

BURR INTERVIEW PART ONE

0:00:00 Blackmon: So, I just want to start with your family background, Gary, and ask you about your parents, your family history, what you owe (??) [0:00:11] both your parents and what they did for a living.

0:00:15 Burr: Okay! My father was an electrician. He owned an electrical contracting company in a small town in the middle of Connecticut, and I used to work with him in the summer, so that was pretty much what I thought I would be doing: growing up and taking over the family business. My mom - I was the last kid, and I was unexpected, and my mom was ready to go back to work when she found out she was pregnant with me. It bummed her out a little bit, but it just meant that as soon as I was able, she went back to work for my dad to be the bookkeeper and an office manager, and that meant I came home by myself for a lot of time. I was sort of a latch-key kid, my family wasn't terribly musical. The local legend was that my grandfather, my great-grandfather, played piano in a silent movie house, and I guess I never really knew if that was true or not, but that was the family legend that came down. So that was my family, a couple of brothers and a sister, and one of my older brothers was the right age to catch the folk movement with Peter, Paul, and Mary, people like that, so he went out and got a guitar that he never touched and leaned against the wall, and I eyeballed it for a few years before he went off to college and I grabbed it.

0:02:02 Blackmon: So, what town in Connecticut?

0:02:06 Burr: Meriden, Connecticut.

0:02:08 Blackmon: Meriden.

0:02:10 Burr: It was called the Silver City, and I, for years, when I was growing up, thought it was because we had silver mines. But it turns out that we had the biggest company in the world that made knives and forks. And they were like the best; you eat at a fine restaurant and to this day when you flip over the fork, you might see "International Silver" and that was where my dad worked and they came to him and said, "Our electrician has just quit, how'd you like to learn how to be an electrician?" And he said yes, and that got him his own business eventually.

0:02:46 Blackmon: And what size was Meriden? How large was the population?

0:02:52 Burr: It was very small. Back when I was a kid, it was probably 80,000 people.

0:02:57 Blackmon: And were you close to a large city?

0:03:00 Burr: We were exactly halfway between Hartford and New Haven.

0:03:04 Blackmon: Okay.

0:03:06 Burr: 20 minutes to Hartford, 20 minutes to New Haven. So, you know, growing up when accents acts started happening that I cared about, I was 20 minutes away in either direction from it. And, we were less than two hours away from New York City when I grew up enough to want to hear music and see plays and things.

0:03:31 Blackmon: So when your brother got into folk music, was this early 60's? What era, what timeframe was that and how old were you, and how old was he?

0:03:42 Burr: Yeah, I was about ten years old, and all of a sudden all these Peter, Paul, and Mary albums and Joan Baez albums started to come in the house, and you know, acts like that, you know, Smothers Brothers at the Purple Onion, those kinds of things, and that was what we started to hear around the house. My mom was a crazy woman for Broadway cast albums, so we basically had a whole library of every Broadway cast album that I would listen to just because I loved music. So I would listen to the Broadway albums and then, you know, my brother started bringing home folk records up until about, that would be about '60, '61, '62, '63, and then in '64 all of a sudden, my sister, three years older than me, started bringing home The Beatles albums.

0:04:46 Blackmon: And so, even though your family wasn't musical as far as playing instruments, there was music in the house and everybody appreciated it?

0:04:53 Burr: Yes, we always had - they spent money and had a nice, console stereo in the living room and my mom would play Flower Drum Song all day long.

0:05:14 Blackmon: And did pre-Beatles, when your brother was bringing in folk music, were you aware of songs and certain songs that spoke to you, or were you just kind of passively listening, or - what was that like?

0:05:36 Burr: I was passively listening up until about when the Everly Brothers started to come out and Elvis. When the Everly Brothers and Elvis, because I kind of remember - gosh, that was a long time ago, I'm trying to look up when - yeah, it was like 1960 when the Everly Brothers - actually, 1958. So when I was six years old, I can remember lying in my bed, listening to the radio, and hearing the Everly Brothers sing "Dream" and my sister and I would replicate the harmonies because she sang too. So we would replicate the harmonies and sing along to the Everly Brothers, and one of my oldest memories is my mom putting me on a coffee table and having me sing "Blue Suede Shoes" for party guests.

0:07:01 Blackmon: (Laughs) And harmonies just came naturally to you and your sister? You just heard them and worked on them together, sang along with the records?

0:07:10 Burr: Yes, harmony always was instinctually for me and she was a good singer, so I really don't remember whether - no, there was never anything we ever tried to do, whether it was the Everly Brothers or Marvin Gaye and Tammi Terrell, you know, "Ain't Nothing But The Real

Thing.” We used to run around the house singing that all day, we basically could just look at each other and, you know, one would go to one harmony and one would go to the other.

0:07:42 Blackmon: And how old were you when you started eyeballing that guitar of your brother’s?

0:07:52 Burr: Probably, not till I was maybe around 1967, so I was like 14 years old before I started to pick up the guitar and I went out into our music shop, it was called - what was it called - I don’t remember what it was called, but I bought a Mel Bay big note guitar book and I - my brother was off to college up in Massachusetts, so I grabbed the guitar and I started to teach myself how to play the four, five big chords you gotta learn with the big chord songbook. Yeah, that was when I picked it up and started on it.

0:08:49 Blackmon: Okay. Backing up just a little, I want to talk about The British Invasion, because I know that it played a big part in your influences and then in your, you know, some of those people in your career later. When the Beatles came to America, did you see the Ed Sullivan Show? Were you turned on by your sister’s records, or the radio, how did that happen?

0:09:14 Burr: I saw them play on Ed Sullivan Show and didn’t realize how knocked out I was, I just knew that it was something special because of my sister’s reaction. Years later, I figured out what the biggest impact was on me, and it was a sort of subliminal impact, and that was just looking at four guys that could actually come from nowhere and make a living doing music, and that’s what stuck in my head more than the quality of the music or anything. It’s like, no parent is ever going to be able to go “you can’t get anywhere doing that” because you can look at those guys and go “look at them” because they were nothing! And they were playing rock-in-roll, so you can’t say that playing rock-in-roll gets you nothing. But I was still too young to go out and buy records, so I would wait for my sister to buy the records and she’d bring them home and I would basically stand in her doorway and listen to her records, which she boldly wrote her name on to make sure everyone knew they were hers. And, I would read every word, read their ages, their likes, their dislikes, all their PR stuff that some anonymous person put on the back of the record. I read and memorized every word to them, and, the funny thing is, all through junior high school I made myself buttons to wear saying that I loved The Dave Clark Five, ‘cause I liked The Dave Clark Five better than I liked The Beatles, but mainly it was just to piss people off because they’d see my button and they’d start arguing with me. Fifty percent of the arguing were girls and that’s the only way I ever got to talk to a girl: when she came up and yelled at me about how much The Beatles were better than The Dave Clark Five. So, as a strategy, it was excellent.

0:11:15 Blackmon: (Laughs) You know, it’s interesting that you say that about The Dave Clark Five. I’ve heard other people that grew up in that era have said the same thing, and it’s almost like their legacy hasn’t been taken care of that well. You don’t hear about them, but a lot of people that grew up in that era really appreciate The Dave Clark Five. I wanted to ask you about The Ed Sullivan Show, did you - did your family tune into that every week? Or did you - were

you guys tipped off, were you all anticipating The Beatles were going to be on there? Was it just a big surprise?

0:11:51 Burr: No, my sister knew that they were gonna be on there, I can't say why, it was probably just people. All you had to do was have one person in school hear about it and all the girls heard about it. I didn't know, I was still too young to know ahead of time and my parents, we watched that show every Sunday night anyway. So, funny thing is, my first real band that I was in, the other lead singer, the main singer in the band - he was in the cast of Oliver on Broadway. That meant that the cast of Oliver was performing on The Ed Sullivan Show the first night The Beatles played. So he was there that night and he met them all. Also there that night was my friend whom I wrote a lot of songs, Andrew Gold, he was there that night because his mother was on the show.

0:12:53 Blackmon: Who was his mom?

0:12:55 Burr: His mom - I'm gonna mess up the name, I'm sorry - but she is the woman that sang all the Disney songs, she was the voice behind all the Disney cartoon characters, she sang the Natalie Wood part in West Side Story, she was the singer, the voice, because none of those people could sing as good as her.

