

An Interview with Jean Bennett

An Oral History Conducted by Claytee D. White

All That Jazz Oral History Project

Oral History Research Center at UNLV
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The transcript received minimal editing that includes the elimination of fragments, false starts, and repetitions in order to enhance the reader's understanding of the material. All measures have been taken to preserve the style and language of the narrator. In several cases photographic sources accompany the individual interviews.

The following interview is part of a series of interviews conducted under the auspices of the *All That Jazz* Oral History Project.

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Preface

Jean Bennett oral history narrative explores her journey from Barnsdall, Oklahoma in the 1920s to living with her grandmother in Missouri. Her vocal talents were evident at a young age and she was challenged to use her coloratura voice in high school competitions.

She married young, started a family and eventually moved to California where she hoped pursuing her singing dreams would be simple. She tells the story of how she came to work for Buck Ram, who wrote, produced and/or arranged for the Platters, the Drifters and many more singing groups of early rock-and-roll and rhythm-and-blues genre.

In 1966 Ram sold Jean the legal rights to the Platters performing group. This relationship was complicated when other groups using the name popped up. She also brings to life music industry stories that occurred during her career with Ram, including meeting and working with a sundry of popular music entertainers from the 1950s on.

Also contributing to this interview is Jean's assistant, Gayle Schreiber.



JEAN BENNETT 1954

This is Claytee White. We are in the home of Jean L. Bennett. Today is July 8th, 2008. We also have another person with us today. Would you introduce yourself as well?

Rachelle Smith.

And we're going to sit down here and we're talking to Jean about The Platters and other good stuff.

So, Jean, why don't you just tell me a little about your early life?

About my early life, all right. I was born in Barnsdall, Oklahoma, in 1923. That goes back a ways. My mother died when I was born. So my dad took me back to my grandmother in Webb City, Missouri, who was also Lana Turner's grandmother. She was two years older than me and I never met her until she was 14.

We always went to the show on Saturday night, my (step)mother and dad and I. And I saw my aunt come down the aisle with this beautiful girl. And I thought I wonder if that could be Julia Jean? I'd heard about her all my life and I was named after her. The Jean came from her. My mother gave me the name after her. And I saw my aunt come down this aisle that Saturday night. It was our show night. So the next day I called my grandmother in Webb City, which was a couple miles away, and I said who was that beautiful girl that was with Aunt Gladys last night? And she laughed and she said that was your cousin Julia Jean. And I said well I wondered if it was. So I went over and I visited with them and stayed a couple of weeks while she was there. But she was 14 and I was 12. And, of course, I was the baby. I didn't date, you know, or anything. So I saw her during the day once she finally got up because she'd be up running around all the time. She was old beyond her years at 14 I'm sure, you know, gorgeous girl, absolutely beautiful girl. So I got to visit with her that summer. My grandmother, she was so worried about her all the time because she'd go out and stay out. She was dating at 14. She was much beyond her years. Not that she was doing anything wrong, but she was, you know, too sophisticated for my grandmother's taste. So she sent her up to her daughter's up in Chicago who worked for a newspaper up there. She worked for the Chicago Sun. On the train she spent every penny she had treating people that she was talking with and buying pop and stuff. So by the time she got into Chicago she was broke and she had to go to the travel service and ask them to call her aunt for her and come and get her. But she was experienced, you know, at 14. Nothing stumped her. And so

then later on she went on back to California and got into the movies, of course...She spent most of the rest of the summer with her before she went back. And she was getting ready to go out. She told my aunt, she said, I have a date tomorrow night. She said who with, figuring it was some young boy, you know. Oh, it's Mr. So-and-so at the bank. Well, my aunt, she was -- so next morning she hightails it down to the bank and she says to him, she said, I understand you have a date with my niece. He said your niece, who's that? She said Julia Jean Turner. He said she told me she was your sister. She said, she's only 14 years old. Oh, my god, he said. And he didn't show up for the date. And she could not understand why she was stood up. Never been stood up in her whole life, you know. But my aunt was pretty sharp and she didn't put one over on her like she intended to.

But anyway, when she got back out to California, then I guess she made the right contacts. Her father died when she was very young. So her mother had given her dancing (lessons) and her mother was a beauty operator. She taught her daughter to think about how she was beautiful. At 14 she looked much more mature for her age. She was just so pretty. So I think that inspired me a lot.

As I was going through grade school, I found out that I loved to sing and I wanted to sing. And my mother, my stepmother, she was a great gal—she was always right there for me and helping me when I would have costumes and things that. I'd take part in every play or musical. As I got into high school, my freshman year, I represented the school with vocal solo. And I went on up. By the time I was a junior, I chose a song called "I Love Life" by Mana-Zucca. It's a tenor song, but I talked the teacher into letting me do it. It started out on a high F and *I love life and I want to live, drink of life fullness, take a lick and give*. And by this time I was absorbing all this. So I made five straight "excellents" on that song that year. I went to county, you know, the local and the county and the next step and the state and all up to national. It so happened that year that it was in Kansas City. So it was about 150 miles from Carterville, which is the southwest corner of Missouri. And I made an excellent. The young boy that represented the school, he had a very distinct voice, kind of like Bobby Breen, if you remember him many years ago. I know you won't. But we both made straight "excellents" for our little old high -- we had the smallest school probably that competed.

So all these things. And I just took part in every play whether it was acting or whether it was singing or whatever. I don't know, the show business thing was really, really strong with me even before Lana got in the movies.

And the following year, my senior year, our teacher quit in the middle of the year. She got married.

Acting teacher?

No. Our music teacher. So they brought in a character from Carterville. Everybody made fun of him. His name was Don Miracle. He was a great, tall man. His feet looked like they were two feet long and clocked along. But he took over from our teacher that left. (When) she got married and left in the middle of the year, they had to rake and scrape to find somebody. It just so happened he was the only one they could find available. I grew to respect him so much because he really loved music and he knew what he was doing. And he would try out my voice and run it up the scales and stuff. He said you have a coloratura voice. And I said, what is that? He said, that is the highest and the purest, the clearest of all voices of women's voices. So he picked "Caro Nome" from the opera *Rigoletto* for me. And I said, I don't do languages. He said, well, I'll teach you. Don't worry about that. And he taught me how to sing that in Italian.

I went all the way up to the national again. At national they criticized him for picking such a difficult song. And I had called him because we had to come back. It was up north in the state of Missouri. I forget where everything was now. And he called. He said, well, I don't know. He said I haven't got the judges' verdicts yet. I don't know. He said, they criticized me, however, on picking such a difficult song for a student. So he said I hope you won't be disappointed, Jean. And I said, don't worry. I did the best I could and I believe in you; don't worry about it. They gave me an excellent plus. So that did the trick. I thought I have to do something with this, with this voice.

So that fall after graduating from high school I started business college because I needed another year of shorthand to be a good secretary. I went there eight months concentrating on all the business stuff, the bookkeeping and the typing and the shorthand and all that stuff. Got a little job across the way for a hardware store to do a little secretarial work. One of the girls had gone over there and she chickened out. She got scared and she didn't want the job. So the teacher sent

me over. And I worked there and that gave me the experience I needed. But in the meantime, that December was the attack on Pearl Harbor.

So '41. So you have just finished high school?

