THE VERDIGRIS PROJECT

KBMF & BUTTE-SILVER BOW ARCHIVES

MICHAEL GAMBLE

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Oral History Transcript of Michael Gamble

Interviewer: Clark Grant
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[00:01:15]

CLARK GRANT: Would you mind saying and spelling your name just for a check?

MIKE GAMBLE: My name is Michael Gamble. M I C H A E L, G A M B L E.

GRANT: All right, then I guess we can begin. Were you born in Butte?

GAMBLE: I was born in Yakima, Washington in November of 1941. And I came here when I was about two years old. So I don't remember anything other than Butte.

GRANT: And where did you live when you first arrived in Butte?

GAMBLE: About four blocks from here, my original house here, on - what is the name of that - about four blocks from here, is all I can say. From here, I lived with our parents, and then I went to Emerson School.

GRANT: And what did your parents do? What brought them to Butte?

[00:02:09]

GAMBLE: My father was a traveling salesman who sold all sorts of items. And also, he was involved in what they call the punch board business, which was a gambling device that you put on bars and you punch the punches out and you won prizes, which were in the back bar. And sometimes it was legal. Sometimes it was illegal. And so he would sell the punch boards and then he would sell the prizes that went along with it, like plush animals, or some sort of games or toys or various things they have behind the bar to draw the customer in, to play the punch boards.

But again, it was a form of gambling. So at certain times there would be, the boards would be up and running. And then all of a sudden, the attorney general in Helena would say, no, that's gambling. We got to shut it all down. So the agents would go out and try to shut down the gambling. So one bar would get ahold of the news from somebody, and then they would call six other bars. And six other bars would call the rest of the bars. And then the boards would go under the table. And then when it was done, then they would bring the boards back up. And the police never really paid that much attention to it because they didn't want to be bothered with it. But also in the old Butte police department, it was, let's just say an interesting police department, and then leave it at that.

[00:03:36]

GRANT: Did you ever have many much contact with the police when you were growing up?

GAMBLE: I was, yes. Running around the streets, we were picked up half a dozen times for being out late at night or being, not exactly - being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Usually they would just tell you to get lost, if you were in a bar and you weren't drunk or drinking, but you'd just be in there looking around, if you could slide through the door and stand in the doorway and watch what was going on in some of the old bars Uptown, like the old Four North Main, or The Stope, which was directly across the street from the M and M at one time.

There was a bunch of buildings there. Four North Main was on the street level. And then there was a bar called the Stope Bar. You knew if you could get in there with a few other people that were maybe 18 or 19 years old, maybe you could slide in there and they would give you a glass of beer too. A lot of times they'd put the run on you, but as long as you didn't cause any problems, and you were just part of the furniture, as I used to say, then you could get away with it and you got to see what was actually going on.

There and Finn Town and the East Side, you'd roam around just, you know, as a kid. I was a freshman in high school when I was 13, because my birthday was in November. So I wasn't 14 years old until three or four months. James Dean was still alive when I was a freshman in high school, for a little while. But so, most of the people that I went to school with were a year older than me, in my class, or two years older, or even sometimes three years older than me. So I was very young. But it opened up - being up in high school, I mean, you just took off on the streets and started roaming around and found somebody to roam with, and just, you know, watch and see what was going on. And it was a great time Uptown to bum around, because there was a lot of a lot going on, you know?

[00:05:34]

GRANT: What year would this have been?

GAMBLE: 1955, September of '55. I was a freshman in high school and James Dean died in the end of September, which was kind of like a - well, I don't know how you'd call it - a mark of, you remember those days of certain people who died, who meant a lot to you when you were watching TV or movies. And he was a big star at the time. And then you could identify with him a little bit as the loner guy. You know, James Dean is rebel without a cause, you know.

GRANT: How do you describe Uptown in 1955 to people maybe who have never seen it?

GAMBLE: Well, it was - even in '55, it was extremely busy, you know? Because I mean, there was lots of restaurants, lots of bars, lots of parking. I mean a lot of cars parked. So it was a very busy, busy place Uptown. And there was all sorts of bars and a lot of card games, a lot of gambling, along Park Street. And of course the M and M was, but down, past the Rialto Theater, there was three or four big gambling establishments, drinking bars and poker games that went on day and night. All day and all night, you know?

[00:06:49]

So, you could go in there, again, you could walk in these places, if you didn't, if you kind of just didn't make a scene or didn't, just very quiet. A lot of times they wouldn't notice you and you could just stand there. And you weren't drinking, of course, but you were watching the card games and watching the interaction between a lot of the miners and a lot of the professional card players. Just, you know, just learning the game, whatever game it is. Or watching some of the, somebody was playing music in the bar, I always wanted to come in and excuse me, and watch some of the players play. And there wasn't any, there was a lot of polka bands in Finn Town and there was a lot of older guys that were playing in orchestras, four or five or six piece orchestras, on some of the places Uptown or farther out. And Finn Town or McQueen.

Well, McQueen was way, way far out. And it only had, I think, a McQueen club. I don't think they had any bars there, other than that. And then of course there was Meaderville, which was really, really going. And roaming around there was just like, you know, it was a busy place as far as, you know, small stores. But lots and lots of entertainment and big time restaurants, Rocky Mountain Cafe, and places like that.
So it was a very busy place.

On New Year's Eve, we went out there one time, in '55 or '56. And it was, you know, it was extremely crazy and busy, you know? So it was real, real interesting to go out there and just watch all this going on, you know, with people.

[00:08:23]

GRANT: Can you describe how to get to Meaderville? How would you get there back in the day?

GAMBLE: So you drove all the way out East Park Street, past where the pit is now. And then you would turn off to the left and there was a whole enclave of Meaderville. And then if you went straight out by the Harrison School and turned left, then there was McQueen, out there, which was a beautiful little community of of houses and churches. And I'm sure a few stores and things like that. So there was these little McQueen and then Meaderville, and then coming through there, there was the East Side and Finn Town.

And all these boarding houses where all these people would, and miners or whoever, single men would be, a lot of the miners or single guys would be living. And a lot of them, I mean they would work and they would stay there, but they were gone a lot of times out and about. So there was plenty of business as far as, you know, barrooms and music. They just attracted a lot of that type of thing going on.

GRANT: Is 1955 the same year that the pit began?

GAMBLE: No I don't, somebody would know exactly when the pit started. Maybe it was just going to get started then, I don't know exactly when they started giving up the underground and going to the pits. So I couldn't say that in any way, cause I never worked for the Anaconda Company in Butte. I worked at the Anaconda Smelter for about six months, one time in 1960. And that was enough.

GRANT: That was enough. Just six months.

[00:10:13]

GAMBLE: Well, it was a very, there was a whole lot of smoke dust and it was a very unsafe place. Not so much as underground as far as getting maybe killed, but the air around the the smelter was extremely bad, you know, because there was all roasters and they were cooking and refining, I guess. I don't know, I was just a day laborer there, so they just moved us around to do various things. But it was a huge city in itself, you know? All sorts of places you could go and lose yourself in that, and the smelter. It was a huge, huge business.

GRANT: And how would you get there? How would you go to work? Would you drive yourself?

GAMBLE: You could take a bus over from the bus station that was across the street from the silver house, now. That was the regular big bus station. And you could buy a week's worth of tickets and you could go over there on day shift and come back on the bus and then you would get in your car and you could go home. So you could ride over and back for pretty cheap type, pretty cheap price for $5, I think, for a week's worth of tickets to work at the smelter and back.

[00:11:22]

GRANT: And I know you weren't very, you know, involved directly in mining. You had a different path in life. But I'm curious how cognizant you were of, you know, the culture of mining when you were growing up in Butte, especially being Uptown. I mean, did it permeate every aspect of life?

GAMBLE: Oh yes. Oh yes. I mean, just like in Anaconda. When payday in Anaconda, I think at the smelter was on, maybe on Thursday. But I mean, I don't know when it was here, but I mean, when that payday happened, I mean, that was a big, big deal. I mean, you know, people actually had some money to go buy the groceries or go out and pay their rent. Or go play cards or go get drunk or, you know, or whatever, you know. But it was, they would say something like, something not exactly rude, but "the eagle shits today" you know, or the company, you know, it's payday. So it's money time, every week, you know. Yeah, but it was very interesting to watch all the bars just jammed with people, you know?

GRANT: Yeah. If we could, I'd like to go back to Meaderville real quick. And if you could just describe, you know, say you take that left and you're going into Meaderville, what is it?

