

Jimmie Davis

THE EARLY YEARS

The view of the state capitol from Jimmie Davis' den is perfect. The monolith that Huey Long built rises out of capitol gardens like an ancient obelisk. Perhaps it's fitting that the building which housed Davis' office as governor for eight years should loom so prominently just across Capitol Lake, a constant reminder to him of his service to the state of Louisiana and its people.

Davis' sprawling, fence-encircled home is filled with momentos, photographs, and relics of a life devoted to the two driving forces which have forever motivated him—his state and his music. Don't ask him to choose the most important between the two, as I did, because he won't make that choice. Many of his most precious possessions were consumed in a house fire nearly fifteen years ago. Long after the fire was snuffed out, the memories remain, and so does the spirit.

Davis was born in North Louisiana shortly before the turn of the century. From a modest upbringing he developed a respect for simplicity in life. That philosophy obviously influenced the manner in which he administered the affairs of state: cautiously, conservatively, cognizant of local government's right to remain unfettered from state interference. He saw the role of government as being the provider of basic services like education, and highways and public safety.

Despite the fact that he served two terms from 1944-48 and 1960-64, Davis contends that he was never really interested in running for governor. He says that insistent friends and colleagues push him into the race both times. He nevertheless ran and won in both outings.

In doing so Davis refined the art of campaigning by changing the rules. His manner of politicking was "down home." He was good at meeting

people, at shaking hands and visiting. Those traits were as much the characteristics of Jimmie Davis the entertainer as they were Jimmie Davis the politician. And they served him as well in both endeavors. In fact, when you closely examine Jimmie Davis' life, the line between entertainment and politics becomes somewhat blurred.

When Davis first took the reins of government in 1944 he found a state limping along, its economy in shambles, its resources depleted. The war was raging and Louisiana, like other sister states, was suffering immensely. Two years into his first term peace would come, but prosperity was yet to be realized.

Troopers numbered barely 170 and there were only 79 vehicles throughout the state. It didn't really matter though, for anyone lucky enough to have a car, it had been nearly impossible to get tires or gas. Those roads which were passable were often deserted. Nearly a third of the troopers had been pressed into plant and facility security details. It was time to restore a degree of normalcy to state government, and to life in general. Davis set out to do just that. While his final two years would later be called the "age of improvement," the improvement was difficult to discern at the time.

Throughout those days, and in the years to come, music would sustain Jimmie Davis. As a Country Music Hall



Davis served two terms as Governor of Louisiana from 1944-48 and 1960-64. This photograph was used on campaign posters.

of Fame inductee, he's probably better known outside Louisiana for his music, he's seldom been without a band, and almost never without a guitar and a song. His ninety-one years have slowed him, but he still manages to make appearances in churches around the state from time to time.

Old friends, like old songs, are always around, and Chris Faser is as close as a friend could be. Chris, a longtime ally of state police, served as an assistant in both administrations. He had met him two years ago when Davis served on the Public Service Commission.

Chris recounts the Davis administration's record with pride—no taxes raised in either term, surpluses left in the state coffer at the end of each term, highways significantly improved, state retirement systems established, a uniform traffic code adopted, and a drivers licensing law passed (Davis has DL #1). *continued*

I recently spent the better part of a morning with Chris and the Governor drinking coffee and talking about the early years of Jimmie Davis. Later that morning Davis' last superintendent of state police, Tom Burbank, would join us. It was a rambling and wide-ranging conversation about his early years. Governor Davis is as "down to earth," quick witted and genuine today as he was when he walked out onto his first stage. His audiences may have changed, but the entertainer has not.



GOVERNOR, A LITTLE BACKGROUND FIRST OF ALL. WHERE DID YOU GROW UP? TELL US A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOUR UPBRINGING.

Well, there's no place where I grew up, that is it wasn't close to anywhere, much less a town. I suppose it was closest to Quitman in Jackson Parish, near Ansley. Our place was about 9 miles from Jonesboro and 6 miles from Quitman.

It was really out there, we didn't even have a rural route for mail delivery. They established one later but it didn't matter because we didn't get any mail anyway.

A BIG FAMILY?

Eleven kids, mama and papa, grandma and grandpa lived with us. That's 15 people in a little two room share cropper's cabin.