I had just finished high school. And so (the war) was really going into gear. And Camp Crowder was a new camp that was built about 30 miles from where we lived in the lower part of Missouri—Camp Crowder, Missouri. So many of the girls and the guys were beginning to take civil service tests and they were being shipped off to Washington. My dad told me don't you get my ideas. You're not leaving to go all the way to Washington, D.C. So you don't need to even try out. Well, you had to have another alternative.

But now, you wanted to go into show business, though?

Oh, yes, but I knew that I had to have a job. I had to take lessons and I had work to do on my voice. And I had to have a job to take the (voice) lessons and things that I wanted to take.

Oh, yes. That was the ultimate goal eventually. But with World War II declared and most of our -- many of our students after about eight months were already starting to get jobs. And Camp Crowder was being built just about 30, 40 miles down the way from Carterville, Missouri, where I lived. So I found out that one of the gals was working down there. Meantime I played hooky from school and I went on a bus down to Camp Crowder. I put in two applications after about eight months of business college -- nine months of business college. One was at the post exchange and the other one -- which I didn't really know what it was, but it was kind of like a business where soldiers could buy short stuff and everything -- and the other was American Red Cross office. I didn't say anything to (Dad) -- I told my mother...don't tell Daddy because he'll have a fit about me taking the bus and going down there. But it was perfectly safe and I came home. So she was with me all the way.

The post exchange came through. And I didn't have a ride. So I had to turn it down. But in the meantime, I scrambled and mother found out that one of the ladies from Carterville had one space in her car left. She said Jean's put in her application for the American Red Cross down there and said she's already had to turn down the first job she applied for. So she said would you save it for a week or two because she thinks that maybe it'll come through. And it did. So that's how I started working at Camp Crowder. I had no idea what the American Red Cross did, but it was the

most interesting job that I ever had because it was dealing directly with the soldiers and their families, soldiers on the base.

And I worked during that next three and a half years. I worked at Camp Crowder. I met my husband there and married him after three months. He was shipped to Fort Sill and I went down to Fort Sill while he was there. From there he was shipped overseas and I continued working at Fort Sill while he was there. The Red Cross accommodated the soldiers' wives all the way wherever they usually -- they were coming and going along with their husbands if it was possible until they went overseas.

So one of the men that I worked with at Camp Crowder I liked very well. He was a very nice guy. He called me and he said, Jean, I'm up here at Great Bend Army Airfield. I hear Ben just shipped out. And I said yes, he did. He said how would you like to come up and work with me? He said I've got a ding-a-ling girl up here and he said she's got my office such a mess I don't know what I'm going to do. I'm going to get fired, he said, if anything comes out. He said, she's supposed to be keeping books and she's just so far behind; half the time she doesn't show up. Would you consider coming up? I said, sure.

So my dad, I talked him in -- he was for me 100 percent by then. And I talked him into driving my husband's car, which was a little Plymouth coupe, driving it up to Great Bend. And then he came back on the bus. I went to work for Boyd Sterrick, who was from, I think he was from Illinois. I helped him get his license straightened out. The thing was that just before I got there this crazy girl, she gets up one morning and she walks out into the kitchen. And the entrance to their basement was through a door in the floor. And somebody had opened it up and she comes out and she's asleep and she just walks off and down the stairs she goes. That's why Boyd called me because she wasn't even going to come to work. So I got up there right away, as soon as I could. And I worked for him until my husband -- he had been shipped out. And so when he came back, then I came back and met him. He was sent back to the hospital in Michigan. And then we finally started our married life again.

Now, during all of this time were you taking any voice lessons?

I was singing on the bases all the time. Yes, I sang for every one of the different camps. And I also met people in Camp Crowder especially. I met some directors from Hollywood and different

places. So I really got to -- you know, it was really interesting. But every night almost somewhere I'd be singing. Yeah.

But Ben and I, we married, and we got a little one-room apartment in Carthage, Missouri, who is about 30 miles from the base. And the bedroom and the kitchen and everything was all in one room because, you know, things were hard to get, you know. And I got up one -- we hadn't been there very long. I got up one morning and there was a loaf of bread, you know. I picked it up and it was empty. It had a hole in the bottom of it. I said, oh, my lord, we've got mice or rats or something, you know. So that night by this little potbelly stove, which heated the whole place, we lay awake and we watched. And, sure enough, just as soon as the lights were out, except from that little fire thing, out trooped a whole bunch of rats up on the table, everything.

Rats or mice?

Oh. They were rats. They were rats. And what it was we were next to a vacant store and they had chewed a hole in the wall underneath the stove, the cook stove, which we had no idea. But Ben pulled out the stove that day and, sure enough, there was a hole. So we plugged that up. And he called his folks and he said I want you to send me the money. He had a couple thousand put away. He said we are going to look for a trailer. So we bought a house trailer and we moved it down close to the camp and we stayed there until --

How did you and your husband communicate while he was overseas?

Well, sometimes it was really hard and he mailed. But they had a fast mailing, but it still took quite a few days to get through. I forget what they called it. It had a special name, but I can't remember. And sometimes I didn't know where he was and I wouldn't hear from him for weeks, you know. And I really was worried. And when he came back, he was sent to the -- where was it he was sent to in Michigan? God, I can't -- I'm 85 now. So my memory is fading and it catches up with me.

But you know it was in Michigan?

Yeah. And then from there once he was discharged, I was up there with him. God, I think he got about six spinal. And they were supposed to be very dangerous. And he had two of them while he was in Michigan. And he had already had several of them. But they didn't cripple him, but it's a thousand wonders they didn't. So we were very happy for him to be released from the hospital.

Then we went to Detroit with his folks for a while. And we got work there and that wasn't happy. So we ended up going back to Missouri and buying some property back there.

Now, when did he leave the military?

It was about 1945 I think.

So as the war was --

He had been in from the time he was 21. I think he had been in close to five years. But, by the way, he's still living. But we're divorced. After I got into the music business and I was putting so much time and effort in traveling and everything else that I say, Ben, it's not fair to you. It's just not fair to you. And he knew that I always wanted to sing. So he didn't stand in the way. We've always been good friends. We've never had any arguments or disruptions or anything like that.

Hello. This is my daughter Alicia.

So we got the military out of the way. We stayed in Detroit for a while and we bought a place on Grand Lake. And they kept letting the water down.

Now, where is Grand Lake?

Grand Lake was in Oklahoma. That's where I had my first daughter, Donnie Lee. Eventually when she was about six, we ended up going out to California because Ben's cousin had settled out there and they invited us to come out. You know, I'm sure you can get good work because Ben was an airplane mechanic and he was a genius when it came to mechanics of all kinds. And if he couldn't find something, he could make it. You know, he's just one of those people. He's very resourceful. So we went out and stayed with his cousin for a short time until we could buy us a trailer.

So how did you feel about moving to California?

Oh, I was thrilled. I was thrilled because I figured out there I'd get some contacts that would do me some good and that was the main purpose, you know. He wanted to give me a chance.

Oh, that's wonderful.

Yeah. He was for me 100 percent. First thing we stayed with his cousin for a little while. And then we had our savings and we found us a trailer. We sat up in a trailer park. One morning I was singing in the shower and somebody says, my, you have a pretty voice. And I said oh? It turned out she was one of my neighbors and so she started going around with me. She and her husband

were from Saginaw, Michigan and they had a couple of kids growing up. She was a dance teacher. So she started driving me around and we were kind of looking for possibilities. And that's where I found the Gordon School of Music, which was a racket. But it served the purpose. I met some good people there. Dan Duryea was one of the students there. Later on he got in the movies and he did several pictures and things and then he died. I don't know what happened to him. But I made some wonderful friends at every one of these places. It was like steppingstones to the next place.

