things changed over the years, as far as play-, as far as places to play and getting paid for it?

DA. Yeah, many years ago, well, maybe you can remember what years it was, when it used to be bands played five or six nights a week in one place – wouldn’t have to move all the heavy PA

equipment and stuff. It's not that way anymore – they got usually just weekends ya play for bands, nowadays. Sometimes, someplace, people have music like on – like The Fresh Palate's got music on Tuesdays and Saturdays. Ah, Courtyard has music on Thursdays – it's usually solo or duet groups there, I've seen a trio at The Fresh Palate. Greg Adamus- I've played with him a few times. Keyboard player – his dad was president of the Detroit Musician's Union, and, yeah, he started playing when he was 11 years old, I guess, playing with his Dad - piano.

CC. Yeah.

DA. Yeah.

CC. He plays a lot of different instruments.

DA. Yeah, he plays drums and

CC. Piano is his thing, though.

DA. Saxophone, yeah.

CC. Yeah

DA. Yeah.

CK. Back to the venues, what are some of the older venues you remember playing at in this area?

DA. If I try to think when I first played, like I said the first playin' gig I had when I was 15 years old, I think it was the Posen Pub, I think it was right downtown Posen. That was with Rich Blackmore on drums and a guy on accordion, I can't remember his name, though. Don't remember who it was. But I started working steady in the bars every weekend when I was 16 years old, from then on.

CC. Did you play like uh, uuh, The Owl, ah . ?

DA. Yeah, I think I did a few times, not very often I think. The Owl Café.

CC. The Grove was up and runnin' then? Back in those days?

DA. Yeah, I played there. Fletcher Motel, The Grove.

CC. Fletcher Motel, The Grove. Um, uuum . . .

DA. Cedar Grove.

CC. Cedar Grove.

DA. I guess that just recently burned down, I guess- saw it in the newspaper.

CC. Several out at Long Lake that's, that's long since burned.

DA. Yeah, Stone Bar . . .

CC. The Keg-

DA. . . . on the corner

CC. The Keg

DA. I - I might've played there, I don't remember if I did or not.

CC. Hideaway

DA. Yeah. I played there.

CC. Three Pines?

DA. Nope, I don't think I – I don't know if I even went in that place.

CC. Bolton-

DA. Yeah, Bolton.

CC. Maplewood?

DA. Yeah, that's where you and your family has music, yeah.

CC. I'm tryin' – and I'm, I'm sure you played, before it was the 19th Hole – what did they call it back then?

DA. Yes, Twin Acres.

CC. Twin Acres.

CK. They had a band, a stage, I remember now.

DA. That's where I first met Bob Seger, at that time I didn't know his mother lived in Alpena, so I was pretty star-struck, anyhow.

CK. Did you ever play with him?

DA. No, no. No . . .

CC. No? But, uh, you played . . . you mentioned, uh, Donny Hartman, that you played with, and . .

DA. Yeah. Yeah, I played bass guitar with him.

CC. Ok. So, when we go back to venues to play, obviously what we just went through, there was way more back then than there is today.

DA. Yeah, I think I played just about every honky tonk in Alpena County, just about. Played in other places like Atlanta and Lewiston. Let's see, Lewiston aaaah - what's it called?

CC. Redwood? Redwood Steak House?

DA. I don't know if I played there or not.

CK. The Slanty Shanty?

DA. I think I played there – was that in Lincoln, or were was it?

CK. Lincoln, I think.

CC. In Lincoln?

DA. Yeah, as you walk in, it was - I think it – when you walked in, it went up, so people when they tried to leave, they could stumble down the walkway to get out.

CC. Ha! Yeah. Slant. And, and – The, uh, Slanty Shanty's not there anymore, either, is it?

DA. I don't think so, I think that's been gone decades ago.

CC. Yeah. Ok.

DA. Tryin' to think, well The Courtyard, before it was that, was The Apartment Lounge – played there when it was called that.

CC. Ok.

DA. I mean, a lot of bars, Ike's Bar in Hillman and . . .

CC. Out in your area, out in Ossineke?

DA. Yeah, the Wagon Wheel, that's been closed for several years. Played at Cattails, there in Ossinke, it's still open now.

CC. Ok.

DA. I played a few times at the Ossineke Eagles.