GAMBLE: Then there was some mines right there also, with the, you know, the tall, what do you call it?

GRANT: The gallus frames?

GAMBLE: The gallus frames. And then in Meaderville, there was some small bars with poker games. And then there was music clubs. The Rocky Mountain Cafe was there, but there was also, they had a really good band there. And then there was Manila Murphy's bar there and Sam's Club. I wish I could remember all the names of all the places, 'cause we just, we could never get into the the real fancy place, like the Rocky Mountain Cafe. But we would walk into like Sam's Slub and peek around the corner, or Manila Murphy's Club 45, I

think it was.

[00:13:24]

And there was a couple more of them, but I just can't remember all their names now. But there was the old markets, and a lot of the family houses. So it was these little enclaves of - that were basically all of one, one culture, you know? So like Finn Town was just amazing because with all of the polka music. And there's still one building left on the East Side that Kathy Folio owns. That's still there that Andy Larson had for a while. A couple of years ago..

GRANT: Oh yeah, the Helsinki?

GAMBLE: The Helsinki. So there was the Helsinki and there was the Alaska, and there was the Broadway Bar. And headed towards, up by the Finlen, was the Alley Bar. And they all had, you know, accordion players and drummers and people dancing and drinking.

But the main place to meet was the Broadway Bar, because it was such a great big place and Anar and Johnny Keevala played accordion and drums, and then Johnny played the fiddle. But they were very, very good at what they did. And there was long benches along the sides of the walls. And people would sit there. And women would dance with women, you know. Men, didn't of course, but I mean, women, if nobody would ask them to dance, they'd get up and dance the polka together. And it was an amazing place. And New Year's Eve went from New Year's Eve until next day.

I mean, you know, there was still going on. But there was never any severe trouble cause they kept that too a...but both of those guys' wives bartended there. But it was just. It was just a tremendous place to go and watch - people watch. And again, if you didn't act up, if you just had a glass of beer and could watch, they would let you be, you know. Just don't be a smart ass. You know what I mean? Don't be starting any fights. And also, if you were looking for trouble in one of them places, I mean, you could find it soon enough.

[00:15:17]

GRANT: Really?

GAMBLE: So you realized that, you know, at 15 or 16 years old, these guys aren't anything to fool with. I mean, they will knock you down or slap you down real quick. So don't be a wise ass. Or dance with somebody else's wife, at all. Or ask somebody else's wife to dance. I mean, if you were asked to dance, it was by a woman, which they would, sometimes, that would be fine. But I mean, you don't go around there pulling something like that, without getting in trouble.

GRANT: And how distinct were the ethnic neighborhoods? Were there times, you know, even in '55 where you could go somewhere in Butte and not hear English spoken?

GAMBLE: Oh, well, you'd hear English spoken, but I'm glad you mentioned that. A friend of mine, Jimmy McCracken, was three years older than me and he loved language. And he could speak some Serbian and Croatian. And so we would go to a little bar called Evatz's. And he made blood sausage, and he was either, I could never distinguish the two, between exactly the Croatian and the Serbian. And of course there is a whole lot, and a whole lot of

love and hate on both sides of that. But they would sit and talk and he would, he learned, he was very interested in their languages. So he would sit and drink with these guys. And since I was with him, it was okay if I was there, if I just never said anything hardly, because they knew that I was pretty young at 16 years old. But he went on and went to Georgetown University and studied Russian for two or three years at Georgetown University, he was so involved in languages. So he was quite fluent in Russian, but he could speak a lot of, and so he showed me a few old - cause he's the one that showed me how to play guitar in 1957.

He had a Gibson guitar, a Gibson flattop guitar. Now that was something because I mean, I had a rented guitar at $12 a week. $12 a month for lessons. Take lessons and you'd get a guitar that was virtually unplayable, but his Gibson was like a J45 Gibson. And I mean, that was a Cadillac, you know? So I would go over to his house. Well, his parents owned a huge motel out on Harrison Avenue and they delved in the scrap business - George McCracken and company. So they were very well off people, but Jimmy was always a reader and a listener and loved his language. And showed me all sorts of country music, which I wasn't involved in. At that time, I couldn't listen. I saw no, I just didn't, couldn't listen to Hank Snow and Hank Williams at that time. I didn't put it down, but it just wasn't for me.

The old, you know, the Chuck Berry and the Fats Domino and the Eddie Cochran, that's what I was interested in. So it took me a long time to realize just how good the older country was, but it took a lot of years. But at least I got the chance to watch these guys play guitar and sing and there wouldn't be large bands. There'd be two or maybe three people at the most. A lot of times, just two guitars and cowboys singing at the Western Star, which was on East Park Street. The Arizona Hotel was on the corner. And then there was a pool hall, next to that, going east. And then there was the Western Star, which was - excuse me...

GRANT: No problem.

GAMBLE: I'll just turn that stupid thing off.

[00:19:00]

Shut that thing off. God damn, I forgot about it. The Western Star. And then there was another huge bar there, and a lot of those bars were, on the other side of the street, were like the Silver Slipper. And a lot of those were Mexican, a lot of Mexican and Spanish. Not Spanish, but Mexican bars going on down there. So it was full of bars, from the corner of Arizona, all the way down to the curve by the cave, and places like that, where you first were gonna turn and go down into Meaderville. So it was a lot of small little taverns, a lot of taverns, which - just beer and wine. Because a lot of places didn't have liquor licenses.

They just had beer and wine licenses. But there was always somebody playing at one of these little places. On Main Street, the same way. There was a lot of little tiny bars that had little combos, or people just set up and played for a kitty, you know? So you'd sit and watch these things and that's why, when I first started trying to learn how to play guitar, I would sometimes sit in with these people. But I didn't know what the hell I was doing. But luckily there was enough time there where I could make all those mistakes and try to figure out what was going on, trying to learn how to play a country song or a polka, or a standard or something like that. And I didn't know what I was doing, so I would just back off and not play at all, really, but watch them and try to learn the game, I guess.

[00:20:32]

GRANT: Mmm hmm.

GAMBLE: So it gave me some years of, before I started to play in a band that was being paid, which you know, so there was places that you could go, the old Elk Park Inn, on the top of the Hill over there, that's not no longer there. But we played the Elk Park Inn, or at Cactus Jack's, over by Whitehall. And the Alibi Inn, way out on Harrison Avenue, where these little end places. I wasn't in the union. So if you weren't in the union, you weren't allowed to play.

GRANT: The musician's union?

GAMBLE: The musician's union. And it was very expensive. And you had to have a, I mean, you had to go through a whole bunch of stuff to even get the union card. So as kids, we just stayed away from it altogether. But they had a BA, or a business agent. He would go around on Friday nights and Saturday nights looking for places that didn't have union musicians. So we were always trying to hide from him. Because at that time, the union was very, very strong.

GRANT: And what would he do if he found you?

[00:21:30]

GAMBLE: Well, he wouldn't do anything to you, but he would just tell the owner, 'these kids can't play here. Because they're not union, and you're not paying them a union wage, because they're not even union members'. So it was that type of a thing. And. It was all, and the musician's union at the time, it was a good thing. But they didn't realize that a lot of the older guys, they might play once or twice a month. We were out there, what do call - Young Turks, just trying to learn the game and play. But we didn't want to get involved in anything like a union contract or join the union or anything like that. That was the farthest thing from our mind. We couldn't even afford gas usually to get to this place or any decent equipment to even play with. You know, you were scrounging - a drum set was from six different pieces of drums. And it was held together with, you know, wire or masking tape or something like that. And a guitar, wasn't any good, or an amp, I mean, you know, it was just, I mean, we're talking about the very, very basic. So it was kind of a throw together thing, but you got to go out and play a little of these places.

[00:22:35]

And that's the first time I ever saw a guy shot was in, at the Elk Park Inn, in March of 1960. The bar was closing up and the bartender threw us out, or asked us to leave. And these other two guys didn't want to leave. And the guy swung at the bartender, and the guy shot him twice in the stomach, with a little 25 caliber revolver. Or automatic. I don't remember which it was, but luckily it was a 25 caliber and he lived.

GRANT: He lived.