One day I decided that school was not getting anywhere except that I was meeting people. I met this French girl and she was a wonderful friend, and her husband. They were French. She said, Jean, you've got to get out and hit the bricks. You know, it's not going to come to you. You have to go to it some way or other. So I played hooky from school one day and I went all the way up the Sunset Strip going into agencies and seeing, you know, getting turned down and nobody showing any interest. Finally the last place I went into was the Carolina Bronson Agency. They were for models and more style stuff. But I said where in the world can I meet somebody that's in the music business? I said I've gone up this entire strip today and I said the agencies, they won't give me the time of day because I'm not ready to be booked yet. I'm looking for someone that will help forward my career. She said, well, you know, there's a man down the hallway here. Why don't you go down and talk to him? She said he has musicians and singers coming in here all the time and I hear the music coming out of there. Why don't you go down and talk to him? And I said, well, I've sure got nothing to lose at this point.

So I went down there and I introduced myself. He was all by himself in an inner office. There were two offices. I walked in the one. It was blank. Then I heard the scuffling and I said hello. And he said hello, come on in. I introduced myself. His name was Buck Ram, show name. I can't even remember what his real name was after all the years that we were together. But anyway, he talked to me and he said, well, you know, it's tough. It really is tough to find contacts and things like that. He said, I can't afford to hire anybody. I said, well, I'm prepared to donate some of my time in exchange for your pointing me in the right direction. And so we made a pact that day. He was helping people get recorded for demos and things to help get jobs and all that kind of stuff. We became very good friends. He even recorded me. Somewhere in my archives I

have a few things that he did. But I had such a high soprano voice that it wasn't commercial for what I was looking for. But in the meantime, I helped him. I was an expert in office work and everything. And so I set up his office for him and helped him with all the different ones that he was working with.

Together we put together The Platters. They were a quartet first when they came to us. He liked Tony Williams' voice, the lead tenor. He said that guy can go far. He really can. But in the meantime, he was already with a record company. They were already on a small label. So we met with the record company and we helped -- and then we got them on Mercury Records.

In the meantime, I was out in his garage going through boxes of music that he had written in the past that was just dumped there. I was bringing it into the office and filing them alphabetically according to title. I ran across this song "Only You." It was just a lead sheet, just a lead sheet. And I said, Buck, the lyric on this is beautiful. He said, oh, my god, I wrote that for Bill Kenny years and years and years ago. And said he left the group before I got it to him. He was The Ink Spots. And he said, you know, like so many of my songs, they get filed away and I forgot all about it. So I laid it on the piano. And it was the second visit of Tony Williams to our office. And he picked up the sheet music and he said what's this? And Buck said that's a song Jean found that I wrote years ago for Bill Kenny and he left before I got it to him. Tony said let's try it. And when he walked out of the office that night, Buck said that's going to be his first recording. And it was. And we put it on Mercury Records. And it became a smash. And then after that he wrote, "The Great Pretender" for them. That was their second hit. So he was so prolific. I'll have to gather up some pictures and different things for you if you can use them.

Oh, yes, we would love to have a picture of The Platters especially.

Oh, yeah. Definitely.

So who was in the early Platters?

Tony Williams was the lead voice. David Lynch was second tenor. Herbert Reed was the bass. Paul Robi was the baritone. And the girl was Zola Taylor, Zola Mae Taylor.

So how did they get together? Did they know each other?

No. Buck put Zola -- Zola was with the Queens. That was Shirley Gunther and the Queens. And she was singing with her and Buck spotted her when he was working with them, too. He had a

bunch of those groups in that genre that was working. And we were working with Hunter Hancock, who was the top deejay, one of the top black -- or he was white, but he was a deejay and most of the black music was being played by him. And he was very popular. So that's how. With Tony, Buck liked his voice especially. He said he's got talent. And so we took over. They had recorded -- they were sort of on King Records at the time, which was an R and B label, real, real, R and B. And Buck ended up putting them on Mercury. And Tony became very, very famous with "Only You" and "The Great Pretender" and "Twilight Time."

So how did you book them? Were you in charge of booking them across the country?

Well, Buck had a good friend Joe Glazer who had about one of the biggest agencies for black acts, especially for black acts. He had white acts, too, but black acts especially. He came out of Chicago and had been in the business for many, many years. He had offices in New York and in Los Angeles and in Chicago. So he picked right up on The Platters. And he knew Buck had the know how to get them prepared to make them 100 percent, you know, salable. So that's how. We worked with Joe Glazer.

So what was the preparation like for a group like that?

Well, they had to have songs. And Buck wrote different songs for them. I found that "Only You" thing. That was just a fluke. But it turned out to be the first hit for The Platters.

Did you also do things about choreography and dressing?

Yes. We kept their choreography sort of to the minimum. We didn't go in for -- because he liked for them to stand and sing and not do too much because they were mainly a vocal group and they were smooth. So whatever choreography -- oh, but they could -- and Zola, she was so cute. She was 15 years old. And we went down to see her mother because she was only 15. Buck said I realize your daughter's underage. I just came. I wanted to talk to you. I wanted you to know that we are legit, that we are -- and that I will look after her as if she were my daughter as much as I can. And she was very grateful. She was a very sweet lady. And, boy, when they hit, they hit -- they were a smash. And when she came out she was just a natural, you know, every expression. She was a clown. She could be funny. She could be sweet and move so smooth. And all of them -- it turned out to be a really fine, fine group.

So what were some of the first places they performed?

Let's see. We put them on the Lawrence Welk show once. By the way, in the meantime -- I did two jobs. I worked for Gabby, Lutz, and Heller who had Lawrence Welk and Liberace. So I was an office worker during the day. And then at night I'd go over to Buck's office on the way home and stay another hour or two. And on Saturdays and Sundays, you know, if we had work that had to be done, we worked. And then I got to where I was taking off from work to go down to San Diego or to get around to all these disc jockeys because I had to get those records around every place. And I couldn't depend on the record company. They had dozens and dozens of records. So we had to be pushing, pushing, pushing.

Explain to me how you approach a disc jockey. How did that work?

Well, their business is to play good music and certain types of music. At that time the black deejays were really coming into their own. So we cultivated every single one of them. We had some good white ones, too. You know, radio was very, very big—and so was television. We put them on television shows, Saturday afternoon television and all that. So every time we had a chance to get them exposed, I traipsed around all over for them.

So give me an example of what you would do when you would go into a radio station.

I would say I have a new record for you by a new group called The Platters. And I also had the Penguins. So I would repeat the whole thing. And we had Shirley Gunther, a lot of black acts in those days. That was their business. So they were tickled to death to get fresh material.

So you would take the 45s or would you take them albums?

Well, the first ones were those great big ones, the breakable ones. When I first started in the business in the early 50s --

What were those, the 56 or the 33s?

No. They were 78s. The first ones were 78s. Then later the albums became the 33 and a thirds. And then the 45s were -- I was tickled to see those because the first ones were breakable and you had to be very careful.

I would like to ask a question. This was during the same time as payolas; is that right?

