Chris Reynolds: This is an interview with Charlie Harmony on Thursday, November the 9th, 2006 at Dean Williams Studio in Springfield, Illinois which oddly enough is on Harmony Court. We’re working on an oral history on the Harmony Brother’s musical career. My name is Chris Reynolds; the taping is being done by Dean Williams, and let’s just go ahead and get started here. Charlie, I want to do this in time frames, so the first time frame I want to work on is the pre-1956, before the band got started. But I want to start out with a question that I really failed to ask Ben which was can we talk a little bit about your family? How many brothers and sisters you had and what your mom and dad did and those kinds of things?

Charlie Harmony: Sure, there were eight of us in the family, four boys and four girls. My dad was a coal miner; my mom was a house wife, as was the case in those days. Of course she had eight kids to raise so she had quite a job. They were all like Ben and I, wild and crazy so she really had her work cut out for her.

Chris: And you lived in Springfield at that same home over there? Where, near Ben is now?

Charlie: Right in front of where Ben’s house was, the house in front of it is the family home.

Chris: And the whole time you lived there, so that goes way back?

Charlie: Yes, the house was built in 1940, the year that I was born, I was the first child to live in that house, prior to that, behind the house there was a little two room shack and that is where all of my family and the other six kids were born, Ben was born there, I was the only one born in a hospital.

Chris: Now where are you and Ben in the pecking order of the children?

Charlie: I am number eight, Ben is number seven.

Chris: So you are the baby of the family?

Charlie: I am the youngest.

Chris: Oh my goodness. Were just you and Ben musically inclined or did anybody else get involved in the music business?

Charlie: Well, nobody else got involved in the music business, the youngest of the four sisters is the person who taught me to sing and she is deceased now, but she taught me to sing.

Chris: Church singing or she didn’t even sing in the choir?

Charlie: No, but she was a good singer.

Chris: I hear your dad use to sing in the garden.

Charlie: Yes, and from what I understand, his family had a lot of musicians and actually had a band that played in out in Kansas where they came from.

Chris: Oh, OK. His brothers?

Charlie: Some other members of his family, I don’t know if they were brothers or sisters or just exactly who.

Chris: Oh, OK. So tell me about your start in music, what got you going in the direction of music?

Charlie: Well, my sister, like I say, the youngest of my four sisters taught me to sing. And never being the bashful sort we use to go to downtown Springfield, my mom would go downtown and we would go in one of the dime stores.
I would walk around the toy counter and I would tell the girls there that my name was Charles Harmony and I was going to sing for them. And I would sing them a little ditty and they would always give me some little toy for singing. They would always set me on the counter and say look at this cute little kid and they would have me sing. So that is what got me started, I’ve been a ham from the word go.

Chris: Well talk about some of your early experiences with music. I had a couple of ribbons in Ben’s scrap book, which I showed him which I think had to do with a music competition that you went to in Cleveland. It had to do with the place where you guys took lessons, guitar lessons? And also, just to show you this first item here, I found this in your materials and I also found this in, this picture in Ben’s scrap book. Is this related to this, or are they two different events?

Charlie: No, that’s from, that’s two different events.

Chris: OK, what was that about?

Charlie: That picture there, that was from when we were on T.V. on channel 17 in Decatur. That was in 1955-56. We were on a Monday night program there it was a country program called “Uncle Tom’s Barn Dance” and Ben and I did country-comedy on that. That is what they wanted us to focus on was doing more or less comedy, country-comedy songs like Homer and Jethro, Lonzo and Oscar, that type of thing.

Chris: And this looks like a pretty big deal here, I noticed it was done up at WGN in Chicago, so you guys had to go up to Chicago for this. Did you apply to get on that or did somebody tell you about?

Charlie: It was a amateur hour that was on T.V. and radio back in the 50s. Of course we could get WGN down here and my mom, we decided we would like to try out for it. So my mom wrote them a letter and then they had us an audition for it and we passed the audition and then we were picked to be on the show.

Chris: And that was, what year do you think that was?

Charlie: That was, the actual date is in the souvenir program, it was March something in 1957, I can’t remember the exact date, right March 3rd 1957, yes.

Chris: So this was actually after you had the band going? This was much later, or a little bit later. This wasn’t one of your early performances?

Charlie: No, that wasn’t one of our early years.

Chris: Oh, OK. Now how did you do in this? Did you ever find out?

Charlie: We never did find out exactly where we placed in it but it was a good experience.

Chris: Did you take the whole band up?

Charlie: No, it was just Ben and I at that point and the band really wasn’t totally gelled at that time so you know, we were still trying to check people out and we hadn’t really formed a complete band at that time.

Chris: What kind of performance did you give for that talent show?

Charlie: We did Elvis Presley’s “Too Much.” And they had a house band there that backed us on that. And I do have a 78 RPM of that. Of that performance.

Chris: Is that part of the list of recordings you gave me?

Charlie: Yes.

Chris: Very good. So that was called the Morris B. Sachs Amateur Hour?

Charlie: Yes. Uh huh.
Chris: I understand from talking to Ben you guys are doing a lot of talent shows, your doing a lot of dances and square dances and things like that, probably some church singing maybe, I don’t know. Ben of course did that later on.

Charlie: We did a little bit of church singing, but I think they didn’t like to have me sing in church because they said I sung too country. They wanted me to change my style of singing and I couldn’t change my style of singing because the way I sing is the way I sing. And I just, you know, they wanted me to do something I didn’t feel I was comfortable with. So I didn’t do too much church singing.

Chris: What, so you are doing a lot of these performances, what do you view as your breakthrough appearance, T.V. appearance or performance that really got you going into the showbiz thing? That let people know about your band and that kind of thing?

Charlie: Well I think probably one of the things that really got us going, we did so many different of the talent shows and everything. One of the first ones we did was on WTXA radio and again, I have a 78 RPM of that performance also, when I was 12 years old and Ben was 16, and that moved us along, we started doing a lot of things after that.

Chris: What was the name of that show, do you remember?

Charlie: It was called OJ the DJ, who was Oliver J. Keller, Jr. His father at that time owned WTXA radio, and he was the DJ and he had a talent show every Saturday night at the YMCA. In the basement of the YMCA that was broadcast live on WTXA and a lot of young local talent appeared on that. And he had local musicians that would back you up also if you needed a back up and there was a bass player named Ed McNeal at that time. Of course I wore my hair in bangs, sort of like the same way that I wear it today and Ed McNeal came up and he told me and my mother, he said don’t ever change your hairstyle. Because that’s what you need to do is have that style of hair and you know and it just sort of stuck. But he was a real nice old guy and then he actually talked to my mom and booked us into a night club he was playing at in Taylorville. We went down there and one of the performers was pretty bawdy as I remember, she was a lady named Linda Lou, and she was a pretty blue comedian. You know she did some pretty raw songs for that time and you know as a twelve year old I sat there and said that I probably shouldn’t be hearing this. But it was funny you know, I sort of snickered and then we sang and we went over very well with the audience. So after that, things just kept building, we started getting requests to appear for different organizations, to sing at different organizations.

Chris: How long before you were asked to do this “Uncle Tom’s Barn Dance”? Was that later?

Charlie: That was about three years later.

Chris: Oh OK. So this was way before then?

Charlie: Way before then, and we were doing like the local cafeteria workers for the City of Springfield, public education, they had us sing at their big banquet that they had, some sort of banquet that they had every year and National Secretary’s Association, we sang at that and we started appearing on telethons for WICS TV and any other TV studio.

Chris: When would you say the band started playing in 1956, and really got formed, was there a particular performance that at the beginning of that era?
Charlie: Well, we started playing in the public parks in Springfield. A lot of times we played like every Wednesday at Bunn Park, we would go out there and play and the kids from the South end and the East end of Springfield would all come to the park and dance. This wasn’t sanctioned by anybody, I mean we went in and we plugged in our amps and our mics and set up on their little bandstand. Nobody told us we could and nobody told us we couldn’t. Kids came and danced, it was pretty peaceful, there was never any trouble, so I guess they decided they would allow it to continue.

Chris: So you didn’t have to get a permit from the city to do this?
Charlie: No, we didn’t have any permit or anything like that.

Chris: So that is really when your band started to come together?
Charlie: Right, then we started developing a following and at that point then a fan club formed and they held meetings once a month. Then we would go appear at the fan club meeting and we would play for dances at the fan club meeting, after their regular meeting.

Chris: Let’s talk about all these various radio and TV performances that you ended up being on during this period. “American Bandstand” gets started in about 1957 and looks to me from looking at these materials that every local TV station decided that they wanted a Bandstand type show. And some of the names of these shows that I picked up from the materials were “Teenage Rage,” channel 20, “The Hop” which was out of Champaign; “Stairway to the Stars” which I think was the Decatur version of that? And then, some of the DJs which seem to have significance to the beginning of your career were Jim Austin and Jim McKinney.

Charlie: Jim McKinney

Chris: Jim McKinney and Russ Carter...

Charlie: Out of St. Louis.

Chris: And Harry King.

Charlie: Right, and there was also in St. Louis with KWK radio with King Richard, when our records came out they were hosting what they called “the Splatter Platter Parties” at a place called Down’s Pool and these were every week. They did a “Splatter Platter Party” and they brought in recording artists for that show, the house band for that show was the Jesters from St. Louis. We appeared with the Jesters and we would be an opening act after the Jesters went on and then we would do our show before the main star came on. And the very first star that we worked with was Dee Clark and then we also worked with Nick Todd who was Pat Boone’s brother, we worked with Carl Mann who was a sudden recording artist who had the song “Mona Lisa” we worked with Jerry Lee Lewis. gosh there were just so many stars that they brought in to this show...

Chris: This was the St. Louis show?

Charlie: Yes

Chris: Was it televised or on the radio?

Charlie: No, it wasn’t even on the radio, they just, it was advertised all week long on the radio and then they would come to the “Splatter Platter Party” at the pool. And of course one of the big things was then after you did your appearance, you had to go get into your swim trunks because than the kids got to throw you in the swimming pool.

Chris: Which I understand Ben didn’t like that.
Charlie: Ben didn’t like that at all because Ben couldn’t swim and he thought he was drowning. I had to pull him out of the pool, we were in about two feet of water and he thought he was drowning. It was rather funny, you know. Not to him but to me it was.