0:13:30 Blackmon: So Andrew grew up in the business, and of course besides being a great songwriter, he's also an artist and had the big hit "Thank You For Being A Friend."

0:13:42 Burr: Marni Nixon was her name, and she was there singing there as herself that night along with my friend Paul and they both got to meet The Beatles. Andrew always said that "The thing that struck me the most was that John was a redhead."

0:13:58 Blackmon: Really. And, did - what was your sister's reaction? You said that influenced you. What did you see about a teen girl when she saw The Beatles, what was her reaction?

0:14:14 Burr: I don't remember it being crazy, I really don't remember. I was a little too involved in myself. What I do remember is when she begged my parents to take us to the drive-in to see A Hard Day's Night. And I remember that they would turn the car around so the back of the station wagon with the big window was facing the screen, and I just remember when that first scene lit up, and it showed The Beatles, I could hear muffled screams out of every car, girls screaming. And my sister next to me, screaming at the top of her lungs. I remember that reaction more, just to hear all these muffled - a thousand muffled girls screaming out of the cars. It was - and that's when I'm looking, going this is something weird.

0:15:16 Blackmon: So besides The Beatles in that era, and it sounds like a life-changing moment, what other bands did you start getting into out of the folk movement and into this British Invasion or rock-in-roll? What besides Dave Clark Five, which were American, or The Beatles? Who else did you love and who were you influenced by?

0:15:44 Burr: You know, it was quite a few years before I was old enough to be able to buy my own records, plus I had to get moved. Our uncle lived with us and he had to move out before there was a room for me to have that was my own, and if I didn't have a stereo of my own for my own room, I had no reason to buy records. So when the time came and I finally got my own room and they got me my own stereo, the first record I ever bought was the Four Top's Greatest Hits. And then it was, that was probably '67, '68, so those were the years I was catching up on The Beatles records and I was buying - you know, I like progressive stuff, so I would get Procol Harum and a band called Rhinoceros and things like that. I liked Yes albums, I liked the progressive stuff. Which is weird, because it's nothing like what I ended up liking; but in the beginning, I was getting that kind of stuff, and the Dylan records, and later on it grew out into Jackson Brown and Neil Young, but they weren't around back then. Maybe, Buffalo Springfield, Springfield was - I might have had the Bruce Buffalo Springfield album. I always gravitated - other than the weird little incursions into the progressive stuff, probably because I was trying to learn the guitar and what guys could do. Another guy I really liked was Johnny Winter. I had a lot of Johnny Winter albums for some reason. But then I got into the harmony stuff, and I would get whoever had good harmonies.

0:17:51 Blackmon: What about staying around that 1967 era when you started playing guitar? From what I understand, I wasn't there, but the radio had a lot of variety - were you aware of race in music or the different sounds? You said you had a Motown record and then you mentioned Buffalo Springfield. Were you aware at all about the different kinds of acts or regions the music was coming to you from?

0:18:19 Burr: No, absolutely not. It was totally homogenous. It was just the song in the Top 10. You'd hear a James Brown song and then you'd hear a Pete Seeger song, and then you'd hear a Tammi Terrell and Marvin Gaye song, and then you'd hear a [Rolling] Stones song. You'd hear novelty songs, you'd hear the guy - the spaceman landing, he's cut up all the little clips of songs, remember that guy?

0:18:48 Blackmon: I don't.

0:18:50 Burr: You're probably too young for that, but there was a guy, he had hits! You know, you'd hear the stinkin' Chipmunks! Then the next song would be The Four Tops! So no, they were just records and you didn't - if you went down to the record store and asked for a James Brown record, you didn't get the stink eye. Of course, we're in Connecticut, in New England. We didn't have many racial issues because, back then, we didn't have many black people living in town, and in my little part of town, I certainly didn't know of any. My high school had two black kids in my class, but I knew them both, they were just kids.

0:19:39 Blackmon: But you didn't make a distinction between hey, this is black music and soul music, and this is, you know, more English music or that sort of thing? It was just all hits?

0:19:53 Burr: No, and we weren't aware of what labels they were on, I wasn't aware that Motown had its own certain sound, and The British Invasion was a certain sound, and I - it was still a couple of years away from that sort of revelation, that this sound came from Detroit, and this sound came from Liverpool, and this sound came from Muscle Shoals. It was years before I could make that distinction, and even the DJs weren't saying that! They weren't going, "Here's the latest one from Motown!"

0:20:33 Blackmon: Right.

0:20:35 Burr: You know, they didn't know. They were just local guys that got good radio gigs a few years before us.

0:20:44 Blackmon: And when you were listening to the radio, how many choices on the dial did you have? Like, how many stations did you have to choose from and what were the genres? If you can kind of remember.

0:20:56 Burr: Two.

0:20:58 Blackmon: Two?

0:21:00 Burr: Two! There were two, and one was like the pop stuff, you know, one was like you'd hear Purple People Eater and Who Likes Short Shorts, and the other one was a little cooler and had a DJ that we all loved. And he was, I can remember coming home and turning on the radio to catch that guy's show because he was on right after we got out of school, so that was a prime time for a guy trying to appeal to 14 and 15-year-olds. So, he was the cooler guy, he was the one who would play more Beatles and Stones and the other one was, you know, you'd hear more Chipmunks and Four Seasons.

0:21:50 Blackmon: I asked this because part of your career later was in country music. Was there any country music radio presence there where you grew up?

0:22:03 Burr: No. We would hear Conway on the radio but he was still doing the pop stuff and we'd hear - I can remember being a kid and hearing Statler Brothers, you know. Big Bad John, they were all on the radio. All the Glenn Campbell stuff, Eddie Arnold, "Make the World Go Away." That was all nestled in next to The Stones and Dean Martin. But in town, there weren't any country bands, there wasn't a country bar, it was New England and there wasn't any live music then. There certainly wasn't a country station that any - that never reached us.

0:22:53 Blackmon: So do you remember what kind of guitar that was you got from your brother?

0:22:58 Burr: No. It was a nondescript, six-string, steel-string guitar that was, sort of vanished from the family history when I went out and bought my own guitar.

0:23:13 Blackmon: And you said there was no live music so you didn't really - that's not something you would see as a kid, somebody performing live?

0:23:27 Burr: Until senior year in high school, no. I had never seen anybody play live. We had a really nice theatre one town over called The Oakdale, and my dad did the electrical, and apparently, I guess he could get tickets and he took me a few times. One time was to see Don Rickles and one time was to see Jerry Louis, so I never saw anyone strum a guitar on stage at the Oakdale until '67 or '68 when bands would come to Hartford, New Haven. The first concert I ever saw was probably '67 or '68 and it was Ultimate Spinach and The Moody Blues.

0:24:17 Blackmon: Wow.

0:24:18 Burr: And Vanilla Fudge. How's that? Vanilla Fudge, Ultimate Spinach, and Moody Blues. That was my first concert.

0:24:24 Blackmon: Were you blown away?

0:24:27 Burr: Yes. I was blown away because, in the first song, they had this effect where the guy hit the strings of the mellotron and the sound of the mellotron, and I didn't do drugs, so the sound of the mellotron literally sailed up from the stage, over our heads, and went to the back of the auditorium. It was the most amazing thing I have ever heard.

0:24:53 Blackmon: That seems like some very heavy bands for your first experience.

0:25:01 Burr: Yeah, but like I said, the first albums I bought were that progressive stuff. I loved The Moody Blues, you know? And so, that was my first concert.

0:25:12 Blackmon: So you got your brother's guitar and you got your Mel Bay book. How did you progress with - you learned your first big chords, big four chords, and how did things progress and how fast?

0:25:29 Burr: Well, so I'm learning the guitar, badly, putting it back against the wall when my brother came home from college, hiding the Mel Bay book like it was a Playboy under my mattress.

0:25:52 Blackmon: Why did you hide the Mel Bay book? I'm just curious.

0:25:55 Burr: Well, cause if my brother found out I was playing his guitar, he'd get mad.

0:25:58 Blackmon: Okay.