Oh, yes. We were competing with payola, too. Yeah. It got worse instead of better, too.

So you weren't involved in the payolas at all?

No. We didn't have any money to pay. There were other ways that we had because we would

perform for them any time that we possibly could.

And this was also during the time of whitewashing, as they would call it, where they would take music from the black artists and give it to the white artists?

Oh, yeah. More and more. And then we had white covers. Yes. There was a white group. I can't remember which ones they were now that covered "Only You." But we had too good a start on it by then. It really took off.

But your company did not engage in the whitewashing?

No. We had some white artists, but they had their own special material. We didn't have -- no, we didn't. Buck, that's one thing -- by the way, here's another picture and it shows you what Buck looked like. That's Willie Nelson. This was Buck's early era. And this was his best friend.

So this picture with Willie Nelson and Buck was taken when?

That was probably taken in the 70s. But that was taken in the 30s or 40s, 30s probably.

Who is this right here?

That is -- oh, god, you know him. I can't read his writing. But he's a black artist from the 20s or 30s.

Oh, that's Duke Ellington.

Duke Ellington. I had it in my head a while ago and then it left me. Yeah, Duke Ellington.

So how did the groups get paid?

Whatever we could get for them, most of it went to them and we'd take a little bit of a commission on it.

So who was paying you?

Well, we did an awful lot of freebies, of course. Then we got to where they could pick up a thousand or 1500. Then they worked it up to 2,000, you know, just little by little.

And this was by engagements on the road?

Uh-huh. Some was on the road and some was around California and San Diego and Sacramento. We did the coast first. But once Joe Glazer got interested and saw the possibilities, then he started taking them across the country and he got pretty good money for it. Five thousand was quite a good price for them at that time.

So is 5,000 what you would get for a whole tour?

No. Eventually it was a night. Once "Only You" and "The Great Pretender" came in, then they would be 5,000 a night and 15,000 maybe a week or whatever.

I see. I interviewed a lady here who did some dancing with some of the groups. And when they would travel in the South, they would call it the Chitlin Circuit.

Yeah. Oh, yes.

Tell me about that.

Well, it was a lot of the black artists. Somebody somewhere came up with that moniker, Chitlin Circuit. But it was usually the deejays that were coming up. They weren't as well-known and the act hadn't quite made it yet. But, eventually, the deejays would build their stature. And they were coming up at the same time. It was a wonderful time because music was something. Today I don't even know where to start. It's a whole new ballgame. And Billboard and Cashbox and the trade magazines and movie magazines, I hit the doors of every one of them, anything they could get to, to get noticed. We made freebies you wouldn't believe. Anytime a deejay or anyone wanted them, we'd be there.

There's my gal. Good. I'm glad you came over.

This is my associate Gayle (Schreiber).

Is Gayle going to be part of the interview, too?

Gayle: I can be. Maybe. It depends if I have anything to contribute.

Oh, she's been with me off and on for a long, long time. She's gone and come back.

So I'm going to ask you to fill out an agreement as well.

Where did the acts stay when they were on the Chitlin Circuit especially going through places like in Mississippi and Atlanta and even when they went to New York and places like that?

In the very, very early days before we got our recognition, they had to stay in a black hotels wherever. I forget the major one in New York City. What was that? The Alvin Hotel. We stayed at the Alvin, which was strictly pretty much black all the way. But later on as they became known, they stayed in the best hotels. Then we weren't stuck there.

Were there ever times that you remember when they could not stay in hotels in certain places, no place to stay? For instance, here in Las Vegas, Sammy Davis, Jr., when he was

performing and other stars just like him, Nat King Cole --

Well, we were one of the first acts. We were just really getting it together. And one of our first appearances was at the Moulin Rouge. But prior to that, however, we stayed at the Flamingo. And they put us in the back in some cabins in the back.

This was probably one of the most important things as far as music history and making that transition is that when they played the Flamingo she told them The Platters stay where they play.

So which year was that?

That was in 1954 probably. Yes, early -- late '54.

So go ahead, Gail.

That was just one of the things. Prior to that they had to go over here and stay at the Cadillac Arms and -- what was it?

Ms. Harrison's house or Ms. Shaw's.

Yes.

Yes. They were well-known on the Westside when they first came down here.

How did you become so racially conscious to go in and say something like they stay where they play?

Well, it was common knowledge, you know. But we fought. So by the time they got their stature, we dictated. We went into the white hotels.

And I don't think it was so much as being racially conscious as being racially unconscious that it didn't make any difference to Jean. And if somebody else said something, it made no difference to her because she was just working with her people. You know, so it was being racially unconscious.

I loved them. I thought they were the greatest. And I had such -- it was the nearest thing to my own career that I could possibly -- so I made another career because I had the wrong type of voice, a high soprano. If I had been born in Italy and had the languages, I would have been an opera singer because it was there. It definitely was there. I did "Caro Nome." And the teacher -- we went to the state contest. And we had to come on home. And our teacher stayed, Don Miracle. He loved coloratura soprano. So she gave me this "Caro Nome" to do. And they jumped all over him. How dare you to put a high school girl or student with such an outstanding, big operatic

thing to compete, you know? They were mad because they couldn't compete with me I guess. I don't know. And he told me when I called after we left -- because we had to come back and he stayed on to try to get the judgments. So he called and said I don't know, Jean. He said I haven't gotten the verdict yet. But he said I sure got chewed out for giving you that operatic solo. I said, well, I don't care. I don't care what they give me. I'm thrilled that I had the opportunity to do that. So they gave me an excellent plus after balling him out.

So tell me about the Moulin Rouge. Now, were The Platters there on opening night?

No. I don't think they were there opening night. And we did not go in the main room. We were in the lobby. We didn't play the main show during the first brief time period. We were just so new that we played the lounge.

Okay, so you were in the lounge.

We played the lounge in the Moulin Rouge.

Do you remember which month? It opened in May 1955. It closed in November.

Yes, it hadn't been open very long.

So tell me, were you there with them when they --

No. I didn't get to go, but Buck went down. He was there.

Do you remember any of the things that Buck told you about the Moulin Rouge?

Oh, he was thrilled. He was so in hopes that it would go. We just had such high hopes. They took them from the Flamingo because every night they had to go over to the black section from the Flamingo. Buck said don't hang around on the Strip because I don't want you getting in trouble. There's always some jerk out there that's looking for trouble, you know. So they just took up residence practically over there. They loved it because they got to be very well acquainted. But the Flamingo was our opening and we stayed on and we went various other places. We opened doors.

So tell me about your engagement at the Flamingo.

I didn't get to come down during the Flamingo. But Buck was there. And they loved them. They just loved them. But it wasn't in the main room. It was in the lounge.

So it was in the lounge at the Flamingo as well as at the Moulin Rouge?

No. The Moulin Rouge I think they played the main --

No. That was the lounge and the lobby. And then the Flamingo, there was a circular stage or something.

Oh, yeah. Yeah. We weren't in the main room at the Flamingo. They had a revolving stage that was high up at the back of the bar. So people sat around the bar on high stools. Then the stage -- they were up above and they were playing right there in front of them. And we were told -- they put us in some old motel cabins back there.

Way out in the back.

Yeah, quite a ways. And it was cold. I remember and we told everybody bundle up, be sure and keep warm, don't get cold. Then they'd climb up on that stage and they'd sit in the kitchen between shows. But then the Moulin Rouge come along and from there we graduated.