Chris: Anything you remember about these local shows that were in Springfield, Champaign, and Decatur? They sounded like they were just like “American Bandstand”, they had kids dancing.

Charlie: Right, they had kids dancing and then any time that they could grab somebody that was in the area that had a record out they would put them on. Now WCIA in Champaign, John Coleman had “The Hop” first and he later went on to national TV.

Chris: Was that the weatherman?

Charlie: Yeah, for ABC

Chris: I remember him.

Charlie: Yeah and after he was on, Ed Kelly followed him.

Chris: I recognize that name, too.

Charlie: Ed Kelly, he brokered a deal with, gosh I believe it was Kelly potato chips out of Decatur. He got them to buy copies of our records and then if kids bought a package of the potato chips then they could send in the coupon from that and then 49 cents and they could get a copy of our second record. So that really boosted our sales and both John and Ed were big promoters of ours. Another big promoter was WMAP radio, who later went to the Quad Cities area was Bob Hale.

Chris: He was on WLS, I remember him.

Charlie: He came down out of Iowa, he was actually the guy that had to go out to Clear Lake, Iowa and identify Buddy Holly and The Big Bopper and Richey Valens when their plane crashed because he was at their performance that night. He was the local DJ in that area. But Bob promoted us an awfully lot, too. He was an awfully good guy.

Chris: And I’m picking up a lot of extra names I hadn’t picked up from your materials, that’s great. Did you enjoy doing those TV shows?

Charlie: Oh yeah.

Chris: It was a lot of fun?

Charlie: Oh yeah, we never sang live, we always mouthed our records, we had to mouth our records, it was really Karaoke to our own things, you know. We also did out of Peoria, they had a Hop there and we were on there.

Chris: It was called “The Hop”?

Charlie: Yep, and we appeared up there on the same type of show.

Chris: Did you ever do those kind of shows out of state? We talked about St. Louis, anything in Iowa?

Charlie: Nothing in Iowa, the only thing we did in Iowa was when Jim McKinney left Springfield and went to Iowa, they were wanting to do a thing at a local drive-in up there and the drive-in was wanting to do something to promote some new sandwich. Jim McKinney said, well why don’t we do this, I’ve got some recording artists down in Springfield, Illinois, I think I can talk into coming up here. And so we went up there and appeared at this drive-in in a God awful thunderstorm and rain and everything else and they just booked Ben and I, they didn’t want the whole band.
They just wanted Ben and I up there, so Ben with his guitar and me and we just sang our songs to the one guitar up there, in the driving rain. If they came through the drive-in and ordered this particular special burger they had, then they got a free copy of our record. And of course that was live on the radio up there in Davenport, Iowa.

**Chris**: Was that typical for just you and Ben to do performances without the band, or that was just a unique situation?

**Charlie**: That happened on a lot of the, like “The Hop” shows, they would only book us in.

**Chris**: Because you were lip-syncing, so why send everybody up with their equipment.

**Charlie**: And you had to get on and off the stage really quick so they could go on with whatever the host of the show was doing.

**Chris**: They probably weren’t very big stages either, confined spaces?

**Charlie**: No, the biggest one was at the Sheridan Jefferson Hotel in St. Louis, the one on “The Hop” and that one, on one of the appearance we were booked into the Ball Room, we were supposed to be the opening act for Annette Funicello. When we got there, they said Annette had cancelled because she had to fly back to California and then we were booked as the stars of the show. So we had to put on a full show, instead of just an abbreviated show, like an opening act always does. And then the next day we were scheduled to be on “The Hop” and we got to “The Hop” and low and behold here’s Annette Funicello there, she didn’t fly out after all. And so she appeared on “The Hop” and she lip-synced her song at the time was “Tall Paul” and so you know, we were back stage with her.

**Chris**: I bet that was a big thing for you, because you know, I remember the Mickey Mouse Club and that was a big deal.

**Charlie**: And she was the most gracious, sweet thing you ever met I mean she was so nice I couldn’t believe it ‘cause you know she was a pretty major star at that point.

**Chris**: Oh absolutely, her and Frankie Avalon were making those beach movies together at that point, I mean that was big stuff. Let’s talk about the artists that influenced the band once it got together in about 1956.

All of this happened really quickly and one of the things I talked to Ben about was whether he went to see the movie “Black Board Jungle” with the Bill Haley song which a lot of people considered the first big rock n’ roll hit. Then of course Elvis Presley is recording by 54 and by 56 he’s having five number one hits and by of course 57 The Everly Brothers are having hits and you got “American Bandstand” all these things are going on. Chuck Berry, Little Richard, Fat’s Domino, were you listening to all these records? Were these artists influencing what you were doing?

**Charlie**: Oh yeah, in fact the first really rock n’ roll song that I hear was “Rock Around the Clock” because I went to see “Black Board Jungle” a couple of friends and I, Ben was teaching at the guitar studio and we went down town to the Orpheum Theatre.

**Chris**: So they did play it here?

**Charlie**: Oh yeah, it played the Orpheum Theatre and we sat down in there and you know, I mean we are in that theatre and the screen was black when that started and I just went nuts I had never heard anything like it in my life and I, that just electrified me and from then on I mean I was listening to all of it.
Chris: So did you hear the Bill Haley song before you heard anything from Elvis then? Probably so, 'cause it was the first number one hit and it was a hit for about a year or so.
Charlie: Right, and then I heard Carl Perkins, we listened to Carl Perkins, Roy Orbison with his very first song, “Oobie, Doobie” on the Sun Label, I mean that was one that just really, you know I sort of it didn’t do anything you know, but I liked that. I heard early Charlie Rich which I really liked when he was with Sun I mean there was just so many things coming out of Sun Records that I really liked, of course I was influenced by Little Richard and Fat’s Domino, just the whole mix of things, The Everly Brothers, listened to a lot of country, liked some of the county sounds, and a lot of the rockabilly sounds, you know there, all that early influence.
Chris: You don’t still have your copies of the Sun recordings, do ya?
Charlie: I’m not sure, so many of my records got lost, but I do have some. I have a lot of my Jerry Lee Lewis and I have a lot of songs that were promotional copies only that the radio stations gave me and from the various artists.
Chris: You better put them in a safe-deposit box; those things are worth some money. Let’s talk about some of the local artists, you gave me that book on the reunion concert which I want to talk about later. But I was able to thumb through that and I had an idea of some of the local artists that might have been performing during this same time that you were. Local artists like Tommy Henderson, Bill Evans, of course Jules Blattner and Louis Harmony which I understand was your cousin. He played in a lot of bands, and then there were guys like Eddy Snow, Roy Williams, Marvin Jackson, Lester Davenport, any of those people you want to talk about at all. I know Ben had talked a lot about Marvin Jackson.
Charlie: One of the bands that was around when we were recording and it’s really amazing now, because when I look at and see where his career has gone, he’s not in music at all was Preston Jackson and his band out of Decatur, Illinois. And now he is a very famous sculptor.
Chris: Is that, that’s right, he just had a show and they had his work out at the UIS.
Charlie: And he was a musician back then, in the late 50s out of Decatur, Illinois, Preston Jackson Band.
Chris: A rhythm n’ blues band?
Charlie: Yeah, and here in Springfield, you know there were a lot of country bands and we did a lot of appearances around the clubs that they played. There were Bob Hamilton and his group. They weren’t in the book for some reason. When we did that book on the musicians of Springfield, a lot of the musicians families did not want to share any of the pictures or any of the stories of their families. I felt that was a shame because I felt that should be all part of it. There was a group, they played at Virgil’s and Betty’s down town when we were playing also called the Carrey Brothers out of Virginia, Illinois they played a lot around the area, they were good musicians also.
Chris: This Hooby Henson,
Charlie: Hoby Henson
Chris: Hoby Henson; I get it, if you were the first rock n’ roll band, I get the sense that he was the second rock n’ roll band.
Charlie: Right, he followed very closely, there was a guy named Bobby Boston also that came up, and those guys both went to Lanphier High School and Bobby had Bobby Boston and the Blue Boys. So for a while Hoby Henson and Bobby Boston were our main competition. “Sarge”, Marvin Jackson when Ben and I recorded our record he called Ben and wanted to know if he could come over to his home. Listen to the record, he wanted to sing for us. So we went over there, we had a lot of kids that would call us and wanted to audition to sing with us. A lot of times, a lot of these kids would come to our dances and we would get them up on the stage with us and we would let them do a few numbers. You know there were some really good singers and performers around.

Chris: So did you ever play together with this Hoby Henson?

Charlie: No. Yeah we did a Battle of the Bands at the Abraham Lincoln Hotel on a telethon and that was pretty interesting that was sort of fun.

Chris: Maybe we’ll talk about that a little bit more. I put together a list of all the guys that were in your band, although I’m sure I didn’t get them all because there were a lot of people moving in and out of the band; Ray Dippel, Gordan Jones, Bill Waldmire, Tom Basko, Gary Turley, Jerry Black, Mike Brokamp, and Rich Hopper was another name I picked up. So you had a lot of people coming in and out of the band, what would you say are the major style influences and did these people coming in and out of the band change it at all? Did you pretty much do one kind of music the entire time or a variety of different music or what was your musical style?

Charlie: We did an awfully lot of stuff, we tried to appeal to a broad spectrum of people because we did a lot of weddings and people would book us for weddings and everything else like that. What we focused mainly on was teen music and those influences we also did a lot of standards, things like that and we could switch, you know we did Polkas, standards we did country, we did rock n’ roll we did you know, our version of rhythm n’ blues and so we did just about every type of music that we could do.

Chris: Did that change with the different musicians coming in and out of the band or was that pretty much constant?

Charlie: No, it was pretty much standard all the way through.

Chris: When you became recording artists and you had records to promote did you stop doing all the other stuff and just do rock n’ roll or did you always kind of do a variety?

Charlie: We always did a mix. When we did live appearances in connection with the records, we did strictly rock n’ roll but when we were booked into other things we did you know just practically every style of music.

Chris: It looks like pretty much your line up included a couple of guitarists, a drummer; did you use a bass all the time or not all the time?

Charlie: Not all the time, we did when Rich Hopper joined the band, we did use a bass. Tom Blasko played accordion when he joined the band, in fact on our record we were probably were way ahead of weird Al Yankavich because we had an accordion on our rock n’ roll record. But then of course Bill Haley had steel guitar on “Rock Around the Clock” so I mean you know it wasn’t so far out. Everybody thought it might be later on, it became Oh my God they’ll play an accordion in a band, but Tom
would play an accordion and he also played piano. So we had the electric piano as well as the accordion and we could switch different things that way.