0:26:00 Burr: It was his guitar, that's all. I was kidding about that, but still, my brother was territorial and if he came home and saw I was touching his stuff, I'd get in trouble. So I'd put the

guitar back so he wouldn't know. I mean, eventually, when he found out he could've cared less because he wasn't playing it. But I didn't know, I was a kid, and I was afraid that I was going to get my big brother mad at me. So I was careful. So I'm playing the guitar, little by little, never out, and then all the way up until 1969, when I was 17, and I went to Woodstock. I sat at Woodstock and I was supposed to go with my best friend, who had a 60' Chevy. And it was that weekend, the Monday of the week of Woodstock, I remember I went and drove one town over and I bought my ticket and it was 21 dollars for the whole weekend, something like \$7.50 a night. So I had my ticket, and I had my ride, and he and I were going to go, and then he had a little bit of a parental problem. On Monday he told his father to go fuck himself and was grounded, so I didn't think that was a really smart move when you want to go to Woodstock. So, all of a sudden, on Monday I don't have a ride. And I hear that the really scary guy in the class above me was going to Woodstock. So, somebody hooked us up and I only knew him because he was one of the drummers in band. He stood at the back and just was making everybody laugh and was just getting yelled at all day. So he was in the back, and he was a drummer. And he terrified me, but he had a ride, so I said I'd go. So he and this greaser from the technical school pull up in this car that the greaser guy drove and I crawl in the back, certain that I'm going to be killed and left on the side of the road somewhere. And by the time we got to Woodstock, we were all best friends. So we went to Woodstock and turns out this greaser guy was a great guy who also played guitar, and we decided that when we came home we were going to start a band because we were looking at all of these bands and we were seeing all these people going crazy. And right there when we were at Woodstock I decided then that I had to be someone in the music business. I didn't care if I had to be a roadie, a manager, a guitar player, or anything. I just had to be part of that. So we all decided to come back and start a band, but I was also on the soccer team. So when I came back, I played a soccer game, and the goalie grabbed the ball and my leg and fell on my leg and broke it in half right at the knee. So I woke up and I was in a body cast, from my nipples down to my toes. And I was flat on my back for two months in a giant cast. And I had my stereo set up next to the bed and I had three albums and I picked up the guitar and by the time the cast came off, I could play every note on those three albums.

0:29:30 Blackmon: What were those three albums?

0:29:33 Burr: Odie, this is where it gets weird. It was a Beatles album, it was a Pure Prairie album, and it was a Carol King Tapestry album.

0:29:50 Blackmon: Oh, that is gonna be weird. That's gonna play into your story, that's really weird.

0:29:56 Burr: Isn't that weird?

0:29:57 Blackmon: Yeah, it is. I wanna back up and talk about Woodstock, it's not every day that you meet somebody or talk to somebody that went there. But the first thing I want to ask you to do for younger people, can you define - you called that one guy a greaser. Can you define what a greaser would be?

0:30:19 Burr: Well, in the 50s, they were the car guys. They were the guys who cared about their cars as much as their girls, and we called them greasers because they rebelled against the Beatles, British look which was “comb your hair forward” and they were sticking with the slick back hair like Elvis had, with you know, all the way to the back with something that was called a ducktail. And he was one of them still greasing his hair back and wearing the ducktail, and you know, was in school to learn how to fix cars, and that was Eddie.

0:31:04 Blackmon: And so, that wouldn't have been the most popular style in 69?

0:31:10 Burr: No, that was definitely rebelling against the way society was going. We were rebelling one way and they were still trying to hold us back to Elvis while we were off chasing The Beatles. But he apparently liked all the music we liked because he was going to Woodstock.\

0:31:28 Blackmon: Was that also a working-class kind of thing? The greaser thing?

0:31:34 Burr: Very. In our school, and I don't know if they still do it because it's a horrible way to do it, but basically, you got separated in junior high, at the end of junior high school. I don't know if you took a test, or they took blood, or whatever, but you were told that you have the possibility to go to college, we're going to send you to the high school, you, forget about it. You're going to the technical school and you're gonna learn how to fix air conditioners and cars. Two of my friend, Billy, the best friend that was my ride, and Eddie both ends up in technical school so we got separated going from junior high school to high school. They went to one side of the town, I went to the other, and that was a horrible system, no kid at the age of 13 should be told that they had a ceiling, but that's how they did it back then. So Eddie went to the technical school, Dean was with me in the regular high school, and we met up in whatever the hell car he took from his dad, borrowed from his dad, that could make it to Woodstock and back.

0:33:01 Blackmon: Can you go through the experience of you and Dean and Eddie, like, just getting there? I would love to hear what your initial impressions of the crowd were, how you made your way around, the different music as you heard it. Obviously, it changed your life, you said you wanted to be in the music business in some way that weekend, can you tell me everything you remember about that?

0:33:29 Burr: Sure. We drove up and it was a really surreal experience, the drive. It was about a three hours drive, and every car that we passed, every vehicle that we passed, or passed us, fell into two categories: it was either long hairs giving us peace signs or truckers and older generation glaring at us or giving us the finger or even trying to run us off the road that was totally threatened by it. And it was 50/50, everyone we passed. It was almost like a game. Hey, I wonder what this next car is gonna be - oh, it's all kids! Peace sign, peace sign. That guy looks like he's got a gun, stomp on it! So that was the whole drive up, it gave you a feeling of, that we were doing something, you know, sneaky, illegal, free, and by the time we got there, it was dark. And you pull off the highway and you start to slow down and you get stopped in the traffic. We got there early. We started to slow down, this was on a Thursday, the day before. So we're pulling

in, and the traffic backs up, and we're slowly creeping down the road, it's black out and there's no street lights. So we're looking for a place to pitch our tent. So we see a field and we go into the field and we pitch our tent. We're almost done pitching our tent and all of a sudden we get hit with a flashlight and it's a cop. Naturally, being the revolutionaries we were, we were all ready to have our first hippie confrontation. And he was a state trooper and he was very nice and he goes guys, you can't pitch your tent here. And we're immediately like why not man, you can't tell us what to do. And then he goes, guys, it's a cemetery. He waves around and we're around all these tombstones, and we go oh shit, sorry! We pack up, get back in the car, get back in our little line, and we creep down until we finally found this gully, all these tents, and there was one space left. So we parked the car, ran down there, pitched our tent, there's 350,000 people.

0:36:01 Blackmon: Did you have any idea what you were getting into?

0:36:06 Burr: No, everybody said there could be 50,000 people, and that was like oh my god, that's gonna be so amazing. But it turned out to be 350,000, and we woke up the first morning, stepped out of our tent, and the next tent next to us opens up and it's my cousin. My sister went to Woodstock, I never saw her, but my cousin was in the tent next to me. And he brought food, we forgot to bring food, and we woke up hungry and there was very little food to be had at Woodstock if you were so paranoid as I was as such an un-drug guy. Because I was certain, even if I went to the free food, I was going to get doused on LSD, so I just stayed hungry.

0:36:51 Blackmon: So you were aware of that kind of culture, even if you weren't into it, you knew that was going on?

0:36:58 Burr: Yeah, I grew up through the beer culture where my friends were always trying to get me to drink, but I was always the designated guy that made sure they all got home safe. So, I was always the guy that had to clean puke out of the back of my car. And the same thing with the drug thing, I watch and make sure you don't want to jump off a building, but I'm not interested. And so we decide to walk up the road and we join this massive, just people as far as you could see and there was a little store on the left that everybody was stopping at, and there wasn't a lot left but you could go in there and buy a soda. And I think they were charging like a buck a soda when back then it was a nickel, and he was gouging, but he was making a fortune. So we pull a couple of cans of soda and kept walking and we walk up to the field and there was like no one on the field yet. We found a couple of seats right where we wanted to sit in front of the stage and halfway to the field, Eddie saw somebody he knew, which came as a surprise to me, that guy had drugs and Eddie was "yippie, I found drugs!" So Eddie went off with him, and that surprised me, I didn't think that was something Eddie liked to do. But we never saw Eddie again for the rest of the weekend. Dean and I walk up to the field, empty field, I go, and we find someplace to sit down. Dean wanders off, cause there was a big tree area to the left of the stage. And I found out later that when you walked in there, there were all these trails and it was called Groovy Way and Hippie Lane, and there were all these people that set up little kiosks and they were selling drugs, trinkets, beads, you know, it was a little community, a little industry back there, an economy. So he went back there, I went there eventually, but not then, then I just took my shirt off and lay