YOUR DAD WAS A FARMER

Yea, I guess so. He had worked on the railroad before, wanted to get rich I guess. He got a dollar a day. But about a month before he quit the railroad they gave him a raise to \$1.10. He got one check for that, can you believe it.

Anyway, he hadn't gotten rich so he got some land from Mr. W.R. Guess who had quite a bit of land up there. The first year we stayed in an old store. About half as wide as this room and about as long, I guess. We all stayed in one room

and cooked and all in there. At night we'd put kind of a curtain down the middle for privacy. We had one or two beds and some of us would sleep on the floor. I was about eight years old before I ever slept in a bed and when I finally got it I couldn't sleep there, I just wasn't used to it. I got out of that and got on the floor.

YOU ENDED UP GOING TO COLLEGE DIDN'T YOU?

Yes, to Louisiana College. I was the first one in our community that had ever been to college. In fact I was the first person who had ever graduated from high school. They had a high school, class of three. We had our first reunion last year. There were two of us. One had died.

I later went on to LSU and finished in 1927. Majored in psychology and education.

"I was about 8 years old before I ever slept in a bed..."

"I realized I could make more money in a month singing than I could make in two years as governor."

THEN YOU WENT ON TO TEACH FOR A WHILE DIDN'T YOU?

For a year at the girl's college in Shreveport, that was something else I'll tell you. I told a man that if he hadn't taught at girl's college then he just hadn't taught. They're gonna put the questions to you. They talk just to keep from getting to the class work, I guess.

DO YOU REMEMBER HAVING ANY INTEREST IN POLITICS WHEN YOU WERE A STUDENT?

No not especially. I did something just to keep from farming you see. Because all I'd ever known was farming. Cotton was selling for about \$50 a bale, 10 cents a pound for a 500 pound bale. I went out there and that whole year made three bales, my share was about \$75 for the whole year, so I decided to go back to

school, just anything to keep from having to farm.

In college I would wash dishes to make a little cash and then I had an old guitar that I could play a little bit. And I got on street corners in Alexandria and played. I would pass the hat until some officer would come along and run me off and I would change corners. I didn't know whether they were paying me because they wanted me to shut up or they liked what they heard.

But being a politician hadn't really crossed my mind.

WHAT HAPPENED AFTER YOU LEFT TEACHING? HOW WAS IT THAT YOU ENDED UP IN THE GOVERNOR'S RACE?

I first served as the Commissioner of Police and Fire Services in Shreveport. That's how I first established ties with

police and firefighters, when I began to respect what they did.

I ran for Public Service Commissioner, there weren't but three commissioners then. There are about a half a dozen now. I ran for the same

position that Huey Long had held years before. There were four of us running for the one position and I beat them all in the first primary. I won something like 28 of 30 parishes.

I really didn't have any particular interest in running for governor. I'd been a commissioner for about two years when people started getting into the race for governor. The whole time I was Police Commissioner and then on the Public Service Commission I had been recording. And since I had started making some money in the music business as a country singer I just wasn't interested in governor. I had had a couple of hits and things were going real good.

I realized I could make more money in a month singing than I could make in two years as governor. But people from all over the state kept after me to get into the race, you know, people who wanted to be a part of my ticket, we ran

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In 1944 the Governor and his band would entertain friends and legislators at private parties. The band is shown here performing at state police headquarters.

together on tickets then, and people who were in government at the time and wanted to stay there. They kept coming up from Baton Rouge and saying that I was the one who could do it.

It didn't matter that I didn't want to run for the office, my friends and others wanted me to run. But I knew that the job would be full of problems. Any time you hold the number one job, whether it's mayor or governor or whatever, you're going to have problems. It's just a matter of whether or not you want to go through it all.

AND YOU RELENTED?

I finally gave in and told them I'd do it and they asked what I needed to run

and I told them that I wanted about \$75,000 to put up signs all over the state. I wanted to put up some billboards and all throughout the parishes. Lots of people didn't know me you see. They didn't know who Jimmie Davis was. The ones running around listening to juke boxes knew me pretty good, but they hadn't seen me. They didn't know what I looked like, only what I sounded like.