**Chris:** So it sounded like from all these guys coming in and out of the band that really you and your brother were kind of the act, and these other folks were just, you were the front men of the band and they kind of backed you up?

**Charlie:** Right

**Chris:** It really didn’t matter who was playing with you. Lets talk about some of the memories of some of the places that you played, and we’ve already mentioned a few of them I got a list of them here, I’ll just throw them out so you remember some of them; Virgil’s and Betty’s of course, the Derby, Big Earl’s Hop, The Buck Horn.

**Charlie:** It was Big Earl’s Hop, Buck Horn was before it became Big Earl’s Hop.

**Chris:** And then your doing a lot of performances in the surrounding communities like Grandview, Girard, Taylorville, The Elk’s Club downtown on 6th which I think is an office building now. Teen Land was really well advertised I saw a lot of ads for Teen Land, you did a recreation center in the Cabbage Patch area and then of course the Battle of the Bands was featured in some of the things that have been written about you. The Pekin Theater, The Orpheum and of course all the county fairs. Any of those particular places you have fond memories of, or remember particular performances?

**Charlie:** Teen Land really catapulted us because we were really starting to come of age with our music then. Teen Land was the first place of its type for teenagers. Bob and Ruth Taylor, a local couple, bought this building and of course it had been a strip club and right across the street from it was Springfield’s infamous Rex Club which was an ongoing strip club. So the elders of the town, because rock n’ roll was the scourge of the earth at that point, they really came down hard on Teen Land. They didn’t really want any thing to do with Teen Land, and they wanted it closed. Yet Bob and Ruth ran that place, I mean it was so on the up and up, I mean the kids had to pay to get out, in, they couldn’t go out, once they got in if they went out they had to pay to get back in again. A dollar admission in those days was hard to come by. So they didn’t leave once they got there. And there was never any trouble, that place was run so well, the kids were so well behaved, but it was like a night club because you had the booths and the tables just like a night club would have. They had a horse shoe shaped bar, of course what was funny, it was when we took our breaks, we got paid five bucks a night to appear there and when we took our breaks I would go back in the kitchen and fry burgers and fries to serve to the kids who were ordering food at this time and stuff. So I doubled not only as a singer but as a fry cook you know and we did jerked sodas and things like that and what ever they needed us to do. But there was so many, I mean families brought their kids out and there were a lot of families that did that and just really enjoyed it. A lot of the kids grew up with us, I mean some, there was one little girl was five years old when she first started coming there. They turned into being good friends and we ran around with them and everything else but she was such a good dancer at five years of age. She would come out there and she always wanted to dance with me and so I’d jump down when Ben was doing a song and dance with her and we would go out and dance with the kids and you know.

**Chris:** It was kind of a family sort of feel to it.
Charlie: Right, and then it got closed down because back in World War II when Bob Taylor was in the service he propositioned a prostitute at Great Lakes (Navel Base) and got arrested for it so they used that charge from the 40s to close the place down. Because he didn’t have good morals and so immediately the kids swung into action, we started protesting, we did, we wrote signs up. We went to, one of the girl’s parents owned sign company, we went to their place we printed signs. We went out on the streets, we picketed in front of the State Journal Register, we picketed in front of WICS TV which was at the, corner at 5th and Capital at that time, behind the Leland Hotel. We just walked up and down the streets of Springfield every where protesting and as the result we drew fire on ourselves. I mean, the Sheriffs, people were following us and city police were following us because we were, you know, we were out protesting. That was something unheard of for kids to do.

Chris: Plus you were playing rock n’ roll.

Charlie: We were playing rock n’ roll, that scourge of the earth, rock n’ roll, you know. Well they finally did get the place reopened, and then somebody complained that I was being too vulgar on the stage and so the sheriff sent plain clothed people out to watch me to make sure that I wasn’t too vulgar and of course I wasn’t too vulgar, they didn’t arrest me.

Chris: What years are we talking about here?

Charlie: This was 1957, this was you know.

Chris: So the band, you hadn’t quite got the recording contract, but you were pretty hot stuff at that point.

Charlie: Right, we were teenage idols at that point. And of course because we went out on the street with the kids and we protested right along with them and we sort of instigated it, you know and they were great kids. I mean they, you know, they wanted that place reopened because they had enjoyed it, their parents were, the parents that came there were just shocked that the place got closed and they protested right along with us, so I mean we had some adult backing and so we went for it.

Chris: So did you win, you kind of won because it got reopened.

Charlie: We got it reopened, yeah, we got it reopened.

Chris: I understand Ben managed then, didn’t he?

Charlie: Right.

Chris: That’s cool. And then it stayed open for several years?

Charlie: About a year or so more after that.

Chris: So any other places that you have fond memories of or particularly good performances you can recall?

Charlie: Well, Virgil and Betty, Virgil Hines who owned it and his wife Betty, they, they tried to bring in main acts.

Chris: Where was that located at?

Charlie: It was on Washington Street just west of 5th street, there’s a parking lot there now.

Chris: OK

Charlie: And it was sort of a dive, I mean the building wasn’t that good, the inside, and Virgil didn’t really have good taste as far as the stage. First of all while we were playing there they tore up Washington Street and the place was overrun with rats. I mean you know, one night we were there at the bandstand and all of a sudden rats
came across the floor and up the bandstand, Ben about went up the drapes you know I
don’t know what happened, our drummer Gary’s wife was sitting there and a rat ran
right up her leg, she was wearing a mini skirt I mean the rat ran up her leg, I mean the
place just came unglued, I mean it was just total pandemonium.
Chris: So it was over by that furniture store, wasn’t there a furniture store in that
parking lot close to there?
Charlie: Well there was Drach’s Restaurant right next door,
Chris: And what side of the street was that, it was across from the Myer’s building?
Charlie: It was across from the Myer’s building.
Chris: OK, I know that area, interesting.
Charlie: And then it moved up on 6th street which you know after that and when I was
in the service then it moved over onto Madison Street, 4th and Madison. And that was
the demise of Virgil and Betty’s but he brought in people like Bobby Helms who did
“My Special Angel” and several other country hits.
Chris: But it was more just like a night club then, there was a cover charge, right.
Anymore you want to say about this Battle of the Bands at the Abraham Lincoln
Hotel? Who all was involved in that and was it in the ballroom at the hotel?
Charlie: Well it was just strictly, it was downstairs in the one of clubs they had
downstairs. The big thing was, we were, it was about head on head the way things
were going. Gordon who was our drummer at that time, he was our first drummer,
jumped up off his drum stool and danced all around the drums doing a drum solo and
that just brought the house down that ended the Battle of the Bands right there.
Chris: That was it, huh?
Charlie: That was it, I mean we won hands down at that point.
Chris: Was there some sort of cash prize?
Charlie: No, it was just billed as that to get people in for the telethon, and people were
contributing you know and for their favorite band and all this kind of stuff.
Chris: And you had, probably all your fans were there.
Charlie: All our fans were there, and Hoby had his fans there and it was you know, it
was live.
Chris: OK, let’s talk about some of the artists that you either played with or maybe
you saw them perform or you got to know them over this time period. I have a folder
there, with a lots of photos that I found from your materials and I could identify a lot
of them, but a lot of them I couldn’t. You want to go through that photo, those
photos and if you get give us your memories of any of these folks.
Charlie: Sure, the first is Dion and the Belmont’s and they were actually here for one
of the “Shower of Stars” which WMAY radio brought these in. There were several
other people involved in that, several businessmen but they were sponsored by
WMAY radio. Then Dion and the Belmont’s went on out to the state fairgrounds for a
telethon out there. The next picture in here, that you have, is Jules Blattner and the
Teen Tones, now Jules was from St. Louis and he still performs today he used to
come to Springfield all the time and play. We would go to St. Louis and play and
Jules would be up here playing, he was on Bobbin Records also he was a Bobbins
recording artist. We never ever got to meet Jules, I finally got to meet him when we
were playing the Ethnic Festival over at the State Fair and then we played the reunion
concert in downtown Springfield.
Chris: So your paths never crossed all those years? You knew of him and he knew of you

Charlie: No, he was on the same label but we were always somewhere and he was somewhere, we never got to see each other. The next is Gary Stites, he did one of the “Shower of Stars” and we did one of the shows with him. The Jesters, they were the St. Louis band at the Down’s Pool’s Splatter Platter Parties. The next picture here is with Diana Ross and that was at the Du Quoin State Fair and I was down there for my 30th birthday and she just happened to be staying at the same motel that we were staying at.

Chris: Did you see her performance?

Charlie: Yes, she had just gone solo. She had just left the Supremes. This was one of her first performances, and she was very gracious just to pose and just spend some time with us, she was really nice. Again Jules Blattner and The Teen Tones, that’s another photograph of them. Justin Tubb, son of Earnest Tubb, country legend, he performed at Virgil and Betty’s and we were opening act and we were the band at that show, Justin was a really nice guy.

Chris: Pure country music act?

Charlie: Pure country music act. He didn’t have any publicity photos with him and so he sent me this postcard with his picture back.

Chris: Did he have his own material or did he do his father’s material?

Charlie: He had his own material. He had his own recording career. Freddie Cannon, we did a “Shower of Stars” at the Orpheum Theater with Freddie Cannon, we were with him. Carl Dobkins, Jr., Frankie Ford, The Skyliners, and Freddie Cannon was one of the funniest people you would ever want to meet. He, God he was crazy, we had a good time back stage with him. I really enjoyed that. Russ Carter, the MC of the St. Louis Hop.

Chris: Just to remind us, I’m trying to think of Freddie Cannon tunes, can you think of any of his, he had several very big hits?

Charlie: Yeah they called him Freddie Boom-Boom Cannon and “Palisades Park” was one of his big ones, people most remember him for that. “Tallahassee Lassie” I thought was probably his best. Russ Carter from “The Hop” in St. Louis, he was the MC at “The Hop” he really promoted Ben and I a lot. He just died recently and he was a super guy down there. He did a lot to promote a lot of local artists. He was really super. This is the picture is the picture is Dion and The Belmont’s at the “Shower of Stars” at the Armory in downtown Springfield.

Chris: Did you open for them or did you just see them?