black in the field listening to them hammering the stage and going “testing, one two, testing” and I fell asleep because I didn’t sleep well in the tent. So I fell asleep, on my back, and I wake up being jostled and I’m thinking Dean’s back, but if he’s back he really didn’t have to jostle me and wake me up. He could’ve just sat there. But then I’m thinking, oh, that’s not Dean, it’s just some asshole jostling me. And I couldn’t understand why, and I sit up and raise my head up and I’m sitting in a field of a hundred thousand people that all came and sat down on the field while I was sound asleep. It was the most amazing thing to raise my head up and look around and go what happened? And I just stayed there until they brought out Richie Havens, and then it got to be dark and we saw Joan Baez, and we chanted with a Yogi, and **Robbie Shancock (??) [0:40:10]** came out and played, and Melanie and Tim Hardin came on, and in the middle of one of his songs everybody put up a match, and the whole field, 350,000 people, had matches up over their heads. It was like the first time that ever happened and it was breathtaking, it was stunning. I never saw anything like it. 250,000 matches, lit up, lighting this field, and watched up all the way until, I think Joan Baez was the last performer, and it was about three or four in the morning, and Dean and I slowly stumbled out of the field and made it back to our tent and that was the first day and night of Woodstock.

0:41:07 Blackmon: Were you familiar with Joan Baez and Richie Havens before then?

0:41:11 Burr: Nope, not Richie Havens. Fell in love with him, went back home, bought all his records, and learned all his songs for when I got into my folk singing phase. Joan Baez yeah, because her albums were nestled with Peter, Paul, and Mary in my brother’s collection. So, I was very familiar with her and actually ended up writing with her years and years later. But she didn’t remember me from Woodstock.

0:41:41 Blackmon: So, that’s possibly the first time a concert, where instead of lighters, people held up matches. How many had you been to before you went to Woodstock?

0:41:50 Burr: Might’ve been just the one. Might’ve been just, you know, Ultimate Spinach and The Moody Blues. I think I see Chicago play a high school prom. I think I saw them play a high school prom, but I was not familiar with anyone that was on the roster for Woodstock. Almost anyone. I didn’t know who Crosby, Stills, and Nash were, I didn’t know who - Ten Years After, I didn’t know any of them, I just went on pure faith that this was something that I needed to be at.

0:42:35 Blackmon: And were - Was it overwhelming, or what were your feelings that first day when you realized how big it was? Did you feel safe, you know, all that kind of stuff?

0:42:49 Burr: I always felt safe. I really did feel like they say, I looked around and went this is what the world could be if, you know, everyone sort of adopted the peace and love mantra. This is what the world could be. Now, by the third day, when everyone was wet and muddy, and it was pretty gross, and it was kind of descending a little bit into primitive conditions, I kind of changed my attitude to if this is what the world would be like if hippies ran it, then maybe we should rethink this. Yeah, wanna hear about my second day?

0:43:52 Blackmon: I do, just let me ask you this real quick before we go on to the second day. So you said if hippies ran it. At this point, were hippies them and you weren't a hippie, or did you consider yourself a part of that movement?

0:44:05 Burr: I was not a part of that movement. I was the only kid there without a headband or long hair. I actually have a picture on my wall that was a two-page foldout of the crowd at Woodstock, and it was in Look magazine, and it took me years to find it, but you can see me sitting right in the middle of the crowd.

0:44:25 Blackmon: Awesome. We're gonna -

0:44:28 Burr: And I had short little hair with short bangs, it was the most my parents let me get away with, and, you know, Dean wasn't either. He looked more like a California beach boy. But, it was definitely, I was definitely checking out the club to see if I wanted to join.

0:44:47 Blackmon: And it was about music more than the culture.

0:44:51 Burr: Absolutely.

0:44:52 Blackmon: Okay. Yeah, let's hear about the second day.

0:44:57 Burr: So the second day we go, same thing, try to get there early, found a great spot. A lot of the bands that day were bands that I didn't really know much about, so I - this time, I left Dean, and I went walking around. I went through the woods and walked all the way to the hill where they had like, some vendors, but they didn't have much. And there was a - I can remember hearing Canned Heat in the distance, I wasn't sitting in front listening to them. I remember Creedence playing down in the distance, I remember them playing "Run Through The Jungle" while I was up looking through the different vendors that had hot dogs and hamburgers and things. And then, as it got to be late afternoon, I settled down and we got to hear some really great bands, Mountain, and stuff like that. It got to be nighttime and we stayed through it all the way, well, as long as we could. And then we were there when we saw Janis, and we saw Sly and The Family Stone, and it got to be like five in the morning, and The Who and The Jefferson Airplane were next. And we just couldn't take it anymore. I didn't know The Who and I didn't really know The Jefferson Airplane, and it's kind of funny. Back then, at that age, you kind of think you have the rest of your life to hear them. So, we got up and left and started walking home back to the tent. Which, because it was raining a lot, was filled with crickets by the time we got there, it was really gross. We had to sleep on wet sleeping bags covered in crickets. But we were seventeen, we didn't care. But, on the way home, I remembered there was a guard rail, and we were exhausted. So we stopped and sat on the guard rail and we talked and decided that when we got back to town that we were going to start a band. I promised him that I was gonna learn the guitar and get better, and he was already a drummer, and Eddie played guitar so we had three out of four people, and we sat on the guard rail and made the plan to come back to Meriden and start a band. Even though in Meriden there was no place to play, we didn't think it out, we just were

gonna be a band. Walked back, climbed in with the crickets, unfortunately not the Buddy Holly ones, the disgusting ones, and we went to sleep with that plan in our heads. And we woke up the next day, and it was just so wet and so muddy and so gross that we looked at each other and decided that we wanted to go home. So I didn't see the third day of Woodstock, we went home, Eddie showed up like a miracle, and we hopped in the car, headed for the first Howard Johnson's, ordered clam rolls, and washed ourselves off in the bathroom.

0:48:29 Blackmon: And, so, you missed Hendrix and, I guess -

0:48:38 Burr: I missed The Band, I didn't know who they were, I missed Crosby, Stills, and Nash and Young, I didn't know who they were, yeah. Anyone who was on the third day, I looked down the list and I went there's no - and now, it's like I could've seen The Band, I could've seen Crosby, Stills, and Nash and Young and I didn't. Then. You know, I've seen them all since, but I could've seen them then. And I didn't, and it was just - that was kind of when I had the revelation that there was a limit to how much hippie you can take. And I had reached my limit of hippie, and you know, maybe if I was stoned I could wander around and be happy with this, but, you know, my mom's main concern when I told her I wanted to go to Woodstock was keep your shoes on so you don't get polio. So, my shoes were muddy, I was worried about polio, so we decided to get the hell out of Dodge.

0:49:36 Blackmon: Were your parents concerned at all about it? You going?

0:49:41 Burr: Oh yeah. My sister was going, but they couldn't control her. They were mildly concerned because they were oblivious, they had no idea what it - if they even thought for a second of what 50,000 kids like my sister had the potential to do to their youngest, they would've said no. But they didn't - I don't know, I think they still thought it was like we were going to see Engelbert Humperdinck or something.

0:50:14 Blackmon: But it lit the spark to be in a band and, so, you get back and you get into your soccer accident and you're in a body cast for how long?

0:50:26 Burr: Two months.

0:50:28 Blackmon: And you just happened to have three records by people that you'd be playing with later in your career and that's how you learned guitar.

0:50:36 Burr: Yeah. Yeah.

0:50:40 Blackmon: So, you get out of the body cast. Do you, Dean, and Eddie actually start a band?

0:50:45 Burr: You bet. We do, we start a band. There's one other great band in town, not great, but they were a band, we didn't know any other bands. There was one other band and right

before we started they broke up, so we asked their bass player who lived around the corner, he was, you know, I knew him, if he wanted to play with us and he did. We were doing all songs that were three-part harmony songs, and he sang, so now we had three-part harmony. And we used to go down to my parent's basement, they'd sit up in the living room, turn their TV up to eleven so they could hear it, and we were downstairs thrashing out Birds songs and Beatles songs.

0:51:36 Blackmon: So you got an electric guitar?