CC. Ok.

DA. Once I became a member, I played there. Um, there's a lot- I'm tryin' to think of all the places I played around Alpena County. Just about every place there was a bar, I guess.

CC. Yep.

CK. You know, I've been thinking about how music sometimes, not always, but sometimes, like, defines a place, um, I think Nashville is a real good example of defining that, I think. I've spent some time up in Cape Breton Island, and there's a very distinctive style of music,

CC. (quiet) Yeah.

CK. Um, and then I was thinking – is there anything about this area, about Alpena, Northeast Michigan – are there any descriptors for the kind of music that defines it?

DA. Well, we've got a lot of super-talented musicians came out of Alpena, counting Mike Jones on saxophone/clarinet, he's super, he's down in Metro Detroit area.

CC. And the style of music he's playing?

DA. Jazz, that's what he loves the best. He played Dixieland and jazz. And, uh, who else . . . uh, Bill Lawrence – these are guys I graduated in high school from, 1975, Bill Lawrence, bass player, he's really good. Tryin' to think who else, I'm thinkin' jazz players that came from here. I mentioned Jerry Ruczynski he went to Berklee School of Music, so did Jim LaCross, from here – on saxophone. Uh, I guess- I enjoy playing gospel music, you asked what style, I probably won't be able to make a living a doin' it, but I like doin' it- spreadin' the gospel. What else . . . I guess I'll let you bring up questions, I can't think of anything.

CC. Well, I think that, that Lloyd Douglas certainly started in bluegrass-

DA. Oh, yeah. Yup.

CC. I mean, he played jazz, he, he –right? He's played every style, but now, right now, he's pretty – he's in with a group that's traveling quite a bit – and it's, he's back to bluegrass.

DA. Yup. A band called Detour.

CC. Yup.

DA. Yup

CC. But that, too, ah, has changed – the style of bluegrass has changed over the years - as country has changed over the years. There's – not so much polkas, I mean polkas are polkas and obereks are obereks, but when you get into these different styles of music, don't you feel, Dan? Am I talking – country's changed.

DA. Country turned like into, into kinda like '80's rock n'roll, kind of feel to it sometimes. I don't know if I . . .

CC. When did it change, Dan? When - who came along in the country field to change it?

DA. I don't know.

CC. I gave my answer on this, what is your answer?

DA. I don't know, I can't remember what years it'd be exactly. All I can think of is the 1980's- they had, country became "popular", I guess, quote popular – *Urban Cowboy*, the movie with John Travolta. I'm trying to think if we did music from that album, too. From the soundtrack, you know- Johnny Lee, "Looking for Love in All the Wrong Places." Um, I can't think of what other songs are off there. I can't think right now, but-

CC. When Cindy asked me, I said Garth Brooks.

DA. Yeah.

CC. Really started to change then.

DA. Yeah, I regret, I missed him twice. He was in – every time the Alpena County Fair brought a Nashville act or a country act, every summer I go to see the show, but the one year I didn't go was in Alpena, was Garth Brooks, I regret that. I missed him down in Nashville when I was down there, too.

DA. Went down there with a couple people who wanted to bring a Nashville show to Alpena. We were in Barbara Mandrell's former company, her booking agency, I can't remember the name of the company. I think the last, the last name of the booking agent was Moore, might be Cathy Moore, her and her twin sister had a duet, anyhow, we were sitting in the office in downtown Nashville on Music Row, and we got there late, and they said, "Don't worry, we've been running late, too." I think it was quarter after four pm it said on the clock on the wall, it would be above her head, she said, "Do you want to go to the taping of "Nashville Now", the TV show, you could probably get there by five o'clock, it's out in Opryland.

The guy from Alpena said, uh, "no, we don't wanna go, take care of business today."

Said, "Oh, by the way, Garth Brooks is there." I wish I would've taken a taxi to see him, but I stayed and did the business there instead of seeing Garth Brooks.

CK. The elusive - elusive Garth Brooks, he just-

CC. Yes, for sure.

DA. I guess he's back performin' again, I figured he probably would after his children grew up, so.

CK. Are there any other memories you have of the time you spent in Nashville early on? Anything that . . .

DA. Mmm, let's see.

CK. Stories that . . .

DA. Well, the first time I went to Nashville, I ended up recording two 45 rpms there, vinyl records. Uh, like I said, Joe Harris, he was a booking agent there, he ended up becoming the exclusive booking agent for Garth Brooks – this is 1984, it's five years before Garth came to Alpena County Fair.