Now, tell them about when they left their jacket. Paul Robi left his jacket in the Flamingo.

Yeah, in the Flamingo when we were down there before we had opened. They were there in the afternoon. They came in the back door and got up on the stage and rehearsed. Paul had hung his sweater on one of the stools there. And they come around the front. Without thinking he said, oh, I left my sweater back there and he ran in the front door and ran back to grab the sweater. And the doorman or somebody saw him. We got the word that if The Platters walk through the front door again, they're fired.

So you could play and you could make money, but don't come in the front door.

But that didn't last too long. That didn't last too long.

So what other engagements do you remember in Las Vegas?

Oh, lord, let's see. We played the Flamingo.

In the early days?

Yes, the early days.

We played the Moulin Rouge, too.

Right. So that was 1955. Do you remember any more engagements around that time period?

I think I can find some itineraries somewhere.

Yes, we've got everything. We actually have -- somewhere there is the contract for the Moulin Rouge. The first time they made \$750. Then I think they went to the Flamingo and they made

\$2500. And then they came back to the Moulin Rouge and I think they made \$2500 or something like that. I saw that not long ago. But between the time they went into the Moulin Rouge and the time they were at the Flamingo, "Only You" hit. So they were stars.

And then it was a whole new ballgame.

That's wonderful.

It was great. Yeah.

Now, on the telephone the other day you told me that you owned The Platters. What does that mean?

Well, I've been associated with them since the beginning. And Personality Productions was Buck Ram's firm of which I purchased.

The Five Platters, Incorporated. The group has always been a corporation since day one. The five original singers that incorporated because there were singers prior to them -- the five original singers that incorporated when they left the group, they sold their stock to Buck and Jean. So when Jean says she owns the group, she owns the corporation. And the singers have always been paid through the corporation. She signed their paychecks for years, you know. A lot of people don't give Jean as much credit as they should because she actually owned Personality Productions, the people that the singers all worked for.

So Buck's old business?

Yes. He sold it to her in -- what? -- '66?

'66 when I came up here. Yeah.

That's great. So what other groups --

That's one of our promo cards there. We had The Penguins for many years. We had a young group that we got out of Bakersfield called The Colts, four young good-looking, nice-looking guys. God, they could sing so good.

They did" "Adorable."

They did "Adorable." You're adorable. Yeah. It's so cute. Buck, see, he was their ace in the hole. If he couldn't or didn't have time to look for a song in his home library, he'd write a new one. He was always writing, always writing. Even when he went to the hospital, he had music paper and he would be writing.

So he was the booking agent and the writer of songs; is that right?

And the producer and the manager.

But there was another agency that booked them.

ABC. We signed with ABC early. That was the big one. It had offices in California and Chicago and New York. That was Joe Glazer. He took a big part once we got the group off the ground.

He loved -- he and Buck got along fine.

So tell me about The Platters today. There was something in the news the other day where I saw people testifying in Congress because groups were using the names of some of the old groups. Explain to me what happened, what that was all about.

That's a good question. You want to tackle that one?

Actually, I've just spent the last two days on the internet with the Vocal Group Hall of Fame as far as who they were inducting and why they were inducting certain people because Jean and Buck spent about five million dollars trying to stop bogus groups that began in about 1964 or so. And no matter that they won every suit, it didn't stop anybody. So now they have come with this Truth in Music bill. And basically, what I got from the fellows at the Vocal Group -- I think his name is Bob Crosby at the Vocal Group Hall of Fame -- as far as the way they induct people, it doesn't matter what generation they were from as long as they had a hit song. So even though Sonny Turner was not an original Platter, they have inducted him because he had two songs that made the Top 40 as a vocalist. However, Monroe Powell, who was the lead singer for --

Over 25 years.

-- over 25 years is not eligible as an inductee because they never had a hit song. But they do recognize the corporation. They do recognize that they all came from this original group. And their inductees are based on who actually had the hit songs. And everybody who recorded on those songs with Sonny Turner are also eligible to be inducted into the Hall of Fame. So they recognize The Five Platters, Incorporated, as the base for all of the group so that everybody who's ever worked for Jean is an official Platter.

So when that ruling came down from Congress the other day --

And I don't know what that ruling was.

This is what we're talking about. The Coasters, The Platters and The Drifters were all

appearing at the Sahara. But The Drifters had to disband. So can you explain? So they didn't have an original in that group?

It's no such thing as original anymore because so many of them are dead.

Herb Reed is the only Platter who is still alive.

He's the only original Platter.

There are no Coasters alive. No. And there are -- I don't believe there are any Drifters alive.

However, The Drifters I believe is the same kind of a corporate structure that The Platters had.

And that's Faye Treadwell -- what was Faye Treadwell's husband's name? Do you remember?

No.

Faye Treadwell was his wife. And then Tina Treadwell, who is the daughter, is now handling that.

So they own the corporation?

Uh-huh. Just like The Drifters had Clyde McPhatter as lead singer and Ben E. King and The Platters had King and The Platters had Tony Williams and all that. So those are -- you can follow that line from the very, very beginning. As far as The Coasters, there were -- is that Edwin Cook,

The Coasters?

Yeah.

As far as the coasters, Cornell Gunter decided he didn't want to fly anymore. So they split the group into Cornell Gunter's Coasters and the other Coasters, whoever those were. So there were really two legal groups that came from The Coasters.

Now as far as what's going on at the Sahara, there are no official members of any of those groups in them. They were licensed. In fact, Jean licensed The Platters' name to these guys. Tina Treadwell didn't want anything to do with Marshack. And so The Drifters are gone. She didn't want anything to do with that. The Coasters is kind of like this as far as who's going to win that argument right now. But the most interesting thing about -- was it The Coasters he's in? Have you seen the show down there?

Yes. Well, I saw the show when the three groups were together -- The Platters, The Drifters and The Coasters. I haven't seen it with the new configuration.

The Marvelettes are wonderful. They are wonderful, just wonderful.

...But the little white-haired guy is Frankie Lymon's brother. You know that? Yeah. It's Lewis

Lymon. He had his own recording career at the same time that Frankie Lymon did. So he is an original as original as anybody can get in that genre of music. But all those groups are licensed. I'm not sure The Marvelettes are. I'm not sure what's going on there.

I can't keep up with them. I have a hard enough time keeping up with my own group.

So, Jean, through the years -- we talked about the 50s. You continued in this business with them even though, let's say, in the 70s, 80s, they began to fade somewhat. But they were always entertaining?

Uh-huh. Very much so.

They were the first black group to play to a mixed audience in South Africa in 1986 that Jean booked. She also made them ambassadors of Good Will. What else did they do?

Going back to the 50s -- and I think this is very important -- you know, the record labels had their regular label and then they had their race music label. So when they first released "Only You," they released it on the race music label, which was the purple Mercury label. Buck took a fit.

Oh, he raised heck.

So tell me why do companies do that?

In the 50s? Because it was the 50s.

R and B didn't have a great name for one thing.

But what I'm trying to ask is what difference did the color of the record mean? I mean what did that mean to a deejay?