0:51:38 Burr: No, I still had an acoustic guitar that I went and bought one of those pickups that you stick in the hole. I had a little pickup for my acoustic, Eddie had an amp and a beautiful white Stratocaster, Dean had his drums set up in the corner. Since then, that little house in Meriden is a (unintelligible - 0:52:01) house now, no one lives there, the bank owns it. But every time I go to Connecticut I go there because they never lock the basement door. So I go in and I walk around the house, and I see the room where my bed was, and I go down to the basement and I'm amazed that we all fit down there, yet it seemed like it was huge when we were kids. But we had my stereo set up with all the pennies down the arm to keep it in the groove and he sat in the corner, we moved the console TV out of the way - that's how upper-class my family was, we had a TV upstairs and downstairs, thank you, you're welcome.

0:52:39 Blackmon: That's pretty fancy.

0:52:40 Burr: Oh yeah. Yeah, that's where my parents would have parties where they would drink highballs. So, Eddie was in the corner, Dean was in the middle with the drums, Eddie, uh, Dean - I'm sorry, Dennis' bass on the left, and I was in front of them because I thought Dean would lead the band but he was more interested in junkin' around, so I was kind of the band leader and the lead singer. And we learned all these songs from The Birds and The Stones and The Beatles and people like that.

0:53:13 Blackmon: That's really cool that while your parents maybe wanted to turn the TV up upstairs that they were supportive in letting you have that space to have the band come over and rehearse, that's pretty encouraging.

0:53:28 Burr: It was wonderfully encouraging. It was amazingly encouraging. I mean, every once in a while my mom would yell down the stairs "you guys need anything?" We had a fridge down there that she kept stocked with sodas, it was - I don't understand, I think my sister went off to college and she was really falling into the bad part of hippiedom, you know, flunking out and joining the FDS and all this stuff, and kind of becoming a little mini James (unintelligible - 0:53:57). And I think they saw me heading that way and said at least if you're gonna do it, let him do it here where we can keep our eye on who he's with. And they knew Eddie and Dean, and they've known Dennis, so they knew they were just my three knucklehead friends, they weren't Eldridge Cleaner on bass, you know. So they were, they were surprisingly supportive while we were down there butchering songs. It was cool, my other friend in high school John was a

technical guy, he worked in a TV repair shop, and he was a genius in electronics. And there was a group in Connecticut called, I don't remember what it was called, but it was like an Up With People offshoot, do you remember Up With People?

0:54:49 Blackmon: Oh yeah, I saw them.

0:54:51 Burr: Yeah, so they were sort of an offshoot, a local offshoot, of that. You know, I think back then it was probably "up with the right kind of people." But, they had a little PA system, and John used to run it for them. And when they were, they only performed very infrequently, so John would basically steal the PA system and bring it to my house, set it up, and we would rehearse. You know, through their little Bogen speakers. And that's what we would - that was the equipment that we had, but we could hear ourselves so we could work out harmonies, and it was a blast.

0:55:29 Blackmon: And so, I'm guessing you guys ended up gigging? How long did you work it out till you were ready and then how did you start gigging?

0:55:39 Burr: We couldn't find - there was no place to play. The one place where bands played, I don't even know if there were any other bands. Yeah, there was, there were other bands, but the only place we knew that they played was a biker club downtown, and that scared us. So what happened was Dean, if Dean was good with one thing, he was an entrepreneur. He was good with (unintelligible - 0:56:03) and otherwise. So a friend of ours in our class got hurt. He got shot in the back and paralyzed. So Dean said, let's do a benefit for him, and we'll be the band. And it actually ended up growing into this thing where we actually got the high school auditorium, and we sold tickets, and we filled the high school auditorium, and it was us. It was our band, you know, my mom and dad were out there, my brother and his new wife, and they were all out there, you know, it was full. And the curtain opened, and I was in a band, and the first song we played as a band was a song from a band called The Wild Weeds, and it was written and sung by Al Anderson. And that was the first song I ever sang in public, called "Mare, Take Me Home." First song I ever sang in public.

0:57:03 Blackmon: How was the reception?

0:57:05 Burr: People went crazy! It was like we were The Beatles. It was an amazing thing, and we had our friend Paul, the guy I would later be in a band with, but it was the guy that was in Oliver and was at Sullivan that night, he was the big folk singer in town. So we gave him his own little spot in the middle and then he and I sang a couple of songs, we sang Mr. Bojangles together. And at the end, we did "I'm a Man" by The Spencer Davis Group, and we had all our friends come up and play percussion, and at the end of the song, we all went out and walked through the audience playing percussion. It was awesome! And we raised a lot of money for our friend John who was hurt. It was a hell of a way to have a first show, it all went downhill from there. From there, we played battles of the bands and some birthday party at a hockey rink or something like that. We just couldn't find somewhere else to play.

0:58:05 Blackmon: What was the name of the band?

0:58:11 Burr: The name of the band was - when I met Dean, he actually was in a little bit of a band, and he was in a band with that guy Paul. Paul, when he was on Broadway, Oliver was at the Martin Beck Theatre. So when we started our band, for some reason, and this is the kind of band name that was big back then, we called ourselves The Martin Beck Theatre Band. MBTB. Martin Beck Theatre Band. So yeah, we had our big show that was a benefit, raised some money, and my mom and dad were kind of impressed.

0:59:03 Blackmon: So, after that band, you said nothing much else happened, and I'm assuming you're getting to college age. What happened next with your life and music?

0:59:13 Burr: Well, what happened next was, for some reason, I decided I needed my own guitar. So I went out and for some reason, Odie, I don't know why I did this, I bought a 12-string.

0:59:28 Blackmon: Well, you liked The Birds and The Beatles.

0:59:32 Burr: Yeah, I guess, but that means that I taught myself how to fingerpick and stuff on a 12-string guitar. You know how hard that is?

0:59:39 Blackmon: I can't imagine.

0:59:40 Burr: Oh, it was brutal.

0:59:43 Blackmon: What kind of 12-string was it?

0:59:44 Burr: A Harptone. Ever hear of them?

0:59:47 Blackmon: Nope.

0:59:48 Burr: They're very not famous. And I ended up giving it to somebody, if I had that back, it was a killer guitar. It was pretty good, Harptone guitar. So I took it to college with me with my record collection and I fell in. I went to, I had to go to a sort of evaluation period at the college. I was not a good student, and basically, there were no colleges that would take me. The only college that had to take me was the one my brother went to because I was a legacy. And it was all through school, what I hated most was science and math. So the only college that would take me was a math and science college called Worcester Polytech. And it was where you go to get electrical and mechanical engineering degrees. So it was hell. It had like three hundred guys and eight girls. This was the first year that they allowed girls in, and there were eight of them. So think of the odds there. But I fell in, we had to go in the summer for like four weeks, sort of like to do a catch-up to make sure our skills were up to par so when the real school started, we wouldn't just get toxic shock syndrome. So while I was there, I met this guy named Jim, and this other guy - oh, what was his name - Dave. And we became fast friends, and we would go up - at