CC. Mm hm.

DA. I think Garth had two albums out at that time – 1989.

CC. Mm hm.

DA. And, uh, to translate, the record producer that was there when I was there with Joe Harris when I was there in 1984 Nashville was – Miles Sillas, Miles Sillas was his name, and Joe Harris told me where he lived, but it was nighttime when I went there. I don't know where he lives at., if he's still alive. Joe Harris died back in the early 1990s, I think. I was going to say about, when ah, they were just gonna do a regional – my record just, like the five states surrounding Michigan, but then I decided to do a national one, that covered the – ended up playin' my record in the 800s radio station across the continental US, the ones that reported to *Billboard* and *Cashbox* magazine or something like that. It never got on the charts or anything like that, just got played at these radio stations, anyhow. That was 1984. I can't remember what else I can say about being in Nashville, uh, the first time. 'Course when I - we got to the Grand Ole Opry, backstage, Joe Harris' southern accent, "Danny, d'ya bring your camera?"

I said "No. Didn't want to bother the stars with shootin' pictures of 'em".

He was kinda disgusted I didn't bring a camera. That's just what happened there. Oh, the guy that co-produced the record I did in Nashville was Tommy Jennings, Waylon Jennings' brother.

CK. Hm!

DA. He sat down with his old Gibson guitar and sang me all the verses to "Irene Goodnight", he thought it might be an idea, doin' that song. But I wanted to do records that nobody ever heard of, you know, songs on the record-

CC:- Sure.

DA. -so I ended up pickin' songs by different, uh, songwriters.

CC. Who wrote – who wrote, uh, "Reflection of a Fool".

DA. Ivan Strother – that's his name. Nobody probably ever heard of him, I never heard of him.

CC. Where did you find it - how did you fall on that?

DA. It was in that record producer's office, he brought in several demo 45s that was from the 19- I think it's from the 1960's, this demo record called "Reflection of a Fool." It was really fast, up-tempo, but the producer wanted to slow it down, he slowed down the tempo when I did it. So-

CC. Ok.

DA. Yeah.

CC. Uh, did you ever get to go to the old Ryman?

DA. Uh, never went inside there, no.

CC. Never went inside.

DA. Walked by it, but never went inside.

CC. Ok. Ok.

DA. Just the new one, backstage a few times at the new Opry house, yeah.

CC. Did ya ever get to Tootsie's?

DA. Yeah, I been in there and, oh, half a dozen bars that are right there in that block.

CC. Did ya get to play in there?

DA. Uuuuh, not there, but some other bar that uh, her name was Cricket, she's from Alpena, she played drums, she sat in at Spratt Tavern, I don't remember her name, she's a short little gal . . .

DA. They called her nickname was Cricket, but Demney or Debney or something like that is her last name. Seems like that was her last name, you don't know who it is?

CC. No, I don't.

DA. I can't remember either. She took me to a bar in Nashville, I don't know where it was – I went out and played bass guitar and sang. That's the only club I remember playin' in Nashville.

CC. Ok.

DA. It wasn't on – I don't think it was on downtown, you know, on Broadway.

CC. Yeah.

DA. Mm.

CK. I'm looking at a poster, here, October 29th, doesn't have the year.

DA. That was 1983.

CK. Johnny Paycheck at the ACC East Campus Building – with Danny Lee Aiger and Zane Grey. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

DA. Oh, it was fun. We had our band, Zane Grey, we did a concert a month before there – before that with our band backed up, uh, Freddy Fender and Susie Nelson, one of Willie Nelson's daughters. It was a lot of fun, you know, what can I say about it? We had a big sound company from a company called ah– what was it called, something about Snowbound Sound. They had a music store downtown Saginaw called Watermelon Sugar. They brought up a big sound system – it sounded great. They really knew what they were doin', anyhow.

CC. Well, they had to – it was in the gymnasium.

DA. Yeah, the sound-

CC. I was there.

DA. -the guy doing the engineering in gymnasium said gymnasiums are terrible for sound, but this is the worst one I ever played – that's what he said.

CC., CK. (laugh)

DA. That's the worst sound for a gymnasium he ever played.

CC. And I remember that night, it was packed in there, Dan.

DA. Oh, yeah, was it?