Charlie: No we just saw them. Then we went out to the State Fairground after that for the, we were on the telethon out there. And then Chuck Berry was here for a performance.

Chris: He’s been to Springfield several times over the years; I’ve actually got to see him

Charlie: Yes and “Johnny Be Good” was really big at that time so that was a good one. Frankie Avalon was at the “Shower of Stars” and then at the state fairgrounds after that and that’s where I met Frankie and had my picture taken with him, we were at the Illinois Building and I don’t know whether you know about the theater in the Illinois Building, that’s where they held the telethon. We were out in the main area,
that big open area of the Illinois Building, they had that all roped off for all the performers and we were back in there. They had security guards so no one could get back there and everything else because Frankie was really popular at the time and the teenage girls were likely to get close to Frankie. And the next picture is Buddy Holly’s Crickets; they appeared here two weeks after Buddy Holly’s death. The guy on the bass in this picture missed the bus. . .

**Chris:** So the band tried to continue after his death?  
**Charlie:** Oh yes.

**Chris:** That was tough I bet, was there still a big crowd there?  
Yeah there was a big crowd, the bass player missed the bus and needed a ride back to the hotel cause he didn’t even know what hotel they were staying at and I knew where all the stars stayed at that time and I said I would give him a ride.

**Chris:** Where did all the stars stay?  
**Charlie:** They stayed at the Hotel Leland in downtown Springfield.  
**Chris:** The building is now the Commerce Commission and was Sangamon State University for a while.

**Charlie:** Right, anyway, on the way down there he told me he was leaving the Crickets and he had a record coming out and he wanted me to look for it and he said and by the way my name is Waylon Jennings and he went on to become a superstar.

**Chris:** Had Buddy Holly not died he might have stayed with the Crickets for a little longer.

**Charlie:** He might have. Connie Francis was here on the same show with Chuck Berry and she was really on top at that point and so that, she was a major star. Gary Shelton, he had some minor hits, he was a pretty dynamic performer but really didn’t have anything big. The next guy here is the guy that I credit with getting Ben and our record contract, that’s Fabian. Because backstage, that was the same show that Waylon Jennings was on, he replaced Buddy Holly, in the show as the star of the show and I was talking to him back stage. I had my little nephew with me and Fabian picked my nephew up and set him on his lap and was talking to him. He said you know I have a little brother that’s the same age and I really miss him. He just, he was really a good guy, so we were relating on that level and we got to talking about, well I said I was in a band and we were thinking about trying to get a record contract. And he introduced me to a guy from St. Louis named Al Shelton and he said you really need to see this guy and he’ll get you a record contract. And so then we went down and I talked to Al and he told us to cut some demo things and bring them down and he would pitch us to a record company, which he did.

**Chris:** Do we have some of those demos in our list of recordings here?  
**Charlie:** Yes. And so really it was through Fabian that I was introduced to Al.  
**Chris:** Do you suppose Fabian made a call to him, too? Or all you had to do was mention his name?  
**Charlie:** No he was right there.

**Chris:** Oh he was there?  
**Charlie:** Yeah, he was right there because he was the distributor for Fabian’s records so he came up for this performance. And so he was there so Fabian introduced me to him right there.

**Chris:** Well what was this guy’s and Fabian ‘s attachment to Bobbin? They just
knew of Bobbin?

Charlie: No, Al Shelton was the head of Record Merchandisers, a record distributing company out of St. Louis and so he knew Bob Lyon who owned Bobbin Records and so he introduced us to Bobbin. And we pitched our tape to Bobbin and they signed us.

Chris: Did you ever see Fabian again after that?

Charlie: I’ve never seen him since then.

Chris: Is he still alive?

Charlie: He is appearing down at Branson, at Dick Clark’s place down at Branson. Dick Clark now has a five acre complex down there with a museum and all this stuff and Fabian is one of the entertainers down there and I’d like to go down and say hi and tell him you know, he did a lot for the Harmony Brothers and he didn’t even realize that he did. But he was, again he was just a kid out of Philadelphia and part of that whole teen idol thing, with Bobby Rydel, Fabian and Bobby Darin, I guess Bobby Darin would be in that group.

Chris: Yeah, he was in that group.

Charlie: The next picture is Shirley Starr, she was a vocalist, country and western vocalist, again she was one that appeared at Virgil and Betty’s. She appeared with a guy named Skeeter Bond who had been a pretty good country star back in the 40s and my mom was a big fan of Skeeter Bond because at that time in the 40s he appeared with another guy, it was called Skeeter and Coy. My mom was one of their big fans and when Skeeter Bond was appearing at Virgil and Betty’s he was here for about a month. He and Shirley were appearing down there and of course my mom was just thrilled that he was there and so she extended an invitation to Skeeter and Shirley to come out and have dinner at our house. Of course when he got in the house my mom was, you know, just lost it cause you know that was one of her idols. But he and Shirley they were just great people. We worked with him down at Virgil and Betty’s. Another picture of the Jesters from St. Louis and they were a great back up group, they were, they were fantastic.

Chris: Did they do rock n’ roll mostly or

Charlie: Yeah they did mostly rock n’ roll and then after the Splatter Platter Parties ended, I understand that they went on to becoming a house band on a cruise ship and did that for several years.

Chris: Did they do their own material or did they just do covers?

Charlie: Cover material, they may have done their own material later on, I don’t know but when we were with them they were just doing cover material.

Chris: Very popular in St. Louis?

Charlie: Yes, very popular in St. Louis in that area. Skeeter Bond again he was a country artist and signed with RCA Victor Records. So he had had quite a good career. The next are the Wilburn Brothers a country duo, they own Sure Fire Publishing Company in Nashville Tennessee. Harry King introduced us to them; they pitched a lot of material to Ben and I. They wanted us to record material that they couldn’t record because it was more rock n’ roll and they wanted to stay in the country thing and of course they’re most famous for discovering and signing Loretta Lynn, she was one of their artists for a long time. And her whole family was signed with them, Jay Lee Webb and Peggy Sue Webb and Crystal Gail and all that, they
were with the Wilburn Brothers they were, they were a pretty big influence in Nashville, they were a really good music company. Frankie Ford, of course well known for “Sea Cruise” we did the telethon with him we also did “Shower of Stars” and they also, they were doing something out at Rochester and WMAY picked Frankie Ford and Ben and I to go out and do some live things out at this little thing in Rochester to help promote the “Shower of Stars” and the telethon so we did that.

Chris: Where was Frankie Ford from?
Charlie: He’s from down in Louisiana, New Orleans area. And he did kind of a pop rock thing? He did “Sea Cruise” was his big song.

Chris: So sort of a pop song then?
Charlie: Yeah a rock song. A rock classic. Louis Armstrong, everybody knows who Louis Armstrong was, I was fortunate enough to meet him at the Illinois state fair and he spent quite some time with Gordon Jones and I there.

Chris: And did a performance?
Charlie: Well he did a performance at the state fair and we were ushered back stage to meet him and he spent some time with us back there and just, just as common as you and I are.

Chris: Getting these invitations back stage, was that just because you knew disc jockeys and things like that or how did you, how did you pull that off?
Charlie: Well, that’s because we were playing at the time, people knew who we were.

Chris: So you were playing at the state fair at the time.
Charlie: Well we weren’t actually playing at the state fair, we went to the show, we were at the show and somebody said hey psst, I’m gonna take you back and you’ll meet Louis Armstrong. And they took us back stage and that’s how we met him.

Chris: Quite a guy. Did you have a conversation with him?
Charlie: Oh yes, we spent about a half an hour with him. He spent that much time with us and just unhurried, I mean the show was over and everybody was packing up and getting the heck out of there but he stayed and just talked with us and just great, just great.

Chris: Jazz legend.

Charlie: Next picture is Fred Oliver and the Prairie Pioneers, they had a daily radio show on WLDS radio out of Jacksonville and Ben and I were a guest on their show a couple of times. And then after we had the recording contract and were playing around, Fred and Lois lived at Pawnee and Farmersville and they would come when Ben and I played, just to listen to us cause they were big fans and they were, the whole group was a great group.

Chris: Blue grass, country?
Charlie: Country. Strictly country. The last picture here is Dwight Gordon, he was a disc jockey in St. Louis on WWE radio and he had us as a guest down there on some live appearances at a park that they played at down there and also we were guests on his radio show.

Chris: Anybody else that you can think of that you didn’t have a picture of that you wanted to talk about?
Charlie: Jerry Lee Lewis, he was, at that point his career was on the skids because he had married his cousin and no body would play him and they brought him into
Down’s Pool and we met him over at the Johnson’s house and he was very nervous about going out on the stage that night.

Chris: About 1959 or 60?
Charlie: About 1960, I think our record had been out, we were on our second record at that time.
Chris: I understand he drank milk and vodka. An interesting combination.
Charlie: Yes,
Chris: I’m sure that didn’t help him too much.
Charlie: No but he needed something to unwind him when he got there cause he was pretty wound up and pretty nervous about appearing because this was one of his first appearances after that whole fiasco, they sort of held him under wraps and he was very nervous about it.
Chris: But you haven’t seen him perform since then have you? Have you seen Jerry Lee Lewis perform since then?
Charlie: Not in person, no not since then.
Chris: Well let’s talk about the Bobbin records years which I think run from about 59 to 62. It looks like that you had, going over what’s available on the internet in terms of your records and what I’ve read, there were three different recording sessions. Is that true or did you record all six of those songs in one recording session?
Charlie: No, we did four of them in one recording session.
Chris: So four of them in one.
Charlie: Right. And then we went back later to do “Remember Me” and “Lock on the Old Back Door”. That was at a totally different studio, that was, the first four were recorded at Premiere Recording Studio in St. Louis and the other I don’t recall the name of the recording studio now. It was in southwest St. Louis.
Chris: In St. Louis. And the first single was released in June of 59 and then there was one released in February of 60. So they held back two of the songs,, and then, then you came back in and did that final session in 62? Would it have been that late? Just before you went in the army then?
Charlie: Yeah, I went into the army in 63.
Chris: OK, so what were those sessions like? Did you, were they like live performances where you brought the band in and you played it a couple of times and that was it?
Charlie: We had rehearsed and rehearsed and rehearsed here on the songs and we just went into the studio and set up and recorded it down there and so there were basically, we did a couple of run throughs to get everything all, you know regulated and everything else. Get a mic where they wanted it and everything else, they moved us around the studio to get the best sound for this and that and then went with that.
Chris: So you would have one take usually, do it or do you remember how many times you had to record this thing to get it just the way you wanted it?
Charlie: As I remember, I think we did them all in one take.
Chris: One take, wow. Did you select the music that you were going to record or did the record company have any involvement in that?
Charlie: We wrote those four songs, Ben wrote “Baby Tonight”.
Chris: It seems like you were doing one side and Ben would do the other on all three records. Until the last one. All except “Remember Me”. So the record company, it
didn’t matter to them what you recorded? You just pretty much decided what you were going to do and came down and did them.