GAMBLE: But it happened so fast. Bam, bam! And then this guy just falls down and you pick up his shirt and he's got two tiny little holes in him. And I was standing - not right next to the guy, but awful close, you know, because it was just a bunch of us standing there. And

this guy, younger man, swinging at this - 20 year old swinging at this older bartender and he wasn't going to take it. He just shot him. And that was the end of that job at the Elk Park Inn. But the Elk Park Inn, all those places, there was no law at all because it was way out there at the top of Elk Park Road. Or Cactus Jack's, way out there - halfway to Whitehall. A lot of these places, there was no sheriff, or no cop way out there. It was just, you handle it yourself. If you were the owner against some type of a problem, or a bar fight or whatever.

GRANT: So nothing came of that, the owner wasn't...

[00:23:55]

GAMBLE: I don't think anything ever came of it because I don't think the guy ever pressed charges. And I think he would just claim self-defense. And I think that was, because we were, I was 18 then I guess. Yeah, it was in March of 1960. All I remember, if a person was interested, he could, I can remember the date very well, with something like that. And it was in the paper next day, about the shooting at the Elk Park Inn, which is no longer there because the road circle's way around now, to Helena. So where the Elk Park Inn is way up on the Hill, and it's not abandoned, but I think somebody built a house up there on top of it. But it was just one of those little places that a lot of the people from Elk Park, who had ranches or homes up there, but they all went to the Elk Park Inn, I guess.

GRANT: And you said it was the first time you saw someone shot.

GAMBLE: Yeah.

GRANT: There were other times?

GAMBLE: Yes. Oh yeah. Yeah. There was another time at a bar called Jerry's Corner. And then there was another one at Harrington's Lounge, later on. The one was in the seventies. Maybe both of them were in the 1970s. Those things, you know, they just, everything's going fine and all of a sudden, over a pool game or over something or other... but there was a family called the McKnight's and one of those young McKnight kids got shot in Harrington's Lounge, which is no longer there now. I don't know what is in there now - Harrington's...

GRANT: I've heard of the McKnights before. They're kind of infamous, right?

[00:25:26]

GAMBLE: Well, there was two families, the McKnight's, and there was a whole bunch of McKnight's, and there was another family. And they all ran together. And they were tough customers. There was a whole bunch of children in both families. The McKnight's and the...but one kid, Joe, he got shot also at a house in the '70s. And then this other boy got shot -

GRANT: Killed?

GAMBLE: Joe got shot dead. And also, there was a shooting up there by the Cabin Bar, which was right next to -

GRANT: - to the Carpenters Hall.

GAMBLE: To the Carpenters Union Hall. And Gary and Larry, Gary and Larry Hendricks hung out in there. And that's when the police killed Larry on the corner of Montana and - Montana and -

GRANT: Granite?

GAMBLE: Granite, yeah. Because they were after the two of them really bad and apparently something happened there on the corner. I wasn't at that one, but the Cabin Bar was another really, really tough, tough bar. And Gary and Larry Hendricks and all these guys hung out there and that, got to be pretty crazy.

[00:26:37]

And they tried to do something with Larry, and either he fought back or pulled a gun on them, nobody really knows what happened there. And then they shot him. And then I forgot all about the Cabin Bar, which was another...and the old Terminal Bar, which is right where they do all that copying, and all that...

GRANT: Oh, Insty Prints?

GAMBLE: Insty Prints. That's where the Terminal Bar was, which was another wild, wild, wild, wild bar.

GRANT: Really?

GAMBLE: We played in there a lot too. Yeah. And there was a lot of fun in there, but there was a lot of problems in there. And they were always trying to bust the owner, Rex Uls, in there, because there was a whole lot of stuff going on in there as far as illegal - nothing like, nothing like meth, but there was a lot of marijuana, and there was a lot of what they call zip, or, it was speed basically.

GRANT: Okay.

[00:27:45]

GAMBLE: But it wasn't -

GRANT: Sounds like speed - zip.

GAMBLE: Zip, that type of thing. But it wasn't the type of stuff that they make today.

GRANT: Yeah.

GAMBLE: But there was a whole lot of a drug called, it was synthetic morphine.

GRANT: Methadone?

GAMBLE: No, and they gave it to cancer patients. And when that hit Butte in the early seventies, a lot of people got hooked on, well I can't think of what it was. I guess I stayed

with the, you know, drinking some beer and smoking some weed. And that was about it for me. I never got involved in any of that, in that hard narcotics. But it hit pretty hard here and in Missoula. And a lot of places. But nothing like, nothing like the meth mess of the -

GRANT: It's a scourge.

GAMBLE: Yeah, but it was the same, well, the old trucking song, 'taking little white pills and my eyes are open wide'. Well, that's what people took years ago was, you know, diet pills and things like that. Even country guys took that. They couldn't stand marijuana, but they took diet pills to keep them up for hours.

[00:28:52]

Dilaudid, was what they used to have around here a lot...

GRANT: Oh, yeah.

GAMBLE: And a lot, a lot. Because people could get scripts of Dilaudid from a pharmacy. And they would claim that they had severe pain from whatever. So once they got a script of them, they would sell the pills, you know, just like Oxycontin is today. The same type of a thing.

GRANT: Yeah. I'd love to hear a little bit more about the Cabin Bar, if you have any more to share, just because it's so close to home.

GAMBLE: Well, the woman who ran it then was Sis, oh I can't remember Sis' last name though. Sis. If I didn't write this stuff down, I can't remember it all, but that was a really - it changed hands two or three different times, but it was it was a great bar. But it was pretty, pretty goddamn tough. And then when Larry got killed outside there on the corner, right where the office equipment is now, Bill Lee's office equipment, I think he got shot right around there. But I can't think of Sis...Sis Patterson owned the bar at the time. But it changed hands two or three different times, because after a while, it was very, very difficult to work in. There was a bartender. If you didn't like it, if you were a customer, you could leave. But I mean, when you're a bartender in a place like that, we were taking your life in your hands, sometimes, at the old Cabin Bar.

[00:30:14]

GRANT: And did you ever play music in there?

GAMBLE: Never did play in there. In the old Terminal, we played a lot in there, years ago. And in room, in the Rumpus Room - in 1961, we started to play in the Rumpus Room, which was downstairs, right on the corner of Park and Main, where the bank is now. That was a downstairs bar that was real popular with piano and drums. And then it turned into a rock and roll bar with Chris Martin. And another guy ran it. It was a dangerous place in a way, because there was only one exit out of there. It was, you had to go down these stairs into the bar. So there was no rear entrance, because the theater was above you.

GRANT: This is the Rialto?

GAMBLE: Yeah. Well, there was an apartment building, an office building on the corner, and that little grocery store there, where the bus came. And then there was the Rialto Theater, and down the street was Trip's Gun Shop, down in the basement. So there was - and a Chinese restaurant in there, also.

I mean, there was so much stuff jammed together in these places, you know. And across the street was the Chili King, of course, right next to where that cab company was, and where there's a restaurant now, down below. Maybe that was where the cab company was. And then there was the Chili King Bar - Chili King was opened after the Rumpus Room got over with, people would always go there, or the M and M.

GRANT: Okay. And the Rumpus Room?

[00:31:49]

GAMBLE: There was two Rumpus Rooms. The first one lasted from '61 to '66, and then the other Rumpus Room moved into the alley entrance, where Whitehead's... that was Room 71, that Chris Martin had. But before that, he rented a place in the alley, which was a huge hall upstairs, that you don't even know is there, that the woman from Whitehead's owns. And maybe, I think she had a dance studio up there, later on. But when Chris Martin ran the Rumpus Room, the second one that was the alley entrance, and there was some hellacious fights in that alley, from 1966 into probably '70, '71. And then he opened up Room 71, which used to be the Ocean Bar. It was the Ocean Bar at one time. And then it was some other bar we played when it was there. And then it was Room 71. And we played there a few times. That was the end of Chris' bar business. And then he leased it out to somebody and lost his liquor license in the interim, somehow or other, that the guy took it over and something happened with the liquor license, and Chris lost the liquor license. But he was quite a guy 'cause he, that was the first rock and roll bar, the Room 71, I mean the Rumpus Room, on the corner of Park and Main.

[00:33:24]

GRANT: What were most of the other bars doing, if it wasn't polka? Like you said, it was piano and drums...

GAMBLE: Piano bars, like the Ranch House was a piano bar. The Acoma, the original Acoma, I think over there by where Penny's was on Park and...those little side streets.

GRANT: Dakota?

GAMBLE: Yeah. On Park and Dakota, there was a - and the Cherry Bar was in there and that was quite a popular bar. And then there was the Atlantic Bar, which at one time was advertised as the longest bar in the world, because it went from Park Street all the way down to where, to the next block where that big, where that new parking lot is now.