So Julius Long came up here and told me, "well we'll get you to all the little towns like Winnfield and places around here and get you introduced to all the judges and other important people. Then they'll introduce you to the people who will have gathered to see you and you can talk for about an hour."

Well I told him there were two things

I was not going to do—first of all I wasn't going to let somebody else introduce me who wasn't a member of my band and I wasn't going to talk for any hour. A man handling the show, the campaign like that, the people wouldn't know anything about him, he could make you or break you. People don't know whether he's good or bad.

I gave it a try, my first speech was at Alan Park in Shreveport. I went out there, some hometown boy running for governor, and I spoke, I guess, for maybe 15 minutes. I gave 'em everything, I just jacked the world up and put blocks under it. I fixed all the problems up for everybody. So I got through and everybody started hollering SING, SING. I told

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them this was not a singing matter, not now, maybe later we can get together sometime and sing. They were saying, "Well, he's become a big shot. He's gonna live in that home in Baton Rouge, he wouldn't have time to slop the hogs or cook dinner or nothing else." I could see that they were very disappointed. I also knew that people would use that against me any way they could. I realized I had to change the way I campaigned.

SO WHAT DID YOU DO?

I got home that night and my wife and I talked. We stayed up almost all night talking about what to do. I decided that I'd take me a band along with me from town to town. My wife asked if I knew what I was doing, and I told her I wasn't sure but I thought I knew which route to take.

So I went to a friend of mine, Kilpatrick, and chartered a plane. I had two boys I wanted to get. We went down to a honkytonk down in Beaumont, Texas. One of the men I wanted was Vince. The other was Moon Mullican. He didn't know me I'm sure, but he was a fine piano man, a good singer, good entertainer and a good hand shaker. I found out that if the boys in the band were good at shaking hands and meeting people it can make all the difference in the world.

So I changed my way of campaigning. I didn't talk that long, I talked about 15 minutes and I sang about 15 minutes and then we'd go on somewhere else. I had the band with me, we'd all shake hands, raise the glass, you know. When you're stumping like that you make all the stops, in all the parishes. We went to little towns, all the towns, I don't think that there's a town in the state that we didn't campaign in.

In those days everybody ran on a ticket, that is a group of people ran together for office, a candidate for governor, lieutenant governor, secretary of state, agriculture commissioner, and the voters would pick which ticket they wanted. So we all campaigned together usually. But only one person mostly did the talking and we didn't do much talking.

We'd talk a little and then we'd sing a little and people would dance. We were all over the place. I remember one Sunday appearing down in Pierre Part

and nobody in our group spoke French. I knew a very few words, but not enough to get by. But we had a French fiddler, a French singer in the band. I had learned a couple of French songs like *Jolle Blonde* and such and we did them. I let the people know I wasn't just a farmer, I could sing.

I saw a pretty young girl in the corner and I asked her to dance. We did while the band played and when I finished, this man came over with his wife I guess and said, "well, you've won me over, you danced with my daughter."

We went down to Morgan City one Saturday night. We got there and there wasn't nothing down there. A man said all the people were out at a place called the Cut Grass Inn. I asked him what that was and he told me that it was big dance hall, so we went out there. Sure enough there were people everywhere, we had a real tough time getting in but we did. And we went around visiting and such. I recall dancing with a woman holding

You wouldn't worry about enemies being disappointed with your selections but you anguish over letting your friends down.

a baby, she wouldn't put her baby down. And that baby was nursing all the time, we were dancing and going at it and he was sucking. Most of the women were barefooted. They'd bring their babies with them when they went out like that and put the babies together, give'em a soda pop with a nipple on the end and let'em go to sleep while they danced.

It got time to go that night and we couldn't even get out the door, we had to go out a window. But that's how we campaigned. Somebody asked me if working that way helped me or hurt me. I told him I didn't know, maybe I'd have gotten more votes another way, but we won. We won twice campaigning that way, close to the people. I think the biggest crowd we had brought about 10 thousand, so many people you couldn't stir them.

SO IT WAS YOUR STYLE WHICH RESULTED IN YOUR SUCCESS?

Yes and just visiting with people. You've got to go around and talk to folks, visit with them and make them feel important. Like on one visit to Hammond we stopped by to see former Governor Sanders (1912-1916). I wanted to go by and pay him a courtesy visit, I really didn't have any other business in Hammond I just wanted to visit Governor Sanders.