CC. The place was packed. Yeah.

DA. Ok.

CC. Yeah, I know when you're a musician you don't notice that – it was packed that night. Yep, yep.

DA. Cuz the, the month before, we played a Freddie Fender – we backed up Freddie Fender and Susie Nelson, it was in the Merchant's Building at the Alpena Coun-, County Fairgrounds. So-

CC. Wasn't there another one was supposed to come in their place?

DA. Yeah.

CC. And somebody took the money and ran?

DA. Yeah. Naomi Thompson said that, uh, she didn't wanna mention it – she passed away now, but she's been gone a long time, but I guess they wanted cash up-front, she was gonna send 'em a check, but they said, "We want cash." She had to go to the grocery store and cash a big check, you know, to pay for the Nashville artists before they went onstage, anyhow. That was Johnny Paycheck.

CC. Somebody else had booked a, a, a another concert?

DA. Yeah, yep -

CC. And they had sold all the tickets, and it was a big name, and I don't remember who it was; but-

DA. I know who it is. Jerry Reed.

CC. It was Jerry Reed, yes exactly. And that person took the money and ran, and, and Naomi was stuck, and so this is what she did – she got Freddy Fender-

DA. Yeah.

CC. –and, and Willie Nelson's sister or daughter?

DA. Daughter.

CC. Daughter, to replace that concert, cuz there were a lot of upset people about that. So-

DA. Yeah, they ended up, Naomi gave 'em like \$5,000 down, she never got it back anyhow - for the concert. Bookin' agency kept it for Jerry Reed.

CC. Yep.

CK. So, was she someone who did production work locally?

CC. She was into country music, and, if she - she was a, a friend of Dan's and many of us, in fact, she was my relative-

DA. Oh yeah, ok.

CC. a cousin.

CK. (Laughing) Who isn't?

CC. Hehe! Yeah, that's true. And she owned – she owned the bar. Uu, uuuh -

DA. Spratt Tavern.

CC. Spratt Tavern. Ok, and she had other friends in Alpena that had some money that was willing to help her out – names are on the bottom of that poster – um, that was willing to help her out,

DA. Yeah.

CC. Ah, so that's how we got a few of these bigger names in here. And, and as hard as she would try, that first one went south cuz the person took the money and, and left.

DA. Yeah. I was at one of their meetings, business meetin for that Jerry Reed show. I was suspicious cuz the tickets, they didn't have them numbered, you know.

CC. Mm hm.

DA. Each ticket one number larger than the other, I just felt suspicious – my gut feelings, I didn't trust 'em, agencies they took off with the money, anyhow.

CC. So then they did the replacement and, and you got to play with them, right. You were part of the band.

DA. Uh, yeah. We were the band, Zane Grey, backed up Freddie Fender and Susie Nelson, yeah. Ok.

CC. Mm hm. Ok. What a history that is.

CK. Here's a - another uh, piece from a recent production that you did with Greg Adamus –

DA. Mmhuh.

CK. -um, it was a program on The Beatles.

DA. Yeah, yep.

CK. Can you talk a little bit about that? Was it just you and Greg?

DA. Yeah, just Greg and I. That was fun, cuz I was kinda mainly just playing rhythm guitar, played a few leads, tried to do the best I could to the sound of George Harrison. I kinda improvised itanyhow. Yeah.

CK. Did you have a favorite Beatle?

DA. A favorite one – well, they're all good and talented. There's like Paul McCartney's writing and singing, of course, McCartney and Lennon wrote together a lot, great songs. They were all good. I don't know if Ringo wrote anything at all, he had solo albums; I know the other three wrote their own music. I don't remember if Ringo wrote anything or just did other songwriter's music, I don't remember.

CC. D'you ever try to write, uh . . . ?

DA. Yeah, I did a commercial for Alcona Motors.

CC. Did you?

DA. Sellin' cars, yeah.

CC. And you, you sang it and played it?

DA. Sang, and played all the instruments except the drums and the – what else – I had Brad Moors play trumpet on it, that did not, ended up, not being the commercial on the radio. But it was, it was for the radio, anyhow. For their commercial.

CC. Where'd you go, where'd you go to record that?

DA. I recorded it myself. I had the first time they had multi-track recorder, it was a reel-to-reel, played seven and a half and 15 inches per second. 3340S is the model number, TEAC multi-track recorder, just four track, I think that's the first one that came out, for the public to buy, anyhow.