GRANT: Really? It went that far?

GAMBLE: It went that far at one time, I guess. And then they cut it off, but it was at one time advertised as the longest bar in the world. Because the Atlantic was a huge was drawing bar, that was - I was only in there a couple little times, but not when it was the longest bar. I

was just in there in, pop in there in the fifties.

GRANT: Where did you first take lessons when you started playing guitar? You said you were renting one.

[00:34:29]

I rented one at Tretheway's Music, which was on West Park Street to about where, just past Riley's Meat Markets. There was Norma's Doghouse in there, there was a little restaurant there called Norma's Doghouse. And there was a music store there called Tretheway's. And then later on, they moved down to East Park. Just down from the big furniture place that went out of business.

GRANT: Yeah, Rudolph's.

GAMBLE: Rudolph's. Just down from Rudolph's was Tretheway's second store.

GRANT: Okay.

GAMBLE: But you could rent a guitar and take lessons and there was an amazing woman in Tretheway's in 1958, on West Park, who taught guitar. And she really helped me a lot because then I started to learn not so much how to perfectly read music, but she taught me how to - you could buy a music book and in the music book was this circle of chords. And it taught you how to transpose from one key to another. And that's why I always tell some of these younger players, I says, 'if you can learn your circle of chords, you can learn how to transpose a song. And you can learn how to accompany somebody. Or if you want to sing a song, but it's too high or too low for you, you can learn how to transpose it into a key that more fits your vocal abilities'.

[00:35:52]

And when I'm playing with some of these younger bands, younger people, I always say, if you can just learn your circle of chords, you can learn how to transpose. Because when I'm playing with you, if you're playing in E flat, well if you're playing in like, key of C, I can transpose it from C into E flat if I have to. But of course, most of them, these bands, unless you're a horn player, were going to play in E flat or B flat or A flat.

But if you're in the key of E, I can transpose it into E flat, or I can transpose it into G. Because I know what chords go in what key, which is really important. A columnist once asked a Nashville session player, if he could read music. And he says, 'I can read music, but not enough to hurt my playing'. Which means you can learn, but you don't want to learn how to do it perfectly by rote. You want to leave something in there of your own. But that's what, that what takes the time, is to be able to know when to play and how much to play, when not to play. All those - certain etiquettes like that, I try to tell these people, you've got to learn, 'what am I doing wrong'? I says, 'well, you're not doing everything wrong, but you've got to watch the singer and the song, and you've got to back him up and know when to stay way back and let him sing and perform.

And then certain times he might want you to solo or he might want the piano solo. Then you got to start playing rhythm while the piano player is playing, or the horn player is playing. Or

if he wants you to play a solo, but then you got to know how much time to play. And then back off, bring everything back in together. You just can't close your eyes and take right off'. And I mean, I would have that with people, and I say, 'you're playing way, way too much. Less. Less'.

[00:37:41]

GRANT: When did you get in your first band? When did you start actually getting this experience, building this skill set?

GAMBLE: Well, my first band, I had my first band in 1959, which was a piano, and I was the guitar player, and then a piano player and a drummer. And so I did the singing and playing the guitar and the piano player played anything that was there, as far as the piano in these bars. Which was a total nightmare, because they were old, upright pianos, never in tune. So I had to tune to the piano that was there. And most bars, they never ever paid anybody to tune the piano. So it was like, there you go. You're stuck with a piano and some of the keys worked. Some of them didn't, you know, that type of thing. But you set up in a corner. And they would get you a glass of beer or something like that, or whatever. I never, I was never one to drink when I played, because it was enough of a chore just to focus on trying to play the music little bit, that there was of it, without, you know, without getting drunk. Other people, as soon as they got on stage and they had a free beer, well, oh, forget it.

GRANT: Yeah.

GAMBLE: So you're playing with people that right away you learned, this is not going so well because the piano, the drummer's draggin' and the piano player's drunk, you know, it's like, this is, you know, you know...

GRANT: Did that band have a name?

GAMBLE: Yeah, it was called the Twilighters. I've still got the sign, 'cause I bought a, friend of mine who was an artist and he made a sign for me. And I would put it up in front of the bass drum, you know, like...

GRANT: Very cool.

GAMBLE: Oh God. I mean 1959, my little band. But there was a real professional band called the Renegades. So, they were really, really good players, the bass player and the guitar player. And so I would follow them around and drive them nuts because they knew how to play Chuck Berry. They knew how to play rock and roll. I mean, they could do it all. And so finally, my drummer in 1960, they had an older guy who was playing drums for them who had a day job and he couldn't make it anymore. So I lost my drummer to them. And so finally, later on that year, I got to start to play rhythm guitar with the Renegades, which was a huge step up for me. Because then I got to be in the band and learn a lot more. But I was always open to learning and criticism. And I got criticized a lot. I mean, it's like, if somebody doesn't call you on things, you're never really going to really learn, well, that's not nice. You're not here to be nice. You're here to learn.

[00:40:20]

GRANT: Yeah.

GAMBLE: And I mean, they're not trying to crush you, but they're trying to say, 'you don't know enough, you're going to have to open up your eyes and pay attention to this, because this is the business that you're in'. So I really learned a lot.

And then finally, the lead guitar player who was really good, after about five or six months, in early 1961, yeah in early 1961, he went to California. So the band that was the Renegades then was Bob Kovacich, and Blankenship and Bobby Bluet, and then they needed me to play guitar, but I wasn't up to it.

I mean, I could do it. I could play a little, but they wanted me to play like the original lead guitar player, who was really, really really good...

GRANT: Now was that Cliff Champeau, that went to California?

GAMBLE: That was Cliff Champeau. And he was very, very good. And I wasn't. So it was it was a real struggle for a couple of years to even gain any type of a foothold, and I'll be the first to admit it. I was, I had one hell of a time, you know. So I finally started to get a little better, but it took a long time because I'm not a natural, flowing musician. So it took a long time to just to try to learn things that can't be taught in rock and roll. Or any type of thing, when you play phil music, there's no actually notes that are written for that. I mean, you know, you can listen to it, but I mean, you really can't, it's not written down enough. How do you play that slur? How do you play a Chuck Berry thing? Or an Eddie Cochran thing, or the Ventures or Santo and Johnny Sleepwalk. I mean, you can hear it, but a lot of that stuff, you just have to go over it and over it and over it. And finally, slowly, it starts to seep in. Unless you are a very talented, natural ability to it.

GRANT: What was it that set the Renegades apart? Was it Cliff? Or was it just that they played rock?

[00:42:19]

GAMBLE: Well they were the only band. There was no other band in town that played rock and roll. At all. So it was either country music, polka music or old standards, you know, that was it. And a lot of the older guys were not really, I mean, this was not music to them. And you ran into that a lot in the fifties.

GRANT: At bars?

GAMBLE: Well, not in bars. But anywhere you went, the older musicians, most of them, 'what are you doing, kid? There's only three chords to that song and that's not'... But a lot of them couldn't do it themselves. It was one of those things where it was so simple, as far as chord structure, they couldn't grasp that it was more than that. It was the feel and the rhythm. And it's like, how come a blues song has only got three changes to it? Yeah. But they're the right three changes. And when you hear somebody like Albert King play it, then you know, I'll Play The Blues For You, when you hear Albert play that song, you know, how do you do that? Well, that is it. I mean, there's a guy who can really, I mean, to me, he was one of the main blues players, electric blues players who ever lived, was Albert King. I mean, I just, I've

got a lot of his stuff, but just amazing player. You know, Freddie King and BB King, just totally different styles, but very marvelously talented men, you know?

[00:43:37]

GRANT: As the Renegades matured, you found your foothold?

GAMBLE: A little bit. Yeah. But it took a long time. Even when we did the very first album, it was like, it's there, if a person can stand to listen to it. I can't, you know, because it's like - it's embarrassing because it just, we had to do in like six hours and some of the tempos are so fast or some of the leads are so unremarkable. We did have a real talented young man called Jerry Emmett who played saxophone on it. And he was very talented, who ended up being the drummer. Because then we lost Bluet for some, I'm not going to go into details about that, but he couldn't play anymore in a bar. So Emmett took over the drums and in one month, he was amazing.