Well, I sat there with his wife, actually his second wife. She told me she was glad I had come by because it had earned her vote. The governor invited me in and we had some coffee and talked. He told me something that I remember to this day. He said, "Look at me. When I was elected governor I was a young man, 30 something years old; I had never been sick a day in my life. I was stronger than a bull and could throw down a cow and milk her before she knew what had happened. Within two years I was an old man, stoop shouldered and worn out. My friends got me. It's always your friends who get you." I remember that to this day.

DO YOU AGREE WITH THAT? IS IT YOUR FRIENDS THAT GET YOU.

Well think about it. You have all these appointments and vacancies that have to be filled. It would be your friends asking to have so and so appointed and if you didn't they'd fall out with you about it. And that has to worry you. You wouldn't worry about enemies being disappointed with your selections but you anguish over letting your friends down.

WAS THE CAMPAIGNING HARD ON YOU?

Not really, but I could take more than too. I enjoyed it, we had a good time. It's just like I told a boy in the band, let's just have a good time meeting and greeting them here and there. Don't drink and that kind of stuff, because if you do I'll fire you, just do your business. They weren't paid until everything was over with. The other members of the band didn't need anything during the campaign, we fed them, gave them a place

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It was called at the time the "bridge to nowhere" by critics, but the Sunshine River Bridge is now recognized as precipitating the industrial development on the west side of the Mississippi.

to stay, they wore cowboy clothes we provided those, so they really didn't need anything.

Take Moon Mullican my main man, when the campaign was over I counted him out \$10,000. He went back home and fixed up the old house and, put a roof on the chicken coop, put in a hog pen and straightened it up and even patched a hole in his barn roof. He had \$5000 left and he pitched at \$5000 drunk.

While we were on the road, I did develop some stomach trouble. Mostly I ate pea soup and drank goat milk, it's predigested you know. I'd carry a couple of cans of soup around with me in my coat pocket and pull one out if a restaurant didn't serve it. All you had to do was add a little water and you had soup.

There was one fellow near Alexandria who helped keep me stocked up on the goat milk. Everytime we'd go through there we'd stop and stock up. I lived on goat milk during the campaign.

WHAT KIND OF CONDITION DID YOU FIND THE GOVERNMENT IN WHEN YOU FIRST TOOK IT OVER THE FIRST TIME AROUND GENERALLY SPEAKING?

The state was broke. When we went in we didn't waste any money, there wasn't any to waste. But when we left we turned over a substantial surplus in the treasury for somebody else to operate with. A governor couldn't succeed himself in those days. They started a campaign to change that law when I was in office. It didn't succeed, but it didn't matter, I would not have wanted to run in the next election anyway.

IN WHAT KIND OF CONDITION DID YOU FIND STATE POLICE?

Well, I suppose it was alright but then I didn't have anything to compare it with. Of course I was very much interested in State Police because I had been a police commissioner in Shreveport. That's a good introduction and orientation to police work.

I appointed Wilbur Atkins as superintendent, he and I were good friends, both from north Louisiana. He was a fingerprint man in Shreveport when I was on the commission. I guess I was closer to that department than to any other in state government.

WERE YOU SATISFIED WITH THE JOB ATKINS DID FOR YOU?

Yes, he did a fine job. He was very loyal and he had a lot of common sense.

You had some good men on the State Police. I remember Captain Walker who was at Troop A, and Captain Green, not little Joe (Green) but his dad. He may have been a Major at that time actually. They were great officers.

WASN'T IT DURING YOUR ADMINISTRATION THAT LOUISIANA'S FIRST DRIVER'S LICENSE LAW WAS PASSED?

That's right in 1946, it took effect January 1, 1947. But passage wasn't easy. We passed it by one vote.

One of the legislators told me, Governor, if I vote for this thing and my people have to get licenses, I'll never get reelected. He was reelected 6 more times.

HOW SATISFIED WERE YOUR FIRST FOUR YEARS?

All right I suppose. But times were tough. We were just coming out of the war and it seemed like you couldn't get raw material and we needed so much to get our programs started. Like concrete, you just had to wait your turn because people all over the country were waiting. New York, California, Oklahoma, you had to wait in line. There were so many things that we wanted to do but couldn't.