CC. Ok. Did you ever do theatre, Dan? Did you ever play at any of the theatres in town, with the bands?

DA. Yeah, I played – I sang and played in the musicals at the high school.

CC. Ok.

DA. Trying to think what the first year was *Finnegan's Rainbow*, my sophomore year, *Annie Get Your Gun* was, uh, my junior year, with Robin Rooney. I seen her doin' theatre down in, uh, Western Michigan University. She had a lead part for about Shakespeare's – not Shakespeare's, uh, whoever it is, Louie the . . . whichever king killed several of his wives, anyhow, he had several wives-

CC. Henry VIII?

DA. Yeah, I think it was. She played, she played one of his wives, anyhow - that was the name of the – name of the theatre production. The last year in high school I had "Carousel", that was with John Wojda, I had a lead part, and he ended up becoming a professional actor. He's still in New York City, as far as I know.

CC. Really.

DA. He's done a lot of – he even got written up in the New York Times when he was an understudy. Isn't that what they call it when the main actor's sick, he filled in and he had good writings on that from the guy that wrote, uh, critics for *The New York Times*. Anyhow, gave him a good report.

CC. So have you had any curtain calls or calls ah, Danny, that you, that you regret not taking or that you had to turn down?

DA. Hm. I guess I can't think of anything.

CC. Has a local theatre's called you and said, we need a band member or, or downstate?

DA. Um, I already had a commitment playing with the band on the weekend when the Thunder Bay Theatre asked me to play George Jones in a production here, I can't remember the name of it. I think it was called "*Always -Always, Patsy Cline.*"

CC. That's right.

DA. I think that's what it was called. I think. Not sure.

CC. They wanted you to play in the band?

DA. They wanted me to sing and play George . . . George Strait's part, actin' there. But I already had commitments on the weekend, playin' with bands, anyhow. That's the only thing I can think of I didn't do. I kind of wish I could've - same thing, could've seen Lorrie Morgan at Spratt Tavern. I saw her rehearse at 6pm before she went to play. But I had to play at the Holiday Inn, we were playin' five or six nights a week there, in Alpena.

CC. That's one we left out, the Holiday Inn.

DA. Yeah.

CK. Nope, I heard him mention it earlier.

CC. Ok.

CK. So, it's apparent to me that music is a huge part of your life-

DA. Yeah, yeah.

CK. -and it has been for a long time.

DA. Yeah, yeah.

CK. What drives you? What . . . what makes you want to be out there playing?

DA. Playin' music? Oh, it's, it's fun playin' music, plus, it's like I said, it's a little bit of an income and some extra money to try to survive on, I guess. Uh, what else . . . that's-

CC. I know that you do nursing homes, too.

DA. Yeah. I do that too, yeah, that's-

CC. And I, and having done that, I know what a feeling that gives you, doesn't it, Dan?

DA. Yeah, the people, they, it gives them some break from the monotony of bein' in a nursing home. Playin' music, you see 'em singin' along, tapping their foot and stuff. Yeah.

CC. People that haven't moved in weeks or months.

DA. Yeah? Ok. Mm hm.

CK. Joy.

DA. Yeah.

CC. What a joy that is.

CK. You bring joy to a lot of people.

CC. Mm hm.

DA. Yeah, I played a few churches here, too. That's a . . . a joy, spreading the gospel.

CC. Uh, Dan, several times, uh, came in – October, the month of October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month, and we always did a program for that, ah – we, meaning when I worked at Shelter, Inc., and I called Dan several times and I remember one particular, he played “Bridge Over Troubled Waters”-

DA. Mm hm. Yep.

CC. “He Ain’t Heavy He’s My Brother”.

DA. I don’t know if I did that song-

CC. Yes, you did.

DA. I like that song- I must-

CC. Yes, you did-

DA. – I must’ve had the words in front of me or somethin’

CC: - Well you probably did, but I asked him and he did appropriate music for those things for Shelter, Inc. Well, Dan, thank you very, very much for coming in ah, this morning, this early afternoon for coming in and sharing your memories with us. We appreciate it, ah from the Alpena County Library and particularly Cindy and me – thank you very much.

DA. Ok, thank you.

CK. Thanks, Dan.

DA. Ok.