**Charlie:** Right, they wanted us to do original material, all the artists in Bobbin were doing original material at that time and it was, you know, we were up river from Memphis but Bob Lyons was sort of the counter part to Sam Philips in Memphis because he was pulling in R & B artists he was pulling in country artists, he was pulling in rock artists, he was taking all types of sound.

**Chris:** But he was more like Stax records then, because he was doing R & B and Soul rather then rockabilly really.

**Charlie:** But also, Sam Philips had R & B people, too.

**Chris:** That’s true.

**Charlie:** I mean there were a lot of R & B people that Sam Philips had. I mean at that time they were experimenting with anybody to try and get their record companies well known.

**Charlie:** And I got this letter from Ben, which I don’t know, have you ever seen this thing? I probably should have shown you that before hand, but it’s a letter from Bobbin Record.

**Charlie:** I have to put on my other glasses.

**Chris:** They talk about the release of your single, “Remember Me.” They talk about the promotion of that particular record, and they talk about another band that they are also promoting and it looks to me like they really want to move into the rock/pop field which they haven’t really been able to break into. Is that kind of what their goals were? They started out as a rhythm n’ blues label. I can’t remember, when was that letter dated? Probably 62 sometime?

**Charlie:** Yeah, June 27, 1962.

**Chris:** So they were, as a record company they were kind of struggling to get their records played on “white stations” or pop stations?

**Charlie:** Right, because Bob owned a St. Louis station that was strictly R & B and he had a lot of the early recordings by a lot of the early blues artists and everything else that later became hits for white artists that they took the material and cleaned it up and sanitized it so to speak, you know, to appeal to the white audience.

**Chris:** The recording sessions, did you have many people helping you with them or was there like a producer, a technician that helped you with the recordings or was it pretty much you guys came in and produced it yourselves?

**Charlie:** We produced it ourselves, we came in and did it ourselves and the recording engineer was there and that was about it.

**Chris:** The person that ran the record company, wasn’t even there? To see what was going on? Not really, huh?

**Charlie:** He had heard our audition tapes and knew what he wanted us to record and you know, told us to go ahead with it and that was about it, he did go with us when we recorded “Remember Me” and “Lock on the Old Back Door” he took us to the, the new studio because we didn’t know where it was at. But we knew where Premiere was because we had gone down there to cut the audition tapes and everything else.

**Chris:** Did you ever know how many copies of these records you sold. I understand you never got any royalty checks
Charlie: We never got any royalty checks; I understand that “Baby Tonight”, I heard once that it had sold 30,000 copies of the record.

Chris: Where did you hear that from, a disc jockey?

Charlie: From Al Shelton at Record Merchandisers.

Chris: Oh OK, the guy that set you up at Bobbin?

Charlie: Yeah, right and then on “Don’t Be Cold,” I didn’t hear how that one did and then with “Remember Me” and “Lock on the Old Back Door” I don’t remember how many it sold, but I know it broke into the top 40 in some areas which I learned about that recently.

Chris: I’m surprised, if I had recorded it, I would want to know how many it sold, you know, I would be on the phone with the record company. How’s it doing? You know, they didn’t communicate much with you then?

Charlie: Well, no, it’s like Bill Haley and the Comets said you know on “Rock Around the Clock” they earned 21 dollars and 42 cents. Recording was not, that was not where you made your money. If you made it, you made it on your live appearances, and a lot of times a promoter would take the artists on that, too.

Chris: So really recording was just seen as a way of promoting your live performances.

Charlie: Right, and in those days if you were starting to make money, a lot of the major labels would pull you back in the studio and record the living day lights out of you. So you were always in debt so you weren’t making any money. I mean that was one of the big things was record the day lights out of the artist so they were always in debt. They would never make any profits off of their records. So they had to make it off of their live shows.

Chris: Back to the record company and what you knew about what was happening with your recordings, did you, was it your impression that they were being played on the radio stations all over the country or just in the Midwest or were you hearing from people, hey we heard your record or you know, that kind of thing?

Charlie: It was our impression that they were, they were being played all over the country they were reviewed in Billboard and Cash Box magazine, we had write ups in there. Somewhere I have the Billboard when “Baby Tonight” came out, you know, describing “Baby Tonight” was a moderate rocker and that “You Don’t Care” was a mournful, weepful ballot full of suffering.

Chris: Never read your critics, right?

Charlie: Never read the reviews.

Chris: So did it ever appear on the billboard charts do you think?

Charlie: Not that I am aware of.

Chris: I don’t know what kind of sales you would need to do that, 30,000 sounds pretty impressive.

Charlie: That was sort of, they would call that a regional break out hit.

Chris: I’m trying to think what a gold record is ? ( $1 million in sales)

Charlie: At that time it was a million. ( That is a platinum record: units)

Chris: A million selling? Oh OK

Charlie: They’ve since revised it down.

Chris: Now, you were self managed, did the record company at all try to manage your band or you know have any say, anything about your performances?
Charlie: No, Bob did book us into some shows in the St. Louis area and got us started there, but he just didn’t do anything at all with the management at all. I think Harry King would have liked to have been our manager and he did a lot to promote us and he tried to promote us down in Nashville and peddle us down there and get us out of the Bobbin contract and go with somebody else.

Chris: So, you did make an attempt to get out of the Bobbin contract, did you have some offers from some other record companies?

Charlie: There were other record companies that made proposals to Bobbin, whatever happened to them we were told at one point we were going on Clock Records which at that time had Dave Baby Cortez and the song “Happy Organ” and they had us do promos for Clock Records and then something happened with that and every time that Bob said that there was something lined up, it didn’t seem to materialize. I don’t know what happened.

Chris: Could you have gotten out of your contract with Bobbin, do you think? And signed with another record company or would that have been a huge legal mess?

Charlie: We probably could have but, I mean Bob was pretty straight, I felt pretty straight forward with us, Mr. Lyons I mean he was always very straight forward with us, very honest type guy and so we stuck with him.

Chris: That’s great. We were, during the time that they were changing the tapes we were talking about the fact that your records are out on the internet. And there was, you can see a picture of the singles on the internet, they have the songs that you can listen to out on the internet. And I noticed during the reunion concert, Jules Blattner said something about the you are collector items, that Bobbin Records was collectors items in Europe and they draw like 150, 200 bucks per record, have you run into any of that at all or heard about any of that?

Charlie: No, I do know that they are, that our records are available in Europe right now. The last one was released on an album called Mr. Rock n’ Roll in 1999 and it’s actually a CD and it has a lot of Bobbin recording artists on there, on that one I believe two of our songs are on that, and then there was one, it was a vinyl album released in 1983 in the Netherlands, called The White Album and four of our songs were on that, the first four are on that one.

Chris: So what do you think happened to your recordings, did they get sold to somebody?

Charlie: Bobbin Records was sold to, after Bob Lyons death, their whole catalog was sold to a company in Germany and the company in Germany now owns the Bobbin Records catalog.

Chris: And you have no claim over that at all, you never owned those songs, once they got recorded for Bobbin then Bobbin owned the songs?

Charlie: The songs, Ben and I are still the, we are the writers of the songs and we are listed as the song writers with Broadcast Music Incorporated. So I mean we still, Ben and I still own the songs.

Chris: What, if they got played on the radio somewhere would you get a check, a small check?

Charlie: We should.

Chris: Well you haven’t gotten a check in a while.

Charlie: We never got a check on that either.
Chris: Ahh geez, you have never gotten a check?
Charlie: Broadcast Music has never sent us any royalties.
Chris: Well we ought to put this out on Napster so you, or some of the internet sites now I can’t remember what it was called, but it was free. Anybody could just pull it up and listen to the records. OK, anymore about the period with Bobbin Records that you want to talk about, any final comments, it sounds like it was a great experience for you.
Charlie: Oh yeah, it was a great experience, I mean
Chris: You don’t seem bitter at all about the fact that they didn’t send you checks.
Charlie: No we met an awfully lot of people, we did a lot of shows, we just, it was just a great time I mean, you know, people come up to me and say you know they were so envious of us at that time because while a lot of them had dreams and things, they never acted on their dreams, you know we lived our dream, we actually were appearing with the top artists at the time and out there doing it and to us we were just out having a good time and playing music and that didn’t, you know it didn’t seem like it was all that much.
Chris: And I think you made a real important point, that the context at the time was artists were performing, that was the big thing and records were just promoting the performances. Nobody dreamed that later on in you know another ten years people would be making millions and millions of dollars from their recordings because recording was just sort of a secondary thing from the live performances. Ben wanted to make sure that we spent a little bit of time talking about your fan club. And I pulled out a couple of pictures that look like they were members of your fan club but I’m not sure. I’m gonna show those to you here. And can you remember who was the driving force behind your fan club? And are those individuals in your pictures, one looks like it’s a parade picture.
Charlie: This, yeah the parade picture I’ll get to that in just a minute, this first picture I have to see, I see one of the people in here that I recognize. This is Sandy Davis, she was a fan from Athens, Illinois and I think that’s her sister Bev. Yes, Bev and Sandy Davis, they were sisters from Athens, Illinois and the lady with them is Irene Robertson and she was one of the officials of our fan club. The club was originally started by a Mrs. Orme and her daughters and they were sort of the first instigators of it and got it together and then later on, Helen Roundtree who was a local lady who was a sweet lady and just she loved to sing and boy she was a great influence and she really pushed the fan club.
Chris: Somebody by the name of Painter or Robinson? Maybe I didn’t get their names.
Charlie: I saw Robertson here in the picture.
Chris: That’s who that is OK. Is there somebody named Painter? That was a president of it?
Charlie: Yeah, Mrs. Painter and her daughter Margi.
Chris: Oh OK Margi, right, right.
Charlie: Gosh there were so many people over the years that were involved. This is, the picture of the parade here, that is the sesquicentennial parade, 1957.
Chris: Looks like 5th street maybe.
Charlie: That’s 5th street and what do you call it, it’s some bar right at the corner of 5th and Monroe. Something like the Firehouse or something like that, some such name as that. But that was the world famous corner of 5th and Monroe that was the big famous corner of down town Springfield in the 50s.