this point, I had started smoking a little pot. So we would sit, and Dave introduced me to, you know, really like the deep cuts of albums. The Tim Buckley and the early Neil Young. You know, Neil Young has his own albums, he's not just Buffalo guy. What? What? Yeah, listen to this. And so, and he was, had the pot, so he introduced me to all the cool folk music. Not folk music, but like the guitar singer-songwriters. He introduced me to the singer-songwriters, Cat Stephens, Tea for the Tillermen, and the three of us became really, really tight. So fast forward to the beginning of the school year, I go up and there's Jim, great. Where's Dave? Turns out Dave went to a festival in Toronto called Strawberry Fields and a car jumped a curb and it killed him. So, yeah. So he was gone and it was just me and Jim. And I quickly flunked out. My second semester, I just transferred all my credits and did nothing but just take whatever limited English courses they had, because I knew whatever I wanted to do, wasn't going to be calculus, it was going to have something to do with lyrics, or poetry, or writing or something. So I took any English class I could until the end of the year when I officially flunked out with a negative grade point average, but the best thing was Jimmy pushed me to play out. And we had something called a rathskeller on campus, and people played there with their guitars. And I put my name on the list, but they never called me because they never heard me, so they didn't know. So one night, I had met a girl and brought her back to my dorm room, and I wanted to impress her, and back then you would impress them by the quality and the quantity of your shit. So I got a hold of some stuff that was a lot stronger than I needed. So, she and I proceeded to get blasted, and all of a sudden there was a knock on the door and a paper slipped under the door, going someone canceled at the rathskeller, and if you can be there in ten minutes, you can play. So I grab my guitar, stumble to the rathskeller, she comes with me, I'm stoned, I have no idea what's going on, I get up on stage and start playing a Dylan song - no, I started playing like a Phil Oak song. (*singing*) And every verse is a soldier going to a different war all through the years as a way of saying it never stops. And I kept that poor soldier in the Civil War for about twenty minutes, and finally, someone came out on stage and goes, you know how long you've been out here? And I go, no - and this is like my first song - no, come with us. And they led me off the stage, and the girl was gone, and I blew my chance to ever play the rathskeller. But Jim said you can do this, you should go down to the girl's college. Down the street, there was a girl's college. They had a coffeehouse, so I started playing there every Thursday night to a coffeehouse full of girls, watching me play. And on that 12-string I would play Dylan songs and Neil Young songs and, you know, you first start out with your eyes closed and you're sweating and making mistakes until eventually you're comfortable and you're up there playing, joking with people with recognize, and then you're going this isn't that scary. So when I came back from college, I didn't have a band anymore because when I went off to college we all went our separate ways, but I knew that if I could start another band, I knew that I would be a lot more comfortable and I would be a lot better at it.

1:06:21 Blackmon: So, one thing I wanted to ask about the war song, was college, as long as you were in college, Vietnam wasn't a concern?

1:06:33 Burr: It was a huge concern right before I went to college, that's when they started the lottery, and I think that year they were pulling numbers on ping pong balls, and whatever your date was if you were born on that day, it went up to like 174, if you were the first 174 that pulled

up, you were going to Vietnam. And I think my number was like 178, I missed it by like four. So I was able to go to college and not go to Vietnam. But I was planning on going to Canada and all that stuff, you know all the looking back and the retrospective bravery I was exhibiting because I didn't have to actually exert it. I had all these plans to stand up to it when in reality, I would've been turning my head and coughing before you could say Canada.

1:07:35 Blackmon: Yeah. Yeah. So, in technical college, you figured you learned, you figured out how to play live, then what happens after that year?

1:07:47 Burr: I came back to town and I got asked to join one of the best bands in town. They had seen me play and said if that guy's ever available, we gotta get him. And it was a real rock and roll band, I had to go out and buy an electric guitar, and we were, by now we were playing Almond Brothers, and I wasn't the only singer. So we had enough juice to be doing Three Dog Night songs and Almond Brothers, and all these great things and dueling harmony parts on guitar, and I was getting to play loud, and we actually had clubs to play. So I was in that band -

1:08:27 Blackmon: What was the name of that band?

1:08:30 Burr: Steed. S-T-E-E-D. Steed. I had hair down to my back by now. So what happened was, in the meantime, Dean and Paul got back together in a band with another friend of theirs named Kevin, and they were putting a big band together, and they are gonna go to California, and they were doing all of Paul's original songs. So, Dean and I were real close at this point, we were like brothers. So on the nights that they would practice, I would go over to their basement and sit and listen to them, and Paul and Dean sang. So after a while, I knew their songs enough so they'd set up a mic just for fun and I would put in three-part harmonies, and it sounded great. At one point, the other guitar player in my band Steed told me, I'm quitting, I'm joining Dean and Paul's band. So Dean said, look, your band's already losing one guy, let them lose two, you should come too. We're going to California, we're going to Los Angeles, we're gonna get famous. So I did. I quit that band, I went with the guitar player, we joined that band, and we went out to California, my folks - and this is another example, my folks basically said you can't go, you can't go with Dean, we don't mind when he's here, but he's a bad influence on you. You can't go to California, you can't do this, you should stay here, come into the family business. And I argued and argued all night until the end of the night, I said I'm sorry, I'm going and nothing you said can change my mind, I have to do this. And my mom and dad looked at me and went if you have to do it, how can we help? They ended up shipping my amps, which were huge, and they ended up paying to ship my amps out to California. I got to California and found out that everyone else in the band, to get to California, sold their equipment. So my band landed in California and I was the only one with a guitar and amplifiers. Everybody else sold their shit.

1:10:51 Blackmon: What was your rig like when you bought an electric guitar, what were you playing for Steed and then this band?

1:10:58 Burr: Big Sunn amplifiers. We had a Big Sunn amplifier guitar and a Big Sunn amplifier bass. And that's, I shipped both of those out to California.

1:11:09 Blackmon: And what about your guitar? What were you playing?

1:11:13 Burr: SG. I think it was a Gibson SG guitar. Had a great cutaway so I could get way up the neck, I wasn't really a lead player, but if I had to.

1:11:25 Blackmon: But you were advancing quite a bit then if you were working out parts.

1:11:29 Burr: Yeah, I was pretty good, I was always a great rhythm guitar player.

1:11:38 Blackmon: Where in California did you all go?

1:11:42 Burr: Our plan was to go to LA, we just were gonna stop in Santa Cruz because Dean grew up in Santa Cruz until high school when he moved to Meriden. So we were gonna stop in Santa Cruz for a few days and we never left for three years because Santa Cruz is, where I like to say, ambition goes to die. And so, we never left. Paul found out the drugs there were better than anywhere else, so he never wrote another song. We all had to go get jobs to survive, so nobody wanted to rehearse after they came home from work. I was the only one that was still, hey guys, let's rehearse, I got a new song, what do you say? And they were all leave us the fuck alone. And, so after three years, I said I'm going back to Connecticut, if you guys aren't doing anything, then I'm going back to Connecticut. Some of the guys in that last band Steed were starting a new band and they called me and said if you're not happy, we got a spot for you in our new band. I had just gotten married to my hometown sweetheart who came out to Santa Cruz with me, and she wanted to go back to Meriden, and I didn't have any way to argue with her, I was working in an ice cream store in a band that didn't want to practice.

1:13:09 Blackmon: So you were basically doing your own - you were pursuing music on your own in California, continuing to practice, and were you writing songs for these bands? I should've asked that earlier.

1:13:23 Burr: That's - first band that I was in, The Martin Beck band in the basement, we were playing Birds and Beatles and Stones and at some point, they all realized that the main trend is the main guitar player wrote the songs. So they all - you know, a nice coincidence, my drummer Dean who went to Woodstock, he's calling right now. So, I'll call him back. Isn't that funny?

1:13:50 Blackmon: That's great. And also, just to - earlier on you said he looked like a beach boy, and then later you just now revealed he grew up in Santa Cruz, it makes sense. Did you start writing songs in that first band with Dean?

1:14:07 Burr: Yeah, yeah I did, they all turned to me and said the guitar player's supposed to write the songs, so start writing. So the first songs I wrote were like a total ripoff of a Neil Young

song or a Beatles song, or you know, a ripoff. But little by little I wrote six or seven songs that we actually performed, and each one started to sound like a little bit, not like something else. You know what that's like, in the beginning, you're a copier until you don't need to copy anymore. And then hearing the band play one of my songs was such a thrill that it really hooked me, and so by the time we moved out to California, we were 50/50 songs of Paul's and songs of mine, and it got more and more mine because Paul stopped writing. So when I moved back to California [Meriden] I was in a band and I was able to - but it was a different kind of band, so I was gonna start writing different kinds of songs, but that band didn't last very long. So I put a band together by myself because I was much more into country rock now because of Sweethearts of the Rodeo and The Eagles and Poco. Eddie had dropped the electric guitar and now was a pedal steel player. The greaser is now one of the best pedal steel players in Connecticut.

1:15:27 Blackmon: Now this is, so you did three years in California and nothing happened. And then you moved back to Connecticut and then back to California, is that what you're saying?

1:15:36 Burr: No, no, no, when I left Santa Cruz, I left it for good.

1:15:39 Blackmon: So during that three years, Eddie picked up steel guitar?

1:15:45 Burr: Yeah, when I came back, he wasn't playing electric guitar anymore, he was a steel player. Much to my shock, because he fell in love with Pure Prairie too, and he memorized every note on those records and learned how to play all those John David Call steel licks.