But in some ways it was the worst thing that ever happened to him because he got involved in, and he was very, very young, and he got shot in Missoula in 1984 at a house party. But by that time he was virtually homeless. But a tremendous talent. But just, just don't hold anything back. He moved to Missoula in the mid to late seventies and played a lot over there. But he lived a very hard life and got involved in a lot of stuff that, that he should've never got involved in. And then he ended up dead in '84. So we all went over for that. But just another, a loss, tremendously talented. Great horn player and drummer, but not a lot of common sense sometimes.

[00:45:29]

GRANT: And how long did the renegades persist and how many records did you put out?

GAMBLE: Well, we put out the one long play in '64, and then they did a, when Cliff came back from California, he started back with the Renegades. I was way, way too ill at that time to do anything, with a serious disease. So I I dropped out totally and didn't play for a while there, a couple of years. And so they put out a couple of 45s. But cliff put out a 45 in 1959, that was he and a bass player, it's still around. If somebody, every once in a while, somebody will find a copy of Black Jack and Swing Little Carol. It was a 45 that they played around here locally is all, they never got a lot of... but they played a lot over in Anaconda at the 919 Club, which was the very first rock and roll club in Anaconda. I would go over and watch them over there. Or help them haul equipment, or just, you know, just be a gofer. You know, just to be around the aura, to chase around just like - but again, all that gave me an insight into what to do and what not to do. Or how to be, just shut up and try to watch and learn and not be a loud mouth.

And try to learn what's going on, but don't push it too far. Just try to - I would watch somebody play guitar and then I would go home and take that song and try to figure out, what was he doing up there on the bandstand that I could break down somehow and figure out and put into a Raw Hide or Rumble, which were two guitar instrumentals of '56 or '57 with Link Ray and the Raymen. Maybe you're familiar with them. Okay. See I can talk to you about this, because you've heard about Link Ray and the Raymen. You say that now, and they say, 'is that true? Link Ray...' And I think Link Ray is still alive.

Because, I mean, he would be like 85 years old, 86 now. But I mean, that was the first kind of distorted guitar type of a feel, of Link Ray and the Raymen.

[00:47:43]

And there was a couple other guys that played around that time that did rockabilly that were tremendous, tremendous players.

GRANT: After the Renegades, were you in other bands?

GAMBLE: Oh yeah. Then I started playing with all sorts of people. Playing in bars with keyboard players. At the Rumpus Room a lot, like six nights a week. He would hire entertainment in the summertime. He would hire really good traveling musicians from Spokane to come over and play. And they were really good trios and four-piece bands. But in the wintertime, it got real slow, so he could hire us. So we would work six nights a week as a trio, for $150 each, a week, you know, which

GRANT: That's not too bad, huh?

GAMBLE: Well, it wasn't bad, but if you're playing six nights a week and then a lot of times, the guys were working day jobs too, or whatever, you know? So it's like, it got to be, you better take a nap after work, because you got to go play till two o'clock in the morning. But you learned a lot six nights a week. And then you got to see these traveling bands come in, that he would hire. And then a lot of times you ended up playing casuals. I mean, you know, wedding receptions, private parties, class reunions.

So what really helped me out is playing with all these different people. Because every time was a new lesson plan, a new lesson plan for me to try to learn how to play with this keyboard player, or that horn player, or this band. And some of the bands they had their own arrangements of things. And you had to slip in and fill in for a week with them or something like that, but you had to learn it exactly the way they played it. Okay. So if you're going to do a song, a certain song that you played with other bands, it's totally different the way they did it. Because I mean, they're usually maybe the same changes, but it's a completely different tempo or it's a completely different key or like - so it really showed you gotta be able to just jump from one to the other and pay attention. Because you were just here as a side man for that weekend or - we need you, you can do it because you've got enough smarts to fill in and not take over. And you can pay attention to what we're doing, and we can get through the night. So that helped. So that's when I really helped to be a side man, which is exactly what I am. Just stand back and let them do the front work and sing and do the job. And then just slide out.

[00:50:12]

GRANT: If you're playing six nights a week, are you repeating songs a lot? Or how many songs do you...

GAMBLE: Oh yeah. Yeah. Well, you are. You try to bring as many new ones in a week, but still, a lot of it was really repetitious. Yeah. Or you had to try to get three or four new tunes every week, you know, so you'd have to rehearse in the afternoon, if you could find time or a little bit, you know, try to do that. But a lot of times you played a lot of the same set lists or

whatever, you know. And that wasn't good either. So a lot of times, I would quit a band just to say, this is enough. We're just going over the same fodder constantly. So I'm going to go with somebody else.

I was teaching guitar, at the time, at Len Waters. So, I had that going for me. Plus I was either single or married with no children. It was like, I could do what I wanted to do. I didn't have a wife and four or five kids, or something like that. So I had choices, you know. The only leak I had was buying guitars. You know, something like that.

GRANT: Well it's handy then that you're working at the music store.

GAMBLE: Yeah. Well, you worked at - Len Waters was the music store because they had all the best instruments. So they had the Martin and the Gibson and the Fender and the Gretsch, and they had all the top instruments. Tretheway's didn't have the really good instruments, like Len Waters did. And I had a charge account there -

GRANT: Oh wow.

GAMBLE: So I would be able to charge my instruments.

GRANT: Can you describe a little bit about Len Waters? What the store was like, the layout, and what happened in the basement?

[00:51:37]

GAMBLE: Well, it was a full line music store, so he had, it was Len, but he was lucky enough to have a manager salesman called Art Green, who was a really good horn player on the road when he was younger. He and I got along, somewhat, Art Green and I, but he was very good at what he did. But Len could leave everything to them. So there was Art Green as the lead salesman. And then there was an Ethel Emerson, and an Alpha Mayo, and they did, and Ethel did the books and Alpha Mayo handled all the sheet music, for all the music teachers. And then there was Eva Lottarette used to sell all the records. So he had a team that was always there. So Len was out on the road just, you know, he was there sometimes, sometimes he wasn't. But he had this engine running, that he could totally leave alone. Because he was never in the store, hardly at all.

GRANT: Really.

GAMBLE: But he knew how well it was...then he had a bookkeeper come in at night. And then there was a guy by the name of Paul Bingaman, who worked as the janitor, the cleaner and did all sorts of odd jobs. And then they had a tremendous, and the basement was all organs and pianos. That was all just stuffed full of organs and pianos. And then the loading dock and the alley, see they could move in and out, and in and out, with organs and pianos. And that was a huge job moving them, in those days with those goddamn uprights, you know? I mean, well, you know, just monsters to try to move around. But organs were really big because somebody always wanted an organ in their house. The woman wanted the organ in their house and they would play organ. They would take lessons and then they would trade their organ in and get another organ.

So the main floor was all sheet music, records, and small goods. And the upstairs had a tier

of, well, you know, of three small rooms for teaching. And then that whole front part of it, that overlooked the main floor, that was all drums and guitars. And some band instruments, was all up in there. But it was all out of sight. So in days like this, when everything is displayed in a main floor, it was all hidden. You had to go upstairs to see, if you wanted to see anything, you had to go upstairs and they would unpack all this stuff.

I mean, you couldn't see anything at all as far as the way it's, what's the word, shown now or...But they did a tremendous business there, and he had five or six, five or six people working there all the time for him. Very busy store. Tretheway's did okay, but they didn't have the business, or the the goods that - but then again, good stores like - there was a really good store in Bozeman, and that guy was way ahead of his time. Because as soon as some of the big amps started to come out, like Marshall and Cream and Hendrix and those people started using amps like that, they were in Missoula. And they were in Bozeman, but they couldn't, at Len Waters I'd said, these amps are really selling now, because that's what Clapton's using, that's what Hendrix is using.

That's what a lot of these British bands are using. And they never did ever get any Marshalls in, which was real stupid. They only ordered what they, when somebody wanted something, they ordered it.But I mean, you had to have it in stock. You had to have it there that you could touch it. And if you could touch it, a lot of times you'd buy it.

GRANT: Sure.

GAMBLE: But I mean, when it was - well, we can get it for you in six weeks, they'll go somewhere else.

GRANT: They'll just drive to Missoula.

GAMBLE: And that's what happened. They'd go drive to Missoula or Bozeman.

[00:55:30]

And so, and that guy in Bozeman now -

GRANT: Is that Music Villa?

GAMBLE: Music Villa. But at that time it was Fred Decker, the old man, and Paul was just a kid then. But now it's all Paul at Music Villa, and he's running still a full line music store, which is amazing to be able to do in this world. With catalogs and 45, 50% off from retail.