Chris: Those two girls, do you remember who they are?

Charlie: Sure, the one girl on the, which would be my right, she is Thelma Orme and Irene’s daughter, Joanne Robertson is the girl carrying the banner. And the little girl in the background with the cowboy hat, the little short girl there, that’s, this little girl is Betty Robertson and this is Thelma Orme, that’s me on the guitar there, and that’s Ray Dippel on the guitar back there. This is my nephew, Kenny Brown on that guitar over there.

Chris: Oh OK. Neat picture.

Charlie: That was in the State Journal Register. That was, we made the paper and that’s where that copy came from.

Chris: Good promotion for the band, too.

Charlie: Right.

Chris: Now another thing I noticed was there were ads in the paper for your fan club to have fund raisers to pay for the copyrighting on your songs, what was that all about? You had to raise the money to copyright the songs and they would do a fundraiser? Do you remember what kind of money we’re talking about here?

Charlie: Well, I know to copyright a song back in those days was 25 dollars.

Chris: 25 bucks. So you guys would have fundraisers?

Charlie: Well they would have fund raisers to help us pay for the copyrights.

Chris: Six songs copyrighted? No it would be five songs.

Charlie: Five songs copyrighted.

Chris: And the record company wouldn’t do that as just part of their service to you?

Charlie: No, we had to have the songs copyrighted before we ever went into the studio. Or the company would take them.

Chris: But in essence, once you recorded them they kind of owned the song or at least that recording of it.

Charlie: Right, they owned the recording of the song but we had the rights to the music; the words and music.

Chris: And as far as you know, no one ever covered your, or recorded your songs on any other album? They were only recorded by you.

Charlie: Right, our own original material.

Chris: Where there some local businesses that were big sponsors of your band? I know Bob Reed was one of the names that I heard mentioned, do you remember that at all?

Charlie: I don’t remember that, I do know that Irv Karpman and Paul Selvaggio from Music Shop were big promoters of ours. Also, Charlie Salvo of the Platter and he put our records on practically every Juke Box in Springfield and did a lot of promotion of us behind the scenes.

Chris: Were you ever able to figure out how many records you sold just in Springfield from those two guys? ‘Cause those were the two main places people bought records right? The Platter and the Music Shop ?.
Charlie: I know at the Music Shop they sold over 500 copies of our very first record, I don’t know of the later records what they sold in copies.

Chris: Do you remember what those records, when I was buying 45s, it seems like they were about 75 to a dollar, you know 75 cents to a dollar, what do you remember what they cost ?.

Charlie: 49 cents they started at, and then they went to 98 cents for a 45.

Chris: Toward the end there they were almost up to a dollar. Isn’t that something? Well you know even if they had sent you checks, they weren’t going to be, a fabulous amount, but you know for that time it might have been pretty impressive. Well let’s talk about how, the band sort of ended. You got drafted into the army and this would be the Korean Conflict? (Brain Cramp)

Charlie: No, the beginning of the Vietnam War, 1962.

Chris: Oh, the beginning of the Vietnam War, 1962.

Charlie: I’m not that old.

Chris: I’m sorry, although it is hard to believe that the Vietnam thing went back that far. Because people didn’t really realize it was going on. So you were one of the early people drafted during the Vietnam era and so was that pretty much the end of the band or did it operated during those years?

Charlie: No, Ben kept playing during that time, I was sent to Alaska. I spent eighteen months up there, and while I was up there, I joined a band off post. There was a lodge down, about ten miles down the road from our army post and they needed a singer in the band. So I went down, and since I had some mileage on me and had a record contract back here and everything else they hired me to sing up there. So for the big part of the eighteen months I was up there, I sang in a band, a country band up there. But I brought rock n’ roll to this country band and the lady that owned the lodge, she insisted on playing the drums, she was the most God awful drummer that ever was on the face of the Earth. She couldn’t keep a beat or anything.

Chris: You got to have a good rhythm section.

Charlie: But she had to play, she had to be the drummer in the band. She owned the place and so we had to put up with her. I introduced rock n’ roll, which she just hated but it drew the G.I.s in and so she decided that she wanted that business and she put up with rock n’ roll while I was up there. She probably never had another rock act after I left.

Chris: Well, after you left though, Ben kept the band going but he couldn’t very well call it the Harmony Brothers anymore since you were, or did he? Did he go under the same name? The Harmony Brothers?

Charlie: Yeah, when I came home on leave we were with the band again.

Chris: Oh, OK. So you continued to appear with the band while you were in the army?

Charlie: Right, right I would come home and at one point when I was at Fort Leonardwood in basic training. We did a gig at Fort Leonardwood for the servicemen, the band came down there and we did a live show at one of the service clubs.

Chris: And then when you got out of the army, did you try to continue the band for a while?
Charlie: Yes, I was in the band, and then in 1967 I left the band. I realized we weren’t going to be cutting any more records. I wanted to expand farther what we were doing.

Chris: Was there a disagreement, did you have some musical style issues with the way the band was going? You wanted to do different types of music?

Charlie: I wanted to do different types of things; I just wasn’t satisfied with the way, the way the band was going.

Chris: Well and by that time, we’re talking about the second wave of rock n’ roll by then. You had Motown, the Beatles, the British invasion and all that kind of stuff, things had really changed dramatically. All those original first wave artists had their last hits, with the exception of Elvis, who continued to have hits. So you wanted to go in some different directions and see what you could do as a solo artist?

Charlie: Right.

Chris: So let’s talk about your years as solo artist, with other bands. As a solo artist, you went, the sequence of events here is, did you go to Nashville first and started working a writer, as a songwriter ?

Charlie: No, that came later. I got together with some local musicians here and the first group was called the Razor’s Edge, and that was Clayton Gillette and his brother Denny Gillette and a kid named Louis Pionetza who played bass, Denny Gillette was our drummer. Clayton told me I could do a lot more with my voice than what I was doing and I wasn’t working hard enough, and he worked my butt off. Clayton was fantastic on the guitar, he did all the arrangements for the group and he just really, really pushed me vocally and we started doing stuff that I just never thought I would be capable of doing. So we were appearing at clubs and this one club owner said you know you really need to do a audition tape and go to Nashville and see if you can get a recording contract with somebody ‘cause the stuff you’re doing is just fantastic.

Chris: This is with the band Razor’s Edge?

Charlie: Razor’s Edge.

Chris: And were you doing rock as well as country?

Charlie: We were doing mostly rock, a lot of blues, jazz, just a little mix of stuff. Doing a lot of top 40 and things that were on the radio, you know cover songs.

Chris: Mostly playing around in the Springfield area?

Charlie: Playing mainly in the Springfield area. And so anyway we got some songs together and went up to Golden Voice recording studio in Pekin and did a demo tape. We cut the songs and the recording engineer came running down and he said to me have you ever sang harmony with yourself? And I said no, not really, not in a recording studio. He said well I want you to do harmony on some of these songs and so he went back in and we did the harmony on the first one and then he played it back and I was just stunned because I didn’t realize that I sounded like what I sounded like. He was very excited about that and then the second song that we cut was a James Brown song “It’s a Man’s World” and he said the first song on the tape should be “Little Green Apples” which I did the harmony on.

Chris: The Roger Miller song ?

Charlie: Yeah and then we did “It’s a Man’s World” and then we put the other things on there.

Chris: It was a real rhythm n’ blues type song?
Charlie: A very bluesy feel to it. And when I went to Nashville, I walked around there and I mean you walked to the companies, and of course they have so many people coming in the door, they won’t even talk to you. And finally ended up at a little tiny recording company and the guy said he was only signing women artists, no men. And I left and this guy followed me out and he said if you want to see anybody go down to Cedar Wood Publishing Company, and ask to speak to Cecil Null, and if anybody can help you, Cecil will. So I went down to Cedar Wood and asked to speak to Cecil and so he told me, he said you know there are so many people that come here, most of them aren’t worth a damn and he said. You go home, cut me a tape and send it to me. And he said, I’ll listen to it and then I’ll give you my honest opinion. Well after I cut the tape I was so excited with the tape, I called him and I said Cecil I want to bring this down to you. And he said, no send it, I don’t want you wasting your time and your money. I said Cecil I want to sit across from you when you play this tape because I want to see you face to face. I don’t want a rejection letter in the mail. So I went to Nashville, set up an appointment, went down there and went in his office and he played about ten seconds of “Little Green Apples” and whirred it to the next song and played about ten seconds of it. He got up and left the office and I thought boy he was really impressed, you know. I’m sitting there and a few minutes later he came back in and he slapped some papers down in front of me and said I’m signing you not only as a performing artists, to the publishing company. But also as a song writer and he said and you let me do the talking. And then a few minutes later these people started coming in and he started to introduce me to these guys. I set there and my mouth just dropped because I recognized every one of them as the top producers in Nashville. He said I want you to listen to something and he played about ten seconds of “Little Green Apples” and they all sort of sat up on their chairs and then he whirred to “It’s a Man’s World” and then he played that and then they all got excited and they started bidding and I thought, my God, what’s going on here?

Chris: Bidding, you mean money amounts?

Charlie: They were bidding for my contract. And they wanted my contract, and Cecil said well we’ll talk about that later.

Chris: So that’s the way they did business? In other words he signs you to a contract and then any of these people could try to buy that contract?

Charlie: To buy that contract, but what Cedar Wood wanted, they didn’t, now Felton Jarvis who was with RCA Victor said he wanted me in the worst way.

Chris: That’s who Elvis was with at the time.

Charlie: Right, and they said well you’ve got to do all Cedar Wood material and he said no I want to pick his material from anywhere because you may not have what I think is best for his voice. And they wouldn’t go along with that, I had to do just Cedar Wood material so Felton Jarvis would not sign me. Buddy Knox would not sign me, Bob Montgomery from Columbia would not sign me, finally Roy Dea from Mercury took the deal and signed me but then that turned into a political nightmare. I mean they would find me something and Roy Dea would get me in you know and we would be rehearsing it and the first thing you know Cedar Wood would let it be known that I was rehearsing, Roy Dea said it was going to be a hit and somebody would cover the song before I even got it recorded. And it just turned into, to really be a nightmare.
**Chris:** Now the songs that you put on the demo tape, I went through them and listened to it, there was about 14, 15 songs on it and the first five songs are all songs that I recognize, you know the artist, the composers are well known they are songs that people have had hits with and that kind of thing. But then there’s about well I would say about ten songs or so that I could not, I should have recognized a couple of them but I didn’t recognize all of them. How did you get those songs to put in the demo?