Like up in north Louisiana around Logansport, kind of up near Shreveport and Mansfield. They had a gravel road up there and every year the candidates for office would come through and promise to pave that segment. And it had never been paved. So I got up on that stump and told them, well I can't promise you anything but I'm familiar with the problem and I'll do what I can. It was very important to those people and we paved it for them, about twenty miles or so. It was hard to do, to honor all the requests for construction, there just wasn't enough money and material to go around. The next time we built more roads.

Around here Highway 19 from Scotlandville to Baker was a gravel road and we concreted it all the way to Zachary. Those people were so happy because it was a main route. We widened U.S. 61 and Plank Road too. We also started finishing Airline Highway (U.S. 61) around Baton Rouge about that time.

(Faser—Well he's being a little modest about what all he did, the administration was quite successful. In addition to the highway improvements, we started the first re-forestation program. Our forests had been completely depleted, I mean nothing left standing. We've got growth

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nothing left standing. We've got growth today because of that effort. And we started the first statewide drainage program. We'd never had one before.)

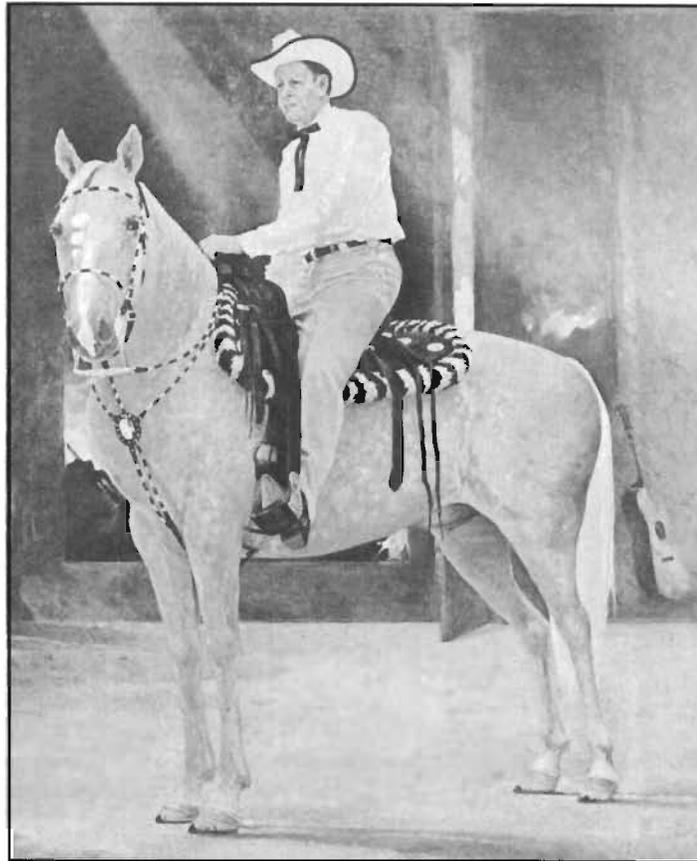
IS THERE ANYTHING THAT MAKES YOU PARTICULARLY PROUD FROM THAT FIRST ADMINISTRATION?

Well that's a hard question. There was so much going on and so much I wanted to do.

(Fraser — The governor did something just after he took office that all his people were proud of. He had taken office in May and the presidential nominating convention was soon after in August that same year. And of course back then the Governor, you know you only had Democrats in Louisiana, and the governor was the titular head of the party.

Well Governor Davis went to Chicago where the convention was representing the state and the party. A fellow named Henry Wallace was Vice-President and Franklin Roosevelt was President. Wallace had had problems and they were trying to get another candidate for Vice-President. The Governor got a call from Senator Harry Truman's campaign manager who asked if Jimmie would come by the hotel for a visit with Truman. Well he did, and Truman explained to the Governor that he (Truman) had been suggested as the replacement for Vice President Wallace but that no southern state had indicated that it would support Truman. Quite bluntly, Truman asked the Governor if he'd second Truman's nomination and escort him out before the convention. The Governor agreed to do so and Truman and the administration never forgot that.)

If I hadn't had been in the music business to a certain extent I'd have been a pauper today.



Louisiana artist Robert Rucker rendered this watercolor of Governor Davis and Sunshine.