I mean, it's like it's killer to try to compete in any market like that. Even for small goods. You know, guitar straps or strings or picks or horns or reeds or sheet music. And now sheet music is basically, I mean, I've got stacks and stacks of old fake books and sheet music that I can't bring myself to throw away. And it's all on the computer now.

GRANT: Uh huh.

GAMBLE: It's not heart breaking. It's just the way it is. But I've saved all that, and all those fake books, you can buy those illegal fake books that you would take with you on a job, if somebody requested Blue Moon. Or if they requested, you know, something else, you had the

fake book and at least you could scan the chords and then you could somehow pull it off, you know?

But now it's like they have these little tablets and things like that. I was playing with Kenny Rich a couple of years ago. And the steel player has this little tablet that I was mentioning in the song and he just hit a button or two and looked it right up. And he says, 'there's the lyrics. And there's the chords to it'. I says, 'well, you don't need me then, to tell you how it goes, or what the changes would be, other than you're going to have to transpose that. Because it's in that key, you're going to have to transpose it to a different key, but whatever'. But it's all just technology, you know, even in my little bit, my little world it's amazing.

GRANT: It really is. Yeah. Well, and the man himself, Len, did you have much interaction with him?

[00:57:23]

GAMBLE: Not a lot because you never saw him. I mean, he just left it all to, he had a finely tuned machine there. And then one of the lucky ones that could do that, he didn't have to be there. Because Art was there and all the women were there. And Paul was there. And so it was all just, he would come in and leave. And come in and leave, and come in and leave. And then the bookkeeper would come in at six o'clock and do the books. And they had a huge amount of credit out there, you know, which sometimes is good. Sometimes is bad. But for a long time, it ran real well. And Len lived to be a very old man. Finally, he sold the business to a Dr. Murphy and George Callous, and they half-assed ran it into the ground. And then Jeff Toshahora bought it.

GRANT: Yep.

GAMBLE: And I worked with Jeff a lot playing with him, until he died. But he ran it for a while and then he sold it to Ernie. And it wasn't much when Ernie had it. Ernie Tregidga. And then Ernie finally sold it to -

GRANT: To Marshall -

GAMBLE: To Marshall, who I haven't seen. I don't even know if he's in town though, is he?

GRANT: No, he's in California.

GAMBLE: He's in California.

GRANT: Doing the snowbird thing.

GAMBLE: Okay.

GRANT: Yeah. Yeah.

GAMBLE: I was wondering.

[00:58:33]

GRANT: What were some, I know you played just about every ballroom and place there is in Butte to play. What were some of your favorites, or some highlights, or buildings that...

GAMBLE: Well to be able to the play at the Masonic temple in the basement, was an amazing place to play. But I got to play once with John Raymond and I, and Salvie and Kip McFall. We got to back up a country singer for the Hank Thompson Country Music Show at the Fox theater, or whatever it was called then. Which is called the Motherlode now. But that stage, to be able to play on that stage, I think Kenny played there about a year or two ago. He had a show there one night. And he wanted me to play with him, but I wasn't feeling that well to do it. But to be able to play a stage like that, or the big stage out at the Copper King, those were really, really nice venues. Because you had plenty of room. Instead of your jammed six piece band in a space about the size of this kitchen, you know, where you're cheek to jowl, you can't even hardly move. If you move, somebody else has got to move with you. But to play at the the old Fox, it was the Bow theater, I think when I was a kid, and then it was the Fox, I think. I don't remember now.

But to be able to play on that stage, but Hank Thompson and the Brazos Valley Boys, he was a big, big star in the fifties. And he was marvelous. I mean, as a front man and a singer, I mean, he was - to watch him work, you could see all those older country guys, they could really handle the show. I mean, they had the whole thing of the palm of their hands. They would bring people out.

But this woman that was the opening act, she was amazing because we had 10, maybe 15 minutes of rehearsal. Because she would come in and she'd say, 'now you boys, I'm going to do these four songs or five songs. And I'm just going to use hand language, you know, or tap my foot'. We got no rehearsal. We had to get up there and do it. And Kip and I, and John Raymond was a really good drummer. I mean he really still, now he does all sorts of shows. I think now. Salvie was Salvie. He was not paying attention the way exactly the way he should have been, but Kip and I, Kip - he played around here for years. Kip McFall. Bow and Kip, or Kip and Bow. They played around here for years as a duo, and did a tremendous amount of work in Bozeman and on the road. But they played in Butte a lot and they were very talented guys. Because they could play almost anything, you know.

We worked with her and I didn't want to let her down. I was so scared that we'd let her down up on stage. Because it almost made me cry, because I was like, 'Holy Christ. I know the songs you want, but I don't know what tempo you want, or what's going on'. She says, 'that's all right'. She says, 'I'll handle it'. And she fronted the whole thing and we pulled it off for about half an hour. But it was, to do it with no rehearsal and not make a major screw up. We pulled it off, but it was scary to have to do something like that. I get a little emotional thinking about it now because it was like, I didn't want to let her down, you know? But she was really good

But they would just come in and play. But Hank and his band, I mean, shit, man. They were playing six nights a week. So they knew the show, where this one was like, you know, you're flying by the seat of your pants, you know. Where it's like, you're just up on stage and saying, okay, the key of E, and it goes like this. But what kind of introduction do you want me to do? Or when do you want me to take the lead? Or how do you want me to end this? I mean, you know, without really making a mess of it?

[01:02:18]

But we got it done, but I mean, just those times was scary. It was good for you, but it forced you out there to breathe deep and hang on to the seat of your pants. You know what I mean? To do it, you know? I got a little emotional.

GRANT: Oh yeah, oh I understand.

GAMBLE: But she was, but those were the type of venues where it really was fun to play. But the bands that played next door, at the basement of that place.

GRANT: Oh, the Masonic Temple?

GAMBLE: The Masonic Temple. I mean, you know, because everybody played there. I mean, from Eddie Cochran and Gene Vincent and His Blue Caps played there and Jerry Lee Lewis, and some really talented people. But they would come in and they would do the show and then they'd be gone.

And, you know, they had their guy running the box office and you'd pay a dollar to get in. And then there'd be a coke and pop stand down the basement. But they would tear the shit out of places like that because they were very - and once in a while, a band would come and play at the Gardens. And that was a beautiful venue, was at the Gardens. Huge band stand right in the center. But I never ever played at the Gardens.

GRANT: But you went there plenty of times?

GAMBLE: Oh yeah. Well, went there - a lot of times that's where they would have the big bands play for - not the unions - I never went to any of those things where they would have the senior ball or the senior -

GRANT: Prom, or...

GAMBLE: Yes, those types of things were a lot of times played out there. Or once in a while, Guy Lombardo or somebody like that would come and play out there. And that was a beautiful venue. Yeah.

GRANT: And what about that period in the seventies, you know, when things started to burn? You've seen quite the transformation of this town.

GAMBLE: Yeah. Like the Pennies fire in 1972, I guess it was, that was a really bad one.

[01:04:23]

GRANT: I mean, how many venues that, you know, you have memories of as a kid, either being a fly on the wall, or actually playing music, how many of those are gone?

GAMBLE: Well, yeah, a lot of them, like the Rumpus Room One and Two and the old Cat's Paw or Rumpus Room Two, or Room 71. And then Harrington's Lounge. We used to play in the back room, or I worked a single at Harrington's lounge. And of course the old Terminal Bar. And there's so many of them. But all the old halls that were on the East side, they would

always have wedding receptions at the Runeberg Hall or some of these halls. Or the old McQueen Club, in McQueen. Or the old East Side Club before the, so now the East Side Club and McQueen Club are both out on Continental. But they had a lot of New Year's Eve parties or a lot of wedding receptions at all those little halls. There was a lot of little halls that you would just go in and play wedding receptions or private parties at.

GRANT: And those halls aren't there?

GAMBLE: Oh yeah. They're all gone now. Yeah.

GRANT: Is that something to, do you dwell on it ever, or...

GAMBLE: Not really. I guess it just, they were there. And then all of a sudden, when the company went through, you know, it just wiped a lot of that, just wiped it out. But it was employment, you know. Just like the pit is now. And now it's like, you can almost see an alley to Helena. I mean, you know, but I mean, but it's that same thing, but they pay really good wages and they employ people. And as long as that goes on, I mean, I'm not knocking it either way, but I mean, it's just, that's the way it is.