**Charlie:** Those were all songs from Cedar Wood song writers.

**Chris:** So this was before you signed with them?

**Charlie:** No, this was after I signed with them.

**Chris:** So was this the whole demo tape that you went down there with?

**Charlie:** The demo tape, was actually the first seven songs. Then the next four are the four that I actually recorded at Bradley’s Barn in Nashville. OK and out of that came the Jed Record release of “Never Let Me Go” and “Knock Around Snickers.”

**Chris:** OK which is item five we have here. So let’s see, so this was on that tape that I listened too? This song, the A and the B side on this? “Knock Around” Ok yeah you’re right. Ok and so that was the one, so that’s not on Mercury?

**Charlie:** No that’s on Jed.

**Chris:** On Jed, OK. So were the sequence of events, you made the first four songs, went down to Nashville ?.

**Charlie:** First seven.

**Chris:** First seven for Cecil Null, he signed you and then the record companies in Nashville bid on you as an artist and you decided to go with Mercury. But it sounds like there were some opportunities with other record companies. You missed opportunities because you signed with this publishing company. You couldn’t avail yourself of other opportunities. But he sent you back, and then you recorded the rest of these songs.

**Charlie:** Right, and the four that I recorded in Nashville at Bradley’s Barn, that was Owen Bradley who did all the Brenda Lee, Patsy Cline, he produced them. He had his own recording studio there. When I got out of the contract with Mercury, when I saw that I wasn’t going anywhere, Mercury wasn’t happy, I wasn’t happy, you couldn’t, we couldn’t get anything on wax at all.

**Chris:** Because they wouldn’t agree to the songs you wanted to sing?

**Charlie:** No, it was every time that I got something that I was going to do, that Cedar would let it out to the major artists. That they had this new guy that had been written up in Billboard that was a new discovery that was going to take this song and make a hit of it. That was the way they got there songs recorded.

**Chris:** Well why was your publishing company undermining your record contract?

**Charlie:** Well that was just the politics of Nashville. You know so, and I couldn’t have gotten in the door of the recording companies without being at Cedar Wood. You know, I mean no I hadn’t even, one would listen to me until I went to Cedar Wood, I mean it was a vicious circle.

**Chris:** Did you have an agent or did you think about getting an agent that might have been able to help you with this?

**Charlie:** Well I did get an agent at that time, I got Buddy Lee Attractions and Cecil Null though retained the personal management of me through Buddy Lee Attractions.
Cecil felt I should go a lot farther and as a professional manager of Cedar Wood his hands were sort of tied and so finally we got out of the Mercury contract. I independently produced these four songs at Bradley Barn and then I brought in musicians and brought in local musicians plus on the four songs. I used the Holladay Sisters to back me on the song “In the Ghetto” and several of his things, in fact the Memphis album of Elvis’ had the Holiday’s on it and they were fantastic, they were really good.

**Chris:** Did you have to pay for the recording sessions?

**Charlie:** Oh yes, oh I paid through the nose.

**Chris:** You bank rolled yourself.

**Charlie:** I bankrolled myself. I was a long time digging out from under that.

**Chris:** Did you ever get a check on this, a royalty check? Any idea how well that was promoted or sold?

**Charlie:** Sold a total of five hundred records.

**Chris:** It wasn’t really distributed through record stores?

**Charlie:** It did not get distributed very well and Jed was so small, didn’t have any money. When the record got played in some areas the distributors couldn’t get the record, they couldn’t put them out fast enough, so it just died, totally died. And then the last four songs on there I independently produced, went back to Golden Voice recording studio and used local musicians and did those four songs up there.

**Chris:** Were all those songs owned by your publishing company?

**Charlie:** Owned by Cedar Wood Publishing Company.

**Chris:** And Carl Perkins has one of those songs? They own some Carl Perkins songs?

**Charlie:** Right, he was signed with, at that time he was signed with Cedar Wood Publishing Company as an artist and a song writer.

**Chris:** Right, from your materials, there was this group of pages of lyrics of songs are those of any significance?

**Charlie:** These are the four songs that I independently produced, the writing on here, the Holladay Sisters actually wrote that, the backgrounds that they were going to do. They came into the studio after I recorded, two weeks after I recorded. I went back I over dubbed my voice. They came in and they brought the words to the song from Cedar Wood actually the song writers are on here, who the songwriters of the songs. And they wrote what thier parts were going to be. They listened to the song one time they wrote there parts down and said ok we’ve got it and then in one take they laid down their tracks. And they were so slick, of course they get 1500 dollars an hour, which they were worth it.

**Chris:** But you had to pay for it. Now did you ever did you ever write any songs that got published by this company?

**Charlie:** No.

**Chris:** Isn’t that something, so your signing with this publishing company is what kept you from hitting it big and you never ended up writing songs.

**Charlie:** When they started playing politics I quit writing songs.

**Chris:** Did you just leave Nashville very disappointed about the whole thing or how did you feel about the experience. Or did you said oh well, well at least I got my shot?
Charlie: It was a good experience I did meet a lot of people in Nashville. We went
down to the Grand Ole Opry on a Saturday night; I went back stage at the Ryman
Auditorium and at one of the tapings, one of the shows that my manager was trying to
get me on. I met Dolly Parton she was there, her sister had just come to Nashville
and we spent about 20 minutes together talking back stage. Gosh she was a doll, you
know she was just so different from her stage persona. She really was and I just
enjoyed that time and back stage at the Grand Ole Opry meeting all the Opry stars.
Names I had known for years and just setting back there running my gums with them
and just jawing and having a good time.

Chris: Well now how long were you actually in Nashville working on this, on your
career there, would you say?

Charlie: From 1969 to 1972 ?

Chris: So you were there for about three years?

Charlie: I was back and forth from here to there because I didn’t move down there. I
worked between here and there because I still maintained the band; you know singing
with the band here in Springfield.

Chris: So you were going back and forth. What was the final straw that broke the
camel’s back as they say? That you just decided well this isn’t going to work I’m just
going to go back to Springfield.

Charlie: After I produced the record and I just saw the whole politics of how they
worked in Nashville. I thought well this is ridiculous, I don’t think I’m going to get
anywhere here, it’s just too hard.

Chris: I got some more pictures here of the period when you were playing with other
bands is that the Tom Blasko ?.

Charlie: That’s Tom Blasko Trio plus two, Tom is in the center, the guy to the left of
Tom is Bob Young, he’s the drummer probably the finest drummer, I feel that
Springfield’s ever produced. The guy on the right is Clayton Gillette who is no
longer with us.

Chris: Who was in the Razor’s Edge with you?

Charlie: Yeah, right and the girl singer is Connie Morgan she has a fantastic voice,
she could bring tears to a glass eye I mean she was so good. We had so much fun
working together on stage, the whole group, we just clicked it was the whole time that
we were together.

Chris: How many years did you play with them?

Charlie: I played with them from 1972 to 1976 when the band broke up. Tom bought
into the Lake Club and he decided he had to get out of the band business to watch his
money at the Lake Club to keep it from going out the door. The rest of us couldn’t
find anybody that we wanted to work together with, because when we went on stage
we had a ball working together. It was more fun. This is one of my Nashville
publicity photos, that’s when I was signed with Cedar Wood and I was still with
Mercury. I was 29 years old in that picture. I tell everybody that’s my baby picture.

Chris: And you never recorded, never really recorded for Mercury. They never did
put it together the right songs and got you into the studio?

Charlie: No, we had the songs, we were getting ready to record then first thing you
know, Ray Price covered one of the songs I mean just forget it, just gone you know.
And this was, I was 17 when this was taken that was taken in the TeenLand years in Springfield.

Chris: I wasn’t sure of the time period. You look young?

Charlie: Yeah this was just, that’s still my baby picture there.

Chris: So those two were taken at the same time here in Springfield?

Charlie: Yeah here in Springfield the photographer on that was Bob Grant. I don’t even know if Bob is still around, still alive even but he was a high school class mate of mine he had his own studio. This is the group of the Illinois Country Opry I don’t know who all the members of that group are.

Chris: How long did you do that?

Charlie: I didn’t, I wasn’t with them at all. I think that was something my mom had, my mom went to one of their shows and probably got that picture, I don’t know. That had nothing to do with me.

Chris: So it sounds like you played with the Accents, that was an army band that you played with and then the Razor’s Edge were the band that you were playing with when you made the demo tape and then later on Tom’s band and then Second Time Around. Was that a final band?

Charlie: Second Time Around was the last group that I was with when we did the reunion concert.

Chris: Oh so about the time of the reunion concert, that’s when that band got put together, you were playing regularly with them?

Charlie: Yeah, just before.

Chris: Oh, ok well let’s talk about the more recent period, you moved from the Nashville years to the 80s and into the present and maybe we will talk about the reunion concert. But you started doing music therapy type things, tell me a little bit about that.

Charlie: Yeah that was during my Nashville period.

Chris: Oh so you were coming back?

Charlie: Right, I worked at McFarland Mental Health Center and got into music therapy and decided that music was a force in helping the kids. I started taking courses at SIU and we would go down there in the summer and take summer courses in music therapy. The one year we actually went to England to study under the guy who wrote the first book on music therapy. We studied over in England and they crammed a whole semesters worth of work into ten days. I mean we went to classes from six in the morning till about midnight at night. I mean it was exhausting but it was, it was really great.

Chris: How many years did you work out at McFarland?


Chris: OK so quite a long time you were a state employee, and you really enjoyed that that part of your job. You worked exclusively in that area?

Charlie: I worked in the children’s unit and did the music therapy. Also ran a preschool program for kids, they had preschool children out there and they had a children’s program.

Chris: Has that continued at McFarland, do you think?

Charlie: No.