THE STATE RETIREMENT SYSTEMS WERE ALSO STARTED DURING YOUR FIRST ADMINISTRATION WEREN'T THEY?

Yes that was during my administration in 1946. We also began to improve the education system in the state. It had really gotten into bad shape.

I left a surplus in the state treasury when I left office the first time around and the second as well. No other governor has ever done that. I'm proud of that.

WHILE YOU WERE IN OFFICE THE FIRST FOUR YEARS, WERE YOU STILL ABLE TO PLAY IN THE BAND AND ENTERTAIN AND SUCH?

I did it the whole time I was in office, but what I would do though, at that time I was recording out of state in New York. I would take my own money, buy me a ticket and go up there on a Saturday, record Saturday night and come back

on Sunday. I never used any of the state's time or money on those trips. I didn't play dates then, wouldn't make those kinds of appearances. There would be festivals here and there around the state and I'd get invited to those, got invited to more than I could make, especially in South Louisiana. But we'd do one occasionally, go over and play and dance. It would be a lot of fun.

WHAT'S BEEN MORE IMPORTANT TO YOU, YOUR MUSIC CAREER OR YOUR POLITICAL CAREER?

Well, that's kind of difficult to say, they're both different fields. Music introduced me to a lot of people you see.

I had two good songs, well not just two, I had more than that, but "You are my Sunshine" and "Nobody's Darling" helped me make it. If I hadn't had been in the music business to a certain extent I'd have been a pauper today. The

first time I was Governor my salary was \$1000 a month. The next time it was at \$1500 I guess.

(Fraser — Most people don't know that he could have had quite a career like Gene Autry or some of those guys. He made several movies but he didn't like it out there in California.)

I guess I wasn't really interested, I always got bored out there. In fact they came down here after I was in office and made an offer. Said, "you'll be rich in a month." But I already had won the election and had this job to do so I wasn't inclined to give it up. I did do one picture, called "Louisiana," released in 1947. It was good and did okay. Of course I didn't feel comfortable. The movie had actors and actresses in it, I was like a blind dog in a meathouse. I had worked on some others where you ride and shoot. You never load, just keep shooting. Anyway I got through with all that and came back to handle business here.

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Even after leaving state office in 1964 the Governor continued to provide entertainment for special events. He is shown here with his wife Anna and James Wilson (left).

WHAT WAS IT THAT INFLUENCED AND GOT YOU INTERESTED IN MUSIC?

Well, probably church and school. We sang a lot at school, we had old books like Stephen Foster and such, so we spent time singing. We also spent time in church, people didn't have any place to go, so we'd end up in church with hymn books and somebody playing the organ and singing to pass the time.

WHERE DID YOUR FIRST GUITAR COME FROM?

Well my older sister, her husband had a guitar. He wanted money for the guitar but he let me have it.

I THINK EVERYBODY REALIZES THAT SUNSHINE WAS THE NAME OF YOUR HORSE, TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT THE SONG YOU WROTE ABOUT SUNSHINE.

I started getting the idea when I left LSU. An old friend of mine named Henderson wanted me to record. In those days all you had were 78's, you didn't have 45's and such, just 78's, one song on one side and another on the other. Anyway, Henderson wanted me to go to Shreveport and do a record. I decided I was going to do "You are My Sunshine" on one side and "Nobody's Darling" on the other.

He told me that he had a band together and for me to get to Shreveport on the train and he would meet me at the depot. Well I went up there on the train and he met me and carried me to the studio. He told me he had some people together to help me do the record. I got to the studio and there was this guy with a big bass horn, I mean the end of that horn was big like a tub. Had never seen anything like that. And there was another guy with a flute. Well, I looked around and I knew that just wasn't going to work. Of all the things I didn't want to include

in the record it was a flute, and I knew that bass just wasn't going to fit in either.

So I told him, just get me a fiddler, a man on guitar and maybe a man on bass. We told the others to just go on home. That left this piano man, he was playing fancy stuff. And I told him, I don't know what you're doing and you don't know what I'm doing, so let's just play some chords. We'll make some music by playing some chords. And he asked me, what are chords?