[01:06:08]

GRANT: Was there any resistance to burying Holy Savior or tearing down Meaderville?

GAMBLE: Oh I'm sure there wasn't. And I'm sure some of those pictures you've seen, of part of that church that was buried out there in McQueen. Or that beautiful church, there was a beautiful old church, like they have down in East, in Texas, right by the border. There was one on the East Park Street. Halfway down East Park Street, that was built just like a Mexican villa or Mexican type of - but I can't remember the name of that. But no, because the company was just too powerful. I mean, we employ these people, we call the shots, you know?

GRANT: And so there, there wasn't like protest in the streets, and you're not going to take my neighborhood?

GAMBLE: No, not that I can remember ever, or at all. No.

GRANT: Did you ever intend for music to be your life and your livelihood, or did it just happen?

GAMBLE: No, it was just one of those things. At the time, I mean, it was just, it excited you so much, that you felt that, that pulse inside you, that you never felt with anything else. I took piano lessons when I was a kid, but they just never took, because it was something that I didn't have to do, but it just didn't - the teacher and I just never got along and it wasn't playing the stuff that I wanted to hear anyway. But at that time, I didn't know what I wanted to hear anyway, so it really wouldn't have mattered.

But my father, who was a businessman and the traveling salesman, as I said, it was like, you know, just like a lot of parents. What the hell are you doing?

GRANT: Oh.

GAMBLE: You know, what the hell are you doing? Oh, there's a line from a famous play called The Glass Menagerie. At the beginning of the play, Tennessee Williams said, 'my father was a telephone man and he fell in love with long distance'.

I'll never forget that line. And that's the way my father was. He was a traveling salesman, so he was never there. He was out making, and he made decent money, we were a middle class family, always had a nice car, nice clothes and a nice Cadillac. But he was always gone and he was never there. And when he was there, you wish he wasn't there, because it was like, he was not much of a parent, and I wasn't much of a son. Because when he was home, it was like, this is the way it is. I'm paying the bills. So you'll do what I I tell you to do, or get out of the house.

[01:09:02]

So that was, since I was the oldest boy, I had a younger brother who went along with my father, had an older sister who went along with my father. But my father and I were just, agree to disagree. So we never, ever, he never, ever heard me play guitar. And I never wanted to be around him ever anyway, because it was like being smothered. Because he just, he couldn't believe that anybody could actually want to do - what are you doing? You know?

And so I understood that. And when he died real young at 55, from no exercise and heavy drinker and heavy smoker, when he died, one of his friends said, 'well, now you can take over his business'. And I went, 'why would I want to take over his business'? 'Because it's there, he's a successful man'. 'Yeah. But it's not what I want to do, you know'. Then they really didn't understand that at all. And you know, like my mother - well, she was just a wonderful woman, but a housewife and anything my father said, that sailed. And she didn't mean any harm by it, but she just never resisted it, you know, as far as - that's the way it was.

So, it was just an interesting time. I just went my own way. But at least I learned to exist on my own terms, on my own money. Because the old man, if I wanted a guitar, well, I don't know what to tell you. You know, if I want a car, I don't know what to tell you. If you want to go do it, then you're going to go do it.

And I'm glad he did. I'm really glad he did because I learned how to get it, god bless a child that's got his own, you know. I mean, because a lot of people, you give them everything and they still, it still doesn't work out. So there's gotta be a happy medium there, of course. But I can remember, I was always the kid - I'm not crying the blues here, I was always the kid that went fishing or on a picnic or something, with somebody else's parents. Because the old man never had time for that type of, that wasn't his thing. And I don't blame him now because I'm sure he was raised the same way. You know, it's like, ah, shit rolls downhill, I guess. I dunno, whatever. That's all I can say about that.

[01:11:20]

GRANT: As I came in, you were saying that nowadays, in the quiet of your own home, you seek solace and poetry and literature.

GAMBLE: Yeah.

GRANT: I was curious if you could talk a little bit about that, some of your favorite, or you mentioned The Glass Menagerie.

GAMBLE: Well, I think between The Glass Menagerie and Death of a Salesman, those two things, marvelous pieces of work. To be able to be able to break - and Arthur Miller was another one, with The Crucible. I mean, to be able to write things like that, that say something that powerful. I was so glad to see that type of work come out of plays. To be able to to show what it was like for that old salesman to come in, come home and he's out on the road and he's lost. He don't even know where he's at. He's in the first stages of dementia, and he's just an old guy and they have no use for him anymore.

He's just an old guy that dreams of, great dreams for his children. And the boys aren't working out. I mean, both boys are sailing off in different directions, but not going anywhere. And he can't figure it out. And the car is almost paid for. The house is almost paid for, but he's just a worn out, man who's not really grasping what's going on with him. And thinking about killing himself, you know. And that was that was an amazing, I've never seen, to be able to watch that play must've been something.

Or The Glass Menagerie. Or All My Sons. To be able to see some of those plays originally done, or done well, I'm not saying they can't be done well here. But to watch those things, they have real meaning. Because they're emotional to me, excuse me.

But the very powerful plays. And The Crucible when, in the early fifties when Arthur Miller started to write that play. And he was talking to these people about what was going on in the McCarthy era and this director's wife says, 'do you really mean that you're relating the crucible with them, with the McCarthy era'? She says, 'how can you'? He says, 'how can't I'? I mean, you know, it was just so apparent, you know. But I mean, they just, they didn't, and that's what's happening today, is don't you realize what's going on today? And in the world in 2018, when this man just moves in and starts to make his own rules and telling you that - from what I'm telling you, it's not fake. This is the truth and everything else is just, it's just make-believe. It's lies and fake.

And these people are just saying, he's their new Messiah. I'm not, I'm like, you're not questioning anything of this, man. It's just like, he's right. And everybody, not everybody, but I mean, when you see a lot of the government people just fall right into line, or just move aside and don't say, nobody's standing up or anything. Like that marvelous Edward R. Murrow finally did in 1953 or four.

[01:14:49]

This man has no conscience. This man has - there's nothing in there. Just, it's just amazing. It's happening again. And he's just moving right along, trying to suppress and suppress and suppress. It's very disheartening. Very disheartening.

GRANT: What hope is there that...

GAMBLE: Well, yeah, I mean, you really wonder. When you blend politics and religion, and God and country, and the Bible and faith, and holding that up saying, you know, 'I am your answer. If you follow me, I will lead you'.

That's what Jim Jones said too. You know? That's what the man said down in Texas, 20 years ago or so. These people have, they don't question it. They want somebody to take their lives and mold them and tell them what's right and what's wrong. I just, nobody can do that for you. Nobody can. I don't know. Real scary times.

GRANT: Well is there anything else you'd like to add?

GAMBLE: No, I think that's it. I think that's about it.

GRANT: Thank you so much, Mike, for your time here.

GAMBLE: Well, I hope I've helped some, I don't know.

GRANT: Oh, it was great.

GAMBLE: In this article, I'll give this to you to take home and read, or maybe you can pass on, but the last paragraph, I was just amazed when he wrote this. He says, 'we were suffering under two delusions. The first was that ending de jure discrimination meant ending discrimination. We know better now about that. The other delusion though, persists. This is the stereotype of sixties youth as progressive and permissive. There was some, there were such young people, of course, and they got a lot of press. But most young people in the 1960s did not march for civil rights or protest the war in Vietnam. They had no sandals to autograph, like young people in any era. Most of them were like their parents'.

I'm not saying I fully agree with that, but a lot of them, when I see them now, we grew up together, and I was a little older than the sixties generation, a little bit, you know. Born in '41. So I wasn't. But most of them were like their parents. And boy, I run into that a lot. Now, people of my age that are just, you know,

GRANT: Thank you very much.

GAMBLE: You might like to read the whole article, but it's just, the stuff is out there, but very few people are ever going to see that.

GRANT: Right.

GAMBLE: Ever see that.

GRANT: Yeah it's not going to be printed in The Standard, is it?

[01:17:54]

GAMBLE: No. There's one more thing before - I need a little light here.

GRANT: Okay.

GAMBLE: These are short poems, but they mean a lot. Robinson Jeffers is to me, a very tremendous poet. And Bukowski really liked him also.

My Burial Place.