Chris: So you were pretty much the catalyst behind it.
Charlie: Right, the programs are totally changed up now.
Chris: Well it looks like you worked for Sangamon County for a while, what did you do for the county?
Charlie: I worked at the Circuit Clerks office; I was the assistant manager of the phone center for the Circuit Clerk’s office for nine years.
Chris: OK, probably got involved in local politics for a little bit. Did you ever think about running for office or getting involved with anybody that ran for office? I see Tom got involved in politics.
Charlie: Right, Tom got involved in politics, got on the school board and that. No, I never thought about running for political office.
Chris: Well let’s talk about that reunion concert, which I got to see and I got to tell you, you must have sang for about three hours, four hours.
Charlie: I think I sang for more than that, because people were backing out at the last minute, they came down there and then wouldn’t appear.
Chris: Because you were the lead singer for every band.
Charlie: Practically, yeah.
Chris: Which was tough, because by the time you and Ben got up there, your voice was tough, it was tough to get through that.
Charlie: It was rough, I was really ragged. And we had just, we had played the night before, we had a five hour gig the night before that.
Chris: Really with Second Time Around? OK, but I really enjoyed it you did a great job; the fans really seemed to enjoy it. The comment you made, it had been twenty years since you and Ben had sang with the band. Was it hard to get Ben to come back and do that or did he jump at the chance?
Charlie: It was, it was sort of difficult because he can’t do the high notes anymore, he couldn’t do the harmony. I never sang the harmony, I always sang the melody. Ben did the harmony, we were The Harmony Brothers and so he popped this thing on me, you know you got to sing the harmony. Me singing the harmony on those songs was, to me was disastrous because I that was not my thing you know. I only had about an hour to practice before we did that because things weren’t working out. I mean we were rehearsing and we were to back Marvin Sarge Jackson on that, too. And so I mean we had to work with various people and do various things. We had been rehearsing and then playing our own gig and every thing else and boy, I’ll tell you.
Chris: It was a tough night.
Charlie: And besides that I was very ill at the time. That was prior to my liver transplant.
Chris: Did you know you were ill?
Charlie: Oh I knew I was ill, in fact they were afraid I wasn’t going to make it. I said even if they have to wheel me in there on a gurney, I will make that concert. After organizing it and getting the musicians to come back together for it and everything.
Chris: Now your selection of songs, of course you did a couple different Everly Brothers songs, actually you did four Everly Brothers songs. Which would make sense because you were had the Everly Brothers sound, would you, back in the days when you were doing that in the band were you doing Everly Brothers songs?
Charlie: Oh we did a lot of Everly Brothers things.
Chris: OK and then of course you did a couple of your own songs and “Suzie Q” which of course according to Ben was somebody in the audience real crazy about loving that song.

Charlie: Right, one of our biggest fans and one of the bands biggest fans from back in the 50s and to this day. A guy that is really involved in local politics, I won’t mention his name.

Chris: Well Ben did.

Charlie: Oh, Ok well he would turn really, really red about it, his favorite song is “Suzie Q” and even when I was with Second Time Around, wherever we played we had to play “Suzie Q”.

Chris: And I don’t remember who wrote that, Creedance Clearwater Revival did a version of it, but I don’t think they wrote it.

Charlie: Dale Hawkins is the original, the originator of that. He also did several other things in the 50s.

Chris: Right, well it must have been a real, even though it was grueling, you must have really enjoyed yourself doing that and you looked like you were having a good time.

Charlie: It was, it was. And to get all the old musicians to come back out and even though some of them didn’t get up there and play. Then Jules Blattner actually got up there and backed me on some of the songs. That was a real kick because you know we, I finally got to see Jules current group play after many years. To see him play and then he backed me up you know on some of the songs.

Chris: And he still tours, doesn’t he?

Charlie: Yeah, he’s still playing.

Chris: Right, then you had a ceramic shop in Ashland, how long did that ?

Charlie: That was in the early 80s.

Chris: Was that in downtown Ashland?

Charlie: Downtown Ashland, yes. And that was not a good location, but I came to the attention of a local ceramic company and eventually ended up moving to Ohio. Going to work for a major ceramic company and traveling all over the country. During that period, when we would pop into towns, of course the guys would want me to sing and if there was a band they would go up and threaten the band members. Saying if I didn’t get up there and sing they would beat them up and these truck drivers would, they would let me get up and sing and we did one in Courtland, NY. I was actually joking around with the group that we went out to dinner with. One of the people was having a birthday and I got up and I do a really bad version of “Happy Birthday” just to embarrass the person. I did that and this girl came over and she said I’m with the band that’s playing here tonight and I know you can really sing because of the way you slaughtered that song. We would like to have you get up and sing with us tonight. She said would you consider that and I said Ok yeah. I’ll come up and do a couple of numbers. Well I went up and did my two numbers and its like I’d worked that band all my life. They were so tight and everything, it just clicked for us that night.

Chris: This was in up-state New York?

Charlie: Yeah, up-state New York. And that poor girl, she never got up to sing the rest of the night, the band asked me to stay with them up there. The audience was
going absolutely nuts and they did things they never done before. I did things I never done before. I knew the songs but had never done them on stage and everything just clicked.

**Chris:** And you knew all the lyrics to the songs?

**Charlie:** I knew all the lyrics and so it was a total blow out night, it really was and the band after we got through they were appearing the next night and in Corning, New York. They asked me if I could stay and go over there and do that with them. I said no we’re leaving tomorrow, as soon as we pack up here we’re leaving, because the next day I have to be back in Springfield, Illinois. To open a club there and they said oh God we would really like for you to stay and appear with our band.

**Chris:** What year would this have been?

**Charlie:** That was in probably 1995.

**Chris:** A few years before the reunion, interesting. Do you remember what the name of the band was?

**Charlie:** No I don’t remember what their name was now.

**Chris:** Did you just think about maybe going back, going with the band and beginning to do music again.

**Charlie:** It would have been fun because they were a tight group and I mean they had all the instrumentation and they put on a show and of course, I move when I’m on the stage. I put on a strong show and several of the people that traveled with me, we were like a bunch of gypsies.

**Chris:** And this is with the ceramic business.

**Charlie:** Right because we did so many shows together weekend after weekend we were in the same places all the time. A lot of them at that particular one didn’t know that I sang. And they were just completely stunned that I got up there and did what I did, you know. And I said oh yeah that’s my hidden past that I don’t tell people about.

**Chris:** So how many years did you do the ceramics?

**Charlie:** Well, from 84 until the ceramic industry went bust in 1996. And that’s when I came back to Springfield, in 1996.

**Chris:** How did you know it was going bust, you could tell?

**Charlie:** Sales were going down hill rapidly and companies were folding right and left and things that were going great guns, were not going great guns and sales were really getting bad.

**Chris:** Well, have you ever seen this before? (SJR Magazine insert for Senior)

**Charlie:** Sure, I tell everybody I was Mr. April of the senior lifestyles. I was the center fold and I didn’t even have to get nude.

**Chris:** And of course you talked about donors and of course an article about encouraging people to donate organs. I notice you’ve got some pins on are you still real active?

**Charlie:** Yes I am, in fact last week I did four events for The Gift of Hope.

**Chris:** OK, do you still do music for those kinds of events, or do you just appear?

**Charlie:** Whenever people say will you sing, I’m up there. And I want to get a band back together again. I would really like to get back into it. I’m old enough to be an elder.
Chris: That would be great. Sounds like a pretty traumatic situation, did you, I mean you were waiting for a transplant, it got tense and everything worked out great though.

Charlie: Yeah, I was twelve hours from death, when I got transplanted, they told me. They called my friends and family and said if they wanted to see me alive come down and see him now. Because he’s got twelve hours left to live. And it was during that time that a liver became available.

Chris: Did you know the donor at all?

Charlie: No, I know the donor was a 37 year old woman, she died as a result of injuries she received in an automobile accident. I’ve written the family three letters, but I have never heard anything back and of course it is their right not to respond.

Chris: Where was this at?

Charlie: St. Louis University Hospital, St. Louis.

Chris: Did the organ become available in Missouri?

Charlie: Yes, yeah I was in the hospital there I had been there.

Chris: So you were just waiting.

Charlie: Yeah I had been in the hospital since August waiting and on September 7th, 99 when I, I mean they told me an organ was available. But Omaha, Nebraska had the first turn down on it and that was pretty significant date because September 7th was my 59th birthday. And I thought what a birthday present. And then it didn’t become available, it went to Omaha and they told me I wouldn’t get another one. And I was so toxic at that point that I said oh yes I will. You know, and they just sort of said yeah right and one became available at about two o’clock in the morning. They started the operation on September 8th.

Chris: And you didn’t have any problems after the operation?

Charlie: Well I was in a coma for about two weeks after that.

Chris: Two weeks!

Charlie: And then I had to learn to walk all over again.

Chris: So those were, people probably didn’t know if you were going to come out of the coma either probably. This was how many years ago?

Charlie: Seven years ago.

Chris: Well that’s terrific, because we wouldn’t have gotten to talk. No that’s terrific, that’s great. Well this has been real great, is there anything else, cause you know I tried to cover as much as I could. Is there anything else, memories or things you want to talk about that we haven’t covered or did I miss anything with regard to your music career.

Charlie: No I think you covered it from the early years on and just recently after about 30 years I was reunited with Gordon Jones our drummer. Thanks to the thing that our classmate Will put on the website and we’ve gotten, he was back in Springfield just this last week and we got to visit.

Chris: Oh that’s great, that’s terrific.

Charlie: Yeah, we visited and he’ll be back in December and he wanted to see Ray Dippel real bad and we tracked Ray down he wasn’t home and we went to where his wife worked and she let us know where he was at.

Chris: Oh so he lives here in town also?
Charlie: Yeah and so we went and surprised him at McDonald’s on 6th street, he was having coffee with a bunch of friends and we walked in and so it was a big reunion for him and Gordon. It was sort of fun.

Chris: Well we’ll make sure that they get a chance to see these videos and that thing, they’ll enjoy that I’m sure. Well this has been a real pleasure Charlie, I’ve really enjoyed getting into the career of the Harmony Brothers and thanks, thanks for the interview.

Charlie: Well Chris thank you, I appreciate all you’ve done I thank Will Howarth for all the things he did for us and one thing that was significant. You know he put this thing on his blog site and he didn’t realize that the day he started the thing he did in the Harmony Boys, he started that on the 7th anniversary of my liver transplant. So it was a very significant day.

Chris: Really, now I’ve exchanged emails with him and he’s really excited about hearing these interviews and that’s great. So thanks again.

Charlie: Thank you.