Well, I tried to show him how playing chords can be the way you do a song and we did a little of that. When we were finished Mr. Henderson let us hear a sample of what we'd done and I told him, please don't ever release that or my music career will be over for sure. Well I carried the music to "Sunshine" around for about 8 years trying to get somebody to record it. I had always thought it was a really good song, it's easy to learn, easy to harmonize, and everybody can sing it.

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If it had been a complicated song people couldn't have sung it. Later when I was in Hollywood to record I ran into Bing Crosby. I showed him the music to "Sunshine." He liked it and recorded it the next day, both "Sunshine," and "Nobody's Darling." He cut them both right then and there.

I GUESS YOU HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO INTERACT WITH SOME OF THE MORE FAMOUS MUSICIANS DURING THAT TIME.

Well I started out with MCA when they were really nothing. I wish I'd bought some of that stock because they are so fabulously rich now. Anyway I was recording there about the same time that Guy Lombardo, Wayne King the Waltz King, Tommy Dorsey, Jimmie Dorsey, Ella Fitzgerald, all those people were around and I'd see them from time to time.

You know there were a lot of us running around recording then, some had made it, some were trying to make it, and some never would make it. I remember I went up there one time to record and they told me, if you don't mind we've got a woman here to do some custom work, would you mind waiting? And I knew they needed the money then and they got paid when they did custom work, so I told them no problem, go ahead.

Well there this lady sat on a tall stool, she'd obviously never recorded and she looked scared to death. I remember she was big woman. And the studio people told her when the red light comes on get your music ready and standby. And when the green light comes on start playing and singing. She was just a sweating. When the red light came on you could tell she was excited, she was ready to go. Just when the green light came on she fainted and fell off the stool, WHAM on the floor. They got some water and put it on her head and she just lay there, didn't do any good at all. So I went and got a small bucket and filled about half full of ice and I lifted her blouse and dumped it in. Well here she came, sat straight up. She asked how she'd done and everybody said just fine. She wanted a hundred copies but they told her they'd have to send them to her later, of course there was nothing to send. Don't guess she ever recorded anything.



Chris Faser, the Governor, and former Superintendent Tom Burbank have never lost touch. They are shown here in the den of Davis' home.

HOW MUCH HAS COUNTRY MUSIC CHANGED FROM WHEN YOU WERE IN IT UNTIL NOW?

That was back when country was considered country, back before it was hillbilly. Well country music has become so popular now that everybody's trying to get into it. It's a little bit of everything. It's kind of like turnip greens and peas. You put a little pepper and spice in there, maybe cook a little squirrel and coon, it makes it better. That's like music I guess. There's some people who are classical and pop. You have a country music show on TV today and you'd get lots of folks. But some of those people today that call themselves country musicians wouldn't have been allowed to call themselves country way back. They weren't considered country. I like bluegrass myself, that's about all I play, I think it's very good music.

WHAT MUSICIANS DO YOU LIKE TODAY?

I don't know, maybe Merle Haggard or George Jones, they're both good musicians and in spite of everything else going on around them they hang in there. They don't change their style.

YOU THINK COUNTRY MUSIC HAS BECOME TOO TRENDY?

Yea, I guess, but if those people get too far off base, too far from what country's supposed to be then the artists will bring them back around. But times have

changed. There's not a place I'd go that I didn't play "Sunshine," except maybe in church. It's gotten to where now even the churches want me to play it, the pastors want to sing it.

WHAT WORK OF YOUR'S SOLD THE MOST?

"Sunshine", "Nobody's Darlin," those are my meal tickets I guess. You know you just can't tell about music and people, what people will like and buy. A song is just the most intangible thing in the world.

WHAT WAS YOUR PERSONAL FAVORITE?

Well I like "Nobody's Darlin" and I've got a gospel song "Someone to Care," I like it. It's a real good song I think. It's selling over in the European market now. Over the last 30 years, more of my work's been in the gospel field rather than country.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU HAVE FOR SOMEONE WHO'S YOUNG AND MAYBE WANTING TO GET INTO THE MUSIC BUSINESS?

Well, a fellow called me this morning from Jonesboro looking for help, advice, just anything. I don't know, you just have to keep singing and trying. Getting on a radio station will help. If you can write a few songs even better. One of them might be the one you need to break out. Just go ahead and do it. Just keep singing.