1:16:05 Blackmon: Did you discover country rock while you were out in California?

1:16:09 Burr: No, I discovered it back with Martin Beck because I remember that Sweetheart of the Rodeo was one of the songs in rotation and Martin Beck Band learned the opening cut "You Ain't Going Nowhere." And we also used to do "Come On" By Poco off their live album. So, that was when country rock was just starting, and "Panama Red" by - what the hell band was that - Riders of the Purple Sage, New Riders of the Purple Sage. You know, so, if it was a country rock song, we were on it like a bum on a baloney sandwich.

1:16:47 Blackmon: That seems like it would be unusual, like, by the Sweethearts, The Birds were out of favor in pop music, right? I mean, that wasn't - you were going on a specific tangent, then, is that correct?

1:17:01 Burr: Yeah, because looking back, even on The Beatles albums, my favorite cats were always the ones that were the most harmony, the most country, you know, like the "I'm Looking Through You" and the "What Goes On" and "Rocky Raccoon." Those were the ones that, for some weird reason, tingled my radar for no reason, it's not like I grew up listening to country. But, something just grabbed me from those kinds of songs, which is why when the country rock thing happened, for me, it felt like coming home

1:17:41 Blackmon: And so you get back to Connecticut, Eddie's playing steel, and then what happens?

1:17:46 Burr: So, I - the first band didn't last very long because me and the main guy didn't get along. You know, we both wanted to sort of run the band, and so I stopped and started another band with a couple of other people and a female singer, and - oh, I know what happened! Dean moved back. Dean moved back to Meriden from Santa Cruz and he gave up too, he got fed up. He moved back to Meriden so immediately he comes to me and goes, come on, let's start a band. You know, he probably called me five minutes ago wanting to start a band. *(laughing)* So we started a band, we called Eddie, we got another bass player, and now we were a country rock band playing all country rock songs. Eagles and Poco and stuff like that.

1:18:38 Blackmon: That would've been pop music too though when you're talking about The Eagles, even though they're - when you're talking about country rock, it would've been stuff you would've heard on a pop station, right? Is that correct?

1:18:48 Burr: Yes, but the big thing that happened was now FM radio was thriving. So now you have FM radio which will play the longer cuts, so you'll play the country song, you know, by Pure Prairie that's like twelve minutes long and you'll get to hear the deeper cuts, you'll get to hear the songs that weren't the hits on an album. So that made a huge amount of difference, the rise of FM radio for us. So yeah, we just loved - and Eddie was playing steel, so it was so much fun to play and there were still shit places to play, but at this point, we were at least brave enough to play the biker club and they loved us.

1:19:35 Blackmon: So, with the change as you progressed into country rock, did that change your guitar choices and gear?

1:19:51 Burr: Yeah. I sold my SG and I got rid of my 12-string and I went down to Madison, Connecticut to Banko's House of Music and bought a Martin D **(unintelligible - 1:20:12)** and put a good pickup on it, and I was ready to go. Now, I switched and I was strictly acoustic guitar.

1:20:27 Blackmon: I wanted to ask before we - just, when you were in California, did you make any connections with anybody there, that three years besides the guys in your band that you - did you connect with anyone musically out there?

1:20:40 Burr: The only guy we connected with was a guy named Dumble. And I don't know if you know about him, he just died last week. His name was Howard Dumble but later he changed it to Alexander, and he made amplifiers. He made the greatest amplifiers in the world, he made them for Clapton - but back then, in California in Santa Cruz, he loved our band, and he used to get up and jam with us. He looked at our equipment and said, this stuff is shit, and made us all amplifiers. He made us a PA system and to this day, I can't think about what all that equipment would be worth, but for years, about nine years ago, I still had my Dumble amplifier. After all these years I still had it, and it was serial number #005. Fifth one he ever made, and I used to

loan it out to Keith Urban and Foster and Lloyd, they used to want to play it on recording because it sounded so amazing. I finally, so this is Howard Dumble and he made all this equipment for us, and eventually, for whatever reason, all the equipment got lost in the sands of time, but I kept my amp until about nine years ago when I sold that thing for \$67,000.

1:22:12 Blackmon: Unbelievable.

1:22:14 Burr: Isn't that unbelievable? And he just died like a week ago. It was really cool, I got to talk to him one more time, I called him up a few years ago just because someone gave me his number, and I actually talked to him and he said you know, I always knew that out of that band, you were the guy who was gonna stick with it. And it was really fun to reconnect with him as long as you were careful to never call him Howard because he would hang up on you. There was something weird going on there. But he was the only connection we ever made because (unintelligible - 1:22:46).

1:22:50 Blackmon: Wow. That's - his amps were famous with a lot of people, that's interesting how you, the different people you run into during your life and you're career. So, you're playing biker bars - did you guys call it country rock? Did you call it that then?

1:23:10 Burr: No, it was just music. That was just the pop music of the day, the rock music of the day. Everybody loved it, everybody that we knew loved it, everybody was getting on that bandwagon of Poco and The Eagles, everybody in our circle. Nobody ever said to us, what are you doing that stuff for? It's not like we wouldn't throw in a Doobie Brothers song. You know, it was just, the other stuff, frankly, it was just easier for us to learn. It didn't have big guitar solos, it didn't have intricate drums or bass, it was just the easier stuff to learn because we weren't great.

1:23:47 Blackmon: And you liked harmonies?

1:23:50 Burr: Yeah, and it had all the good harmonies. That was the fun, sitting with the guitar going, here, you go up here and y'all go down here, blah blah blah. That was always my favorite part.

1:24:02 Blackmon: Did you connect Pure Prairie League and The Eagles and Poco to Sweethearts and specifically Gram Parsons? Was there a thread there that you were aware of?

1:24:17 Burr: I was only aware of it because that was back when Rolling Stones magazine came out, which we read religiously, and it always told us who was connected with who, who was sleeping with who, who was quitting what band to go join what band, so we knew all the interconnections. We knew it more than I knew how Aunt Gert was connected to Uncle Joe. Oh, I say she's the sister of Uncle Joe, I don't care. But I know that Gram Parsons was in New Riders of the Purple Sage for a cup of coffee.

1:24:52 Blackmon: Did you, were you into his solo albums, The Burrito Brothers, and his solo albums where he had Emmylou, did you follow that or - The Eagles kind of just taken front seat, were you aware of Gram's career after The Birds?

1:25:13 Burr: I saw his influence when he joined The Birds, but I was pretty shallow at that point, all I knew was I liked the songs when he was singing but I didn't like his voice. I loved The Birds, I followed The Birds, but I didn't even know he had, I didn't even know his whole Emmylou solo thing until a few years later when I caught up and fell in love. It was a lot of years later, probably after he died and I read all that stuff going, everybody is saying this Grievous Angel is so great, I better get it. Then I listened to it and went oh my god, I could've been listening to this forever.

1:25:56 Blackmon: I was asking because, from what I can gather, while he was highly influential with that Birds record, the Burritos and his solo stuff just wasn't that big or popular iron anybody's radar like The Eagles were or Poco. I just wanted to ask. Or Neil Young.

1:26:16 Burr: No, he was more famous for how he died than how he lived, you know? You listen to those solo albums and you know, all these songs are like hits. They're not just really great songs, if they had been on the radio, they would've been hits. Yet nobody knows him, no record company wanted to put money behind him because he was such a loose cannon.

1:26:50 Blackmon: So you guys, after playing biker bars, your old pals, what happens then?

1:27:01 Burr: What happened then was, at one point, Eddie looked at me and said, you know, these last couple of songs that you wrote, they're as good as anything that's on the radio, you should do something with them. And I said, what do you mean do something? And he said send them somewhere, see if you can get a record deal or something. So I went down to Asalina's Music Box, I just remembered the name, Asalina's Music Box in Meriden, down on Colony Street, and I wrote down the addresses of twelve record companies. I went home and borrowed \$600 from my brother who I used to steal his guitar, and he made me promise if I got rich I would buy him a Corvette, which I never did and he always reminds me, and I went to a little recording studio that John worked at so he got me a deal. It's all interconnected, John who used to steal the PA, and he engineered a session. I recorded two of the songs that Eddie was talking about, called "Goodbye Rosie" and "Mexico" and sent out twelve tapes, sent them out to the record company A&R, didn't know what it meant but I knew you were supposed to write A&R department, I sent them out, and I got back eleven rejections, one of which from Mary Martin. You know Mary?