So that when you went into the record store -- now, my neighbors owned a record store. And I went downtown to buy a Drifters' record, a 45 I think. And my neighbor said, oh, no, you have to buy the cover version of this even though they had it in the record store. Oh, you can't buy that. They were afraid my mother would get mad at them because I was bringing that record into my house. But I want it. My mother didn't care. Actually, my mother probably would have known and wouldn't have cared.

My mother wouldn't have cared.

No. So Pat Boone was -- it was a black label on Mercury. I don't know what label Pat Boone was on. But Pat Boone and Tab Hunter and all those people did the cover versions. It became rhythm and blues right about that, didn't it?

It started out as rhythm and blues.

Wasn't it race music before that and then it became --

Well, race music, yeah.

But Buck took a fit. And he said these kids have worked for a year and a half. He said and these are my songs. Didn't he make them re-label them?

Yeah.

Or the second pressing. I think there's still some out there in purple labels. But he made them re-label them.

Oh, yeah. He threw a fit.

So do you have any with the purple labels now because they're probably really expensive?

And really rare.

Rare, yeah. I might have. I've got a bunch of stuff in storage back there and I haven't gone back there to even take inventory. I've been trying to take up nerve enough to do it, to start it.

So I've heard that you want to start a museum for The Platters.

That's right. That's our next project. Not just for The Platters, but for the music industry.

So explain to me your concept.

Well, you've got a better concept than I've got or you can explain it better than I do. But The Platters, their music is history all over the world. They were the first black group to really go all over the -- besides The Ink Spots and Mills Brothers.

The Traneers were in Las Vegas.

The Traneers were here. But The Platters were taken, my god, overseas. It was just fantastic. They were treated with the highest respect and big-star treatment all the way everywhere we went. And there are stories about some of those places where we appeared. We ended up in Scotland in a hotel, which -- I don't know -- Scotland must not have a lot of class or something. But this was like a big old house, but it was a hotel. And right off the lobby they had a big room and they had this table -- tables. They had long tables. They didn't have an auditorium. And they put a platform here. So The Platters performed there. These women came in evening gowns. The Scotch people must be bigger than ordinary people. There were two or three six-foot tall women in long, skinny gowns. One of them got down underneath the table that was in front of the stage

where The Platters were so that she could look right up at them. She's lying on her belly in this evening gown. I laughed so hard. I tell you. I was trying to cover it up because I didn't want -- no telling. She'd clean my clock.

So do you think because she was so enthralled by the music or --

She was lying flat on her stomach in her evening dress and with her hands under chin and looking right up in their faces.

So were they not accustomed to black singers or --

They didn't care. We didn't run into that overseas. We never did. We always went into nice places. They didn't seem to mind one way or another.

Tell me about traveling with them.

Oh, it was great. I had great times in Paris.

So tell me some of the stories.

Paris was great. We played the Olympia -- well, there's the Palladium. We played the Palladium. And we played the Olympia Music Hall in Paris. It was like a big theater. We co-starred part of the time when we were there with Ella Fitzgerald. I remember Ella was on stage one night and I got up in the balcony with my camera and a flash. I had a RolleiFlex taken down at her. All of a sudden I get tapped on the shoulder and the usher says you have to come down from here. You cannot -- Ms. Fitzgerald is complaining about your taking flash pictures of her. And if you don't come down, I'll have to take your camera. I said I'll come down. I'll go down.

Now, Buck did discover Ella Fitzgerald.

He did. She was one of his first discoveries when she was just a young woman.

Well, tell me his story about Ella Fitzgerald.

Oh, lord, it's been so long. Let's see.

She was 15?

She was 15. He saw her at the Apollo Theater in New York City. She was competing. It was an amateur contest. She was 15 years old. And she was pretty good-sized then. But he heard her sing and he was working as an arranger and sax player for Chic Webb. And he went back to Chic and he said Chic I have seen a girl I want you to hear. He said she's got a heavenly voice. He said come with me tomorrow night. She's going to be singing again. So he drug Chic up there. Chic

took one look at her and he said, but, Buck, she's fat. Buck said she's fat, who cares? Listen to that voice. It's a voice of heaven. It's a beautiful voice. This girl has got to go places. And he talked Chic into hiring her with the band.

And Chic worked for whom?

And she was so sweet. Chic had his own orchestra at the time.

Now, when you said he was a ranger and something else, what does ranger mean?

Arranging for the different pieces of the orchestra.

Oh, arranger. I'm sorry. I just didn't hear the whole word.

So Buck was with Chic and Ella for quite a long time in his early career.

And they wrote "Chew Chew Chew Your Bubble Gum" together, the three of them.

So how long was Buck in the music industry?

Oh, he was a young man. He had just graduated from college.

So we're talking about 19 --

Twenty something. Probably about 1923 through 1991.

Yeah.

So when he sold his company to you in 1966, he wasn't ending his career?

Oh, no. Oh, no. They stayed working together. He still produced -- he produced every Platters' album.

Yeah. He worked up to the day he died.

Every Platters' record from the first -- well, not from the Federal ones, but when they went --

Well, he was in on them. Oh, yeah. He never let them go in anywhere to record.

When you say Federal, what did you mean?

Federal label.

Federal label. Yeah. Yeah, they were recording for Ralph Bass on Federal label. But it was a black label and it wasn't going anywhere. And Buck wanted to get them -- and Mercury approached him. So he said if you take The Penguins and The Platters, I'll sign them both. So he took them off of Federal and put them on Mercury. And he did very well.

They were about to be dropped from the Federal label because they were going no place. And Buck actually changed the lineup. He added a girl. They were a quartet to begin with. And then

he added Zola, who was from the Queens, which is Shirley Gunther's, Cornell Gunter's sister.

Yeah. And I was getting -- anything that I could get them exposure and taking them around to the disc jockeys, dragging them around to the radio stations and all that.

So did you actually take them into the radio station, not just the records?

No. I'd take them right in and introduce them to the different -- you know, I'd take the records around, get them playing them, and then I'd take them over to meet them.

So where did the name Platters come from?

Plates. People, you know -- I don't know. For some reason or another -- they had the name when we first met them. They hadn't done anything. But they were calling themselves -- now, the disc jockeys had a -- now, here's a platter by so-and-so. They picked up on that. And they said let's call our group The Platters. So that's where they got it. They got it from the disc jockeys themselves.

Oh, tell them about Ireland with the big signs on the side of the bus when they were bombing.

Yeah. Dangerous, dangerous.

So when are we talking, which year?

This was about 1950 --

Yeah, '59 or something like that, '58, '59. Yeah. It said, "Don't shoot."

So we're talking about the Protestants and the Catholics and all that in Ireland?

Uh-huh. And the IRA and all that, blowing everything up. And they put big signs -- did it say, "Don't Shoot The Platters?"

Don't shoot. And then a big cross with The Platters on the side of the bus. Yeah, we went through some crazy times over there. But, boy, I'll tell you they were well loved. It was beyond everybody's wildest dreams.

What was your favorite city?

Oh, gosh. I don't know. Paris was great. I liked Paris. It was so beautiful. We were so well received there at the Olympia Music Hall. And there were quite a few movie stars that came in there. Ella Fitzgerald, I saw her on stage there. That was such an honor because I had not seen her before. It was just -- it was a great adventure, the whole thing from start to finish, you know, and probably never will be again because unless we can get that music back again, something that

is appealing as it was, you know.

In later years they played Monte Carlo. Princess Grace was still alive then, wasn't she?

Uh-huh. And they played Greece. Oh, I have to tell you about the funny things that happened in Greece. We were booked by this beautiful country club that sat on a lake, a huge lake. And they got the idea that The Platters should perform on the stage in the lake and everybody along the shore at the thing. Well, going out they had to go out, of course, in their evening clothes and everything. It was all eveningwear in a rowboat. And they get to the stage. And everybody's jumping up and all going like this. Zola just almost fell in. One of the guys grabbed her just in time. She almost fell in the drink and would have had to go up on that stage sopping wet. You can imagine what she'd look like. And it was just the most hilarious thing. They did a great -- it was beautiful. The Queen of Greece was there and a big dinner and everything. But why they stuck them out there on that stage? Of course, it was kind of -- they said it was really a crazy sensation because it bobbed up and down.

Oh, now tell them about the time you had to be Zola.

That was in Canada.

Now, we need the readers to know that Zola in this group -- it's an all-black group and Jean is not.

But I never let them go anywhere without me, you know.

But this was on the radio?

It was on the radio, fortunately. And we had gone in two or three cars. We were playing in Canada and we had radio interviews with the different disc jockeys. And Zola's car somehow got lost and they didn't show up with her. And I showed up with the four Platters. And the deejay, we came in and he was on the air and he was talking and doing his records and everything and all. And he started interviewing The Platters. And what is your name? He thought I was with them. And I said my name is Zola Taylor. Everybody was cracking up. And I just gave the interview. I heard her give many of them, you know. So I gave all her answers. And everybody -- and I know that the deejay thought what is going on here? After he got off the air we told him. She evidently was lost. She was on her way wandering around in some car with somebody and she never did show up. So I carried off the interview.

So we've seen a lot of movies about the life of The Temptations and other groups, the Mannhattans and other groups. Do you think that The Platters personal life as well as entertainment life would merit a movie?

Yes. I sure think it would. I would love to see that happen.

What would be some of the highlights?

Oh, gosh, I don't know. It would involve some foreign appearances I would think and so forth. And, of course, we'd have to conduct a young new group with a cute a girl as Zola was. She wasn't beautiful, but she was pixie-like and smart-mouthed. She was coming up with off-the-wall things that just cracked people up, so funny. She was really unique. And then she had this little baby voice when she sang. And they just loved her. And they were so -- and the boys danced so well and smooth. Buck kind of kept them partially subdued. And they had class. They just had so much class. And they just went crazy over them in every foreign country that we went to.

It might be in the -- I started a script. I don't know if you know who -- well, you're from UNLV.

You probably know Stan Armstrong.

Yes, I do.

Okay. Stan and I won the screenwriters contest a couple years ago with our script about the west side. So I have started several times -- and that's about all I do is start on it -- a script about The Platters, which begins with how all those three different groups of people from different places -- a Jewish guy from Hollywood, a small town girl from Missouri and four guys from Watts -- and what was happening at the same time that brought them all together. The guys were all singing at Alex Hodge's house. And sometimes they'd go to Cornell Gunter's house. Jean wants to be a singer. She was looking for an agent. She goes to a modeling agency by accident and they tell her, well, we think the guy at the back has something to do with music and sent her back there. And the timing was just right to bring all of these people together. And then Buck managed Tony William's sister. And Tony Williams was looking for a manager. He didn't want to sing with a group. So he wanted a single's career. But the time was it was becoming The Colts and The Penguins and it was all groups. And Buck says, you know, right now it's groups. So he said let me bring these guys I've been singing with. And that was why the personnel change before it settled into the four that had the hit. So that would be the beginning of the script. And a lot of it

would be the fact that you had all of these people. You had Gaynel Hodge and Alex Hodge and The Queens and The Platters and The Coasters and The Drifters all coming out of this little Watts neighborhood where -- was it Shirley Gunther's mother and Alex Hodge's mother wanted to keep them off the streets, the kids off the streets. So they'd bring them over and have them sing.

And encourage them to come from school to rehearse. And Shirley wrote songs. She had several songs that she wrote. It was just a really musical montage of youngsters that were ready. And the timing was just right.

And probably different from like The Temptations and all of those movies or even The Five Heartbeats.

And I said The Manhattans. I believe The Manhattans was that story.

Is that what that was about? Because this story is not so much about a bunch of singers. It's about a business that came together and everybody was perfect. That's how The Platters became the number-one group of the 50s because Jean did physically take these people out -- was it, what, you said every Thursday night or every Thursday afternoon the disc jockeys would come down on Sunset Boulevard to pick their records for the next week? She would hall them down there.

Oh, yeah. We'd go down and we'd perform live, no music. But anything just to get them known.

So the deejays would go where?

Someplace on Sunset. Was it on Sunset Boulevard?

Actually, no. It was Pico Boulevard, which was called "Record Row." And the jukebox operators came in there all during the week and on Saturdays to buy their records to keep their material fresh on their jukeboxes. And it was a big era for jukeboxes. And so I would take the acts down there and they would have various meetings and everything. They got to where they'd call me every time they had a meeting. Bring some your artists and come down. So I'd take Shirley Gunther, Cornell Gunter -- they were singles -- and then The Platters. So anytime we could hang out and draw attention, we were there. We were there.

Did you tell them about Sammy Davis, Jr.?

No. Tell us about Sammy Davis.

When Zola got you into -- what was it, Ciero's?

Oh, Zola -- let's see. Where does that start now? She got very well acquainted with Sammy while

they were playing here at the Moulin Rouge, wasn't it? And Sammy was playing there, too. And she came back from there and she told me that she got a chance to really kind of get acquainted with him. And I said how is he? And she said, oh, he's so nice. She said he's such a nice guy. So I read that Sammy was going to do a job at Ciero's -- or not a job, but he was going to do a Saturday afternoon for the kids to come into Ciero's and see his job because they couldn't come in the nightclub, you know, regular. So I called Zola and I said didn't you say that you had Sammy's number? And she said yes, I do. I said call him and tell him that you would like to be on his Saturday afternoon show if he's got time. So she did. She called him. She called me back and said he's tickled to death. He said definitely be there. So we trooped down there. And they filled that place with all high school kids. And he brought them on with the nicest introduction that he had gotten acquainted with them and a new group coming up. So they did their whole act. And then he came on. And he was on for I don't know how long. And then he went back and sat in the dressing room. And they let the kids come around to the side and he signed autographs for every single one of them. Long towards the end he looked up and he said you've been through here once before. Yeah. He said, now, do you think that's the right thing to do? He said these people behind you, this is their first time. And here you are. That's not right, you know. And he just shamed him, but he was nice about it. It was so cute the way he did that. But I'll tell you it was an afternoon to remember.

And then coming out -- this was when Sammy had his accident and he had the bandage over his eye. He performed with it. He did his whole show. And he said that it was just -- I forgot what I was talking about now.

Performing with his eye.

Yeah. So coming out this jerk comes right up with a flash camera and flashes it right in his face. And he rubs his eye like this and he goes over and he sits for quite a little bit until it kind of eased up. He got up and he went on out. And all the kids were out there waiting. And he kibitz with them all the way in the car, waving at them when he left just like nothing had ever happened. It was fantastic.

Wow. That's great. That is great.

Well, I think you've got enough to do you awhile.

Yes. I think that this is a very, very good interview. Tell me where you are right now with The Platters.