1:28:35 Blackmon: I don't. I know the name.

1:28:36 Burr: You know who she is? I mean, she's the person that put the band with Dylan, you know, legendary. And her note was great, she wrote me, and I kept it I have it somewhere, and it says there's something wrong with this tape, the songs are so fast it made me nervous.

1:29:01 Blackmon: What label was she with?

1:29:05 Burr: CBS. Columbia. And another rejection - huh?

1:29:12 Blackmon: She wrote you back?

1:29:12 Burr: Yeah! Well, they all wrote me back, but form letters, just this doesn't fit our current needs, thank you for thinking of us. And then this one handwritten note saying I made her nervous, which we laughed about years later when we got to know each other, and one letter from a guy named Harold Kleiner from Columbia, saying I heard this, I'm intrigued, call me. I called him and he invited me up to New York to play in some other songs, and he became my first publisher and my first Yoda in the business, telling me how it works. He's the one that guided me until I finally sat down and wrote "Love's Been a Little Bit Hard on Me" which he sent to Bob Montgomery in Nashville and we got our first cut together. All because Harold Kleiner was the twelfth letter.

1:30:03 Blackmon: So you signed a deal with him, with Columbia Publishing, would that be right?

1:30:13 Burr: No, we had our own - he started our own publishing company, him and an investor, and me. This was how naive I was, Odie, I basically gave away two-thirds of - actually, I gave them all my publishing - and they never even gave me a draw. They were just my partners in this publishing company, never a deal, never a contract, just a handshake and let's do this. So, when he - but he industrious, we were sending out like a hundred tapes a week. Everybody he could think of. And Bob Montgomery heard "Love's Been" and played it for Juice's producer, and she cut it, and they took all the publishing, House of Gold Music. But it was, you know, but I made it in the business, and Harold actually got me a record deal, and I sung records.

1:31:21 Blackmon: Before we go there, let me ask you, from the time you signed with House of Gold Music till you got the Juice Newton cut, how much time was there? In between those?

1:31:31 Burr: You know what, I misspoke. This is the timeline: Harold started taking me in to do demos, he got me a record deal with his friends, Tommy West and Terry Cashman, they ran Lifesong Records. That had Henry Gross and Jim Croce. So they did a record on me. I have a record called "Matters of the Heart" and right after the record came out, they folded the record company. Typical. So, Harold said, let's keep looking for a record deal but in the meantime, you keep writing, we'll demo, and we'll see if we can get a cut while we're looking for another record deal. That's when we went into the studio, cut "Love's Been a Little Bit Hard on Me" and "Make My Life With You," the number one Oak Ridge Boys song, and that was when he sent it. So I got that record deal in '77, '78, made the record, and it wasn't until - and the record company probably folded in '80? And we did demos and demos and demos until finally, Juice Newton cut "Love's Been" and we gave it to House of Gold in '82.

1:32:56 Blackmon: So at that time when you're working with Harold Kleiner, are you solo-writing? Is he hooking you up to co-write with anybody in New York?

1:33:04 Burr: No, I've never - at that point, I had never co-written with anybody, I was back to being an electrician, and I would take the company van against orders and drive down to New York City at night and go to a studio called Counterpoint, owned by Jerry Ragovoy who wrote "Time Is on My Side" for The Stones and "Piece of My Heart" for Janis Joplin. We would go up in his studio and cut these demos and they were all solo writes until Bob Montgomery invited me to come down to Nashville and meet Don Henry. I had never co-written before.

1:33:46 Blackmon: And when you would go to Counterpoint Studio, did Harold Kleiner provide the musicians, or were you just doing acoustic work tapes? How was that?

1:33:57 Burr: No, I'd walk in with a full band and it was all the top guys. It was Hugh McCracken on guitar and Andy Newmark on drums. Andy Newmark played on "Double Fantasy." Hugh McCracken played on "Double Fantasy." These were the guys that I walked in to play with in my demo sessions.

1:34:17 Blackmon: Unbelievable. And Kleiner, he wasn't giving you a job, but he was paying for musicians and the studio time, or?

1:34:23 Burr: Our friend Irwin Bailey was our investor and he would put up the money. He would go to Atlantic City and I would sit by the phone. If he had a good night, we'd do demos. If he didn't, we'd have to wait. Irwin used to say to me if I want to go to Atlantic City by road, they'd send a car. If I want to go by air, they'll send a helicopter. If I want to go by boat, they'd dig me a canal. *(laughing)*

1:34:54 Blackmon: *(laughing)* That's old-school music business stuff right there.

1:34:56 Burr: Yeah, so that's when we used to do demos. He had a good night at the craps table, we did a demo.

1:35:05 Blackmon: I just want to think, before we wrap up today about this era before we get into the cuts in Nashville, can you share anything about those early - one thing I did, you were working as an electrician this whole time, that you were in bands?

1:35:23 Burr: Yes.

1:35:26 Blackmon: So when you start going to New York, is there anything you can share about what you learned being in a studio with pro musicians for the first time and writing solo and making demos and to pitch and working with an experienced A&R executive?

1:35:46 Burr: Well, what was really interesting and really influential for me is Harold knew what he knew and knew what he didn't know, and he didn't know shit about music. When I would go out to do harmonies, he would say okay, it's time to do the harmonics. He didn't even know what they were called. So, when I walked in a studio, I was the one saying maybe the drums could do this, maybe the bass could do this, no one told me I'm not supposed to. So right from the beginning, every demo I ever did sounded exactly the way I wanted it to sound. I never came out of a session going why did they do that to my song, like I hear so many people say in the beginning. I walked in there with this song and I walked out with a piece of shit because they wouldn't listen to me. Right from the bat, for some reason, Hugh McCracken said "what do you think I should play" and it was amazing. Right from the back, hearing the headphones and hearing my song played by those guys, it was amazing. To come into a session and see a thirty-piece orchestra to put an orchestration in one of my songs. It was like -

1:36:57 Blackmon: For a demo?

1:37:00 Burr: No, this was when they did my record. In '78 when I got to do my album. But the sensation was there to be able to, you know, Harold put his name on as the producer, but his idea of producing was turning to me, going "tell them what to do." You know? It was a great learning experience to see how that all worked and the professionalism of it, and there wasn't a lot of it that translated once you got down to Nashville because it certainly wasn't a number system, it was pretty much just whoever was the leader wrote out a chart with the chords. God helped them. If I walked in - I mean, those guys were so good, that if I walked in and said I want to try this a step higher, they would just play it and transpose it, look at an A and go okay, B. And they'd just play it flawless.

1:38:00 Blackmon: I'm sorry, you would play it and they would write it out like bass clef and treble clef? They would write out - or would they just write out kind of a chord, write the chords out. How would that work?

1:38:11 Burr: They would write out the measures with the chords on the measures, you know. G for half a bar to the F, and like that. It was all done before I got there because I would record it on a cassette and send it to Harold, Harold would give it to say, Hugh McCracken, Hugh McCracken would walk in and hand out the sheets, just like we do here. You know, back then it was still like here except instead of numbers, it was actual measures with the numbers written on the measures.

1:38:40 Blackmon: And the session players, these top New York session players, were open to this young new writer and just wanted to help and were really great?

1:38:52 Burr: Yeah, I mean, you know what all the documentaries - hell, we know some of them, the people that used to be (unintelligible - 1:38:59) like the Wrecking Crew in LA. They would do six sessions a day and one would be Sonny and Cher but then it would be this kid that no one ever heard of and then it would be a commercial. They don't care, just pay me, and I'll play. Just

put the chart in front of me and turn the red light on. That was their job, so for me, I'm sure I was the afternoon session and at night, they would play in with The Stones.

1:39:25 Blackmon: Unbelievable.

1:39:26 Burr: It was unbelievable, the access you would have because it was just work for them. Call the Union, send a drummer, oh, they sent Andy Newmark because he had three hours free and didn't want to not make 150 bucks.

1:39:50 Blackmon: This is a great place to stop and pick up with your transition to Nashville tomorrow. I'm going to stop my recording right now.