Well, right now I still have the license with the group down there.

And "down there" you mean?

The Sahara. Between you and me I'm sorry I did that. But, you know, you do things. And he already was in there. He didn't tell me until it was too late and so forth.

And when you say "he"?

That's Larry Marshack.

That's the person --

He's the person that has that show down there, Larry Marshack. I don't know how much longer it's going to go on. I don't know. He'll stay there forever if they let him I guess. But it's been a handicap for me.

Now, why is it the handicap to have them there?

Well, because how many Platters can you have in one town, you know?

So how many Platters are there now?

God knows. God knows. Would you have any idea how many Platters there are?

Well, how many groups do you have licensed that are named The Platters right now?

They don't even bother anymore to license.

So you just have one group?

I have the one group, yeah. That's the Buck Ram Platters. That distinguishes them from the others.

Now, is the Buck Ram Platters the one that's at the Sahara?

No. The Sahara is licensed by her. That's the only one. That's the only one that she has licensed. For a while she had licensed a Branson group and she has nothing to do with that at all.

So the Buck Ram Platters are where?

They tour. They tour. They're going to do -- and I don't even know what their itinerary is right now.

No. We're just working on it now.

But they tour. They aren't settled in any one place.

Okay. I see.

So if it doesn't say Buck Ram in front of it -- or Herb Reed because Herb is the last living Platter. And he's in Boston. And it will be Herb Reed and His Platters I think is what he works as. And that's the people who really know what's going on and that's when you get the quality shows. But there are probably on any one day a half-dozen acts out there calling themselves The Platters. And some of them will tell you that they have an original member. And, in fact, this guy down here at the --

It's impossible.

-- Sahara will get up there and make you believe he's an original Platter and he's not. He played piano for Tony Williams years after Tony Williams was out of the group.

I see. Wow, this has been so interesting. Any other stories you want to tell us about?

We covered an awful lot of them.

Yes, we did.

Oh, there's dozens more. She's got so many that's why I'm here. I'm going, okay, now, remember this one. I know this one. You told me this one before.

And I really appreciate you being here to jog her memory for us.

So far you're giving us three photographs to take with us?

Yeah.

So you're giving us the 1964, 2000 --

That's the last one of those you have. Hang on to that. There may be things in here. What particularly were you looking for?

We just wanted some photographs. We have a photograph of Jean, we have one of Buck Ram, and then we have one of the Platters. So this is fantastic. Do you want us to bring these back to you?

No, no, no. You can have those.

Okay, great. So we're going to sign off and we're going to say thank you so much for doing this interview with us.

Well, I enjoyed it. It was a pleasure. My memory is fading. So anything I can get on -- if you can spare a copy, I would appreciate that.

Oh, yes. As soon as we have it transcribed, we'll let you read the transcription. And then later on it will be bound. But that takes months before it's bound.

Oh, yes. Oh, that would be great.

Now, for pictures if you want to use pictures I put a website up for her, which is JeanBennett.net. And there's one up for Buck, which is Buck_Ram.com. There's a lot of photos on there.

So you're saying that we could download the photographs off the website if we wanted to?

I think you can. Oh, sure, go ahead for what you're doing. And I think you can. I think you can blow them up and I think they'll print probably better than they look on the Internet.

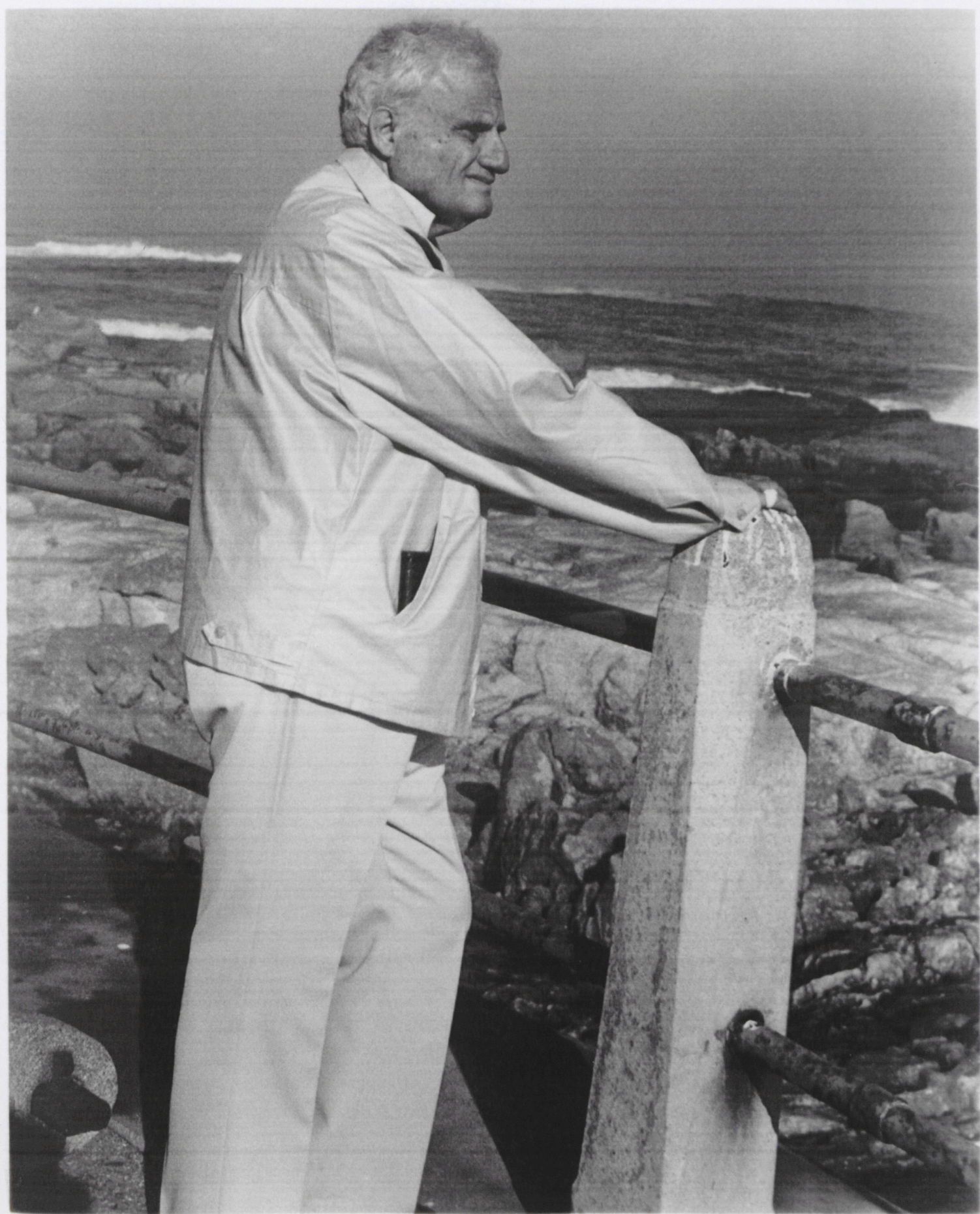
And give her your number so if she has any problems she can call you.

Okay. Because whatever photos you want to use, more than happy to have you use them.

She's my computer girl, computer lady.

Wonderful. Thank you so very much.

Well, it's been fun



Personal Management:
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BUCK RAM



1954



2004

The Platters' Golden Anniversary



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