'I have told you in another poem, whether you've read it or not about a beautiful place, the hard wounded deer go to die. Their bones lie mixed in their little graveyard under leaves, by a flashing cliff brook. And if they leave ghosts, they like it. The bones and the mixed antlers are well content. Now comes for me the time to engage my burial place. Put me in a beautiful place, far off from men, no cemetery, no necropolis. And for God's sake, no columbarium. Nor yet no funeral. But if the human animal were precious as the quick deer or that hunter in the night, the lonely puma, I should be pleased to lie in the grave with them'.

I don't know why I'm so emotional, but it things like that really cut deep. I'm sorry. Cut deep. You know, but Robinson Jeffers wrote some really, really good things.

The other one that really amazed me, I'll need a little light here. Just things that mean a lot to me, anyway. I don't know.

GRANT: Yeah.

GAMBLE: 'I think I could turn and live with animals. They are so positive and self-contained. I stand and look at them long and long. They do not sweat and whine about their condition. They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins. They do not make me sick, discussing their duty to God. No one is dissatisfied, not one is demented with mania of owning things. Not one kneels to another, nor to his kind, that lived thousands of years ago. No one is respectable or industrious, not one is respectable or industrious, over the whole earth'.

Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass.

[01:20:09]

GRANT: Mmmm.

GAMBLE: You know and things, they're not totally forgotten, but you sure don't hear 'em much. And there's just one other little thing that I always tell these some of these young players, or young actors, or whatever they are, you know, that want to be in the arts.

I says, 'have you ever read a poem by Charles Bukowski called' - I've got it here.

GRANT: Okay.

GAMBLE: I don't mean to unload on you here, with all this.

GRANT: No, that's why I came over - just to be with you.

GAMBLE: I usually don't get this - not upset, but just emotional.

GRANT: Yeah, I understand.

GAMBLE: But Air and Light and Time and Space is one of my favorite works of his.

GRANT: Okay.

GAMBLE: I love this.

'You know, I've either had a family, a job, something has always been in the way, but now I've sold my house. I found this place, a large studio. You should see the space and the light. For the first time in my life, I'm going to have a place and the time to create. No baby. If you're going to create, you're going to create whether you work 16 hours a day in a coal mine, or you're going to create in a small room with three children while you're on welfare. You're going to create with part of your mind and your body blown away. You're going to create crippled, demented. You're going to create with a cat crawling up your back while the whole city trembles in earthquakes, bombardments, flood, and fire. Baby, air and light and time and space have nothing to do with it. And don't create anything, except maybe a longer life to find new excuses for'.

I mean, it's like, you know, and I try to bring that down to, you know, you can sit around and have conversations and you can talk about, you know, music or art or poetry or plays or things like that. But what you're going to have to do is go do it. You're going to have to go fucking - well, how can I, even the little feedback I get once in a while from, how can I play like that? Well, you know, I don't know how to tell you that. I can't tell you how to do it. You're going to have to go. You're going to have to go learn how to do it.

One more thing, Spencer Tracy, in a film called Judgment in Nuremberg, he had to do about 12 to 14 minute monologue at the very end of the film.

[01:22:48]

And so it came up to the time where they had to finally film this in 1960, '61, somewhere around there. And in a biography of Spencer Tracy's, these really talented people in the film watching him do this. Richard Widmark and all these people. And he did the whole goddamn thing in one take.

And one of the people walked up and he says, 'how in the world did you ever do that?' And it only took 50 years of practice, you know? I mean, you know, it just, you think just, you know, you can just wake up in the morning and all of a sudden this evolves. I mean, even though, to me is one of the finest actors I've ever seen in my entire life. Amazing, amazing man. But it's not going to happen like that. You know what I mean? Unless you're a genius, like a Les Paul or a Jimi Hendrix or something like that, or an Eddie Van Halen. But for the rest of us, you grump and grind and grovel and then slowly the door starts to swing open a little bit, but it's going to take time.

And even at the end, you, might've not gotten very far. But I mean, at least you've tried, you know. It's like that scene from One flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest, in the bathroom, with the big Indian. And he's trying to lift that marble water fountain. And he says, 'well, let me try to do that'. And then he tried to lift this thing that weighed about 600 pounds. And he says, 'you can't do it'. He says, 'no, but at least goddamnit, I tried'. Yeah. I love that scene scene in One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest. There are certain little things like that, that if they don't jump out at you and if you don't get it, I can't help you. Because you're going to have to have enough brains or enough smarts to see that, you're going to have to grasp for those things yourself. And when you mention The Glass Menagerie, or Death of A Salesman, or any of

those things, people have never even heard of them. And I'm going, you've never even - don't you even understand what Death Of A Salesman was about?

[01:24:52]

You know, oh my God, man. How can you go on living? Not even knowing anything about that or about the man who wrote it, you know. My god.

GRANT: May I see this book?

GAMBLE: Oh sure. This is one of his best, this is one of his best ones.

GRANT: There's one in here I'd like to -

GAMBLE: Spark is in there too, I think.

GRANT: Okay.

GAMBLE: Spark is really good.

GRANT: Let's see if I can find it.

GAMBLE: But I can remember reading him and in the mid seventies, in the Rolling Stone, and that's when I got turned on to him.

GRANT: Okay.

GAMBLE: Because I didn't know who he was. And then there's these two or three...

GRANT: Do you know this one, The Telephone?

GAMBLE: Oh, I've read the book, but I don't know if I remember every one of them.

GRANT: I love this one. Yeah. That's probably my favorite one in there, that I've read.

GAMBLE: Oh yes. 'But then they say, and then you say hello, and you will say, this is Dwight. And then, you know, the kind of understanding...' So, you know, that type of thing. I mean, because there's so many people that like, again, getting back to that - you don't want to be rude to some of these people, but I can't do it for you. You know, I can't, I mean, I can open up the door a little bit or I can talk to you a little bit, but it's up to you.

I mean, and there's people on the phone that want the answer. You have the answer. I've had even a couple of people tell me, 'well, you seem like you know the answers'. I say, 'I don't know any answers'

GRANT: I don't know shit.

GAMBLE: I don't know shit. But at least I'm trying here, to open up a few doors. But you seem like you've got it all together. What does that mean? It means nothing, you know. But you're gonna have to start scraping away at some of this stuff to find some of these things,

you know. It's all here. For Christ's sake, it's all around you, but you're going to have to dig for it. That's all. My God. You know, and have no knowledge at all. I mean, or learn how to question a few things.

Because when we were kids, you know, you can't question the teacher. The teacher's right. The policeman's right. The lawyer's right. The judge is right. I mean, they know best.

GRANT: Ah.

GAMBLE: Yeah. I mean, and they pound that into you and pound that into you. Don't talk back to your elders. Don't ever question. Don't ever question him, and look what it's got. Look what it's got us now. And I mean, all those young girls with Larry Nasser. I mean, you know, don't question. How can we question the doctor? He's the one who knows.

GRANT: Yeah.

GAMBLE: And when you start that, they say, well, you can't question him.

GRANT: Are you interested at all in playing some guitar on the mic? Before I pack up, you know?

[01:27:39]

GAMBLE: I might be able to do, maybe one song that I really...

tape cuts out here

1:28:34

GAMBLE: I can try one, I guess.

GRANT: All right then.

GAMBLE: [PLAYING GUITAR]

I'm leavin' my family
And leavin' my friends
My body's at home
But my heart's in the wind
And the clouds are like headlines
On a new front page sky
My tears are salt water
And the moon's full and high
And I know Martin Eden's
Gonna be proud of me
And many a man
Who's been called by the sea
To be up in the crow's nest
And singin' my say

Shiver me timbers
'Cause I'm a-sailin' away
And the fog's liftin'
And the sand's shiftin'
And I'm singin' on out
And Ol' Captain Ahab
Got nothin' on me
So follow me, don't swallow me
I'm sailing alone
Blue water's my daughter
And I'm gonna skip like a stone
So please call my mother
Tell her not to cry
'Cause my goodbyes are written
By the moon in the sky
And nobody knows me
I can't fathom me stayin'
So shiver me timbers
'Cause I'm a-sailin' away
La la la la. La la la la.

[01:31:39]

GRANT: Thank you, Mike.

GAMBLE: God, that guy can write songs. He wrote a song called Broken Bicycles. You remember that one?

GRANT: Nuh-uh.

GAMBLE: Oh, Jesus, Tom Waits. God damn. To be able to create that kind of stuff. That's what I admire, you know, to be able to - broken bicycles, out in the rain.

And that tune there, but he wrote some - his early stuff, I really like. His later stuff, it's fine. It's just, it's quite experimental.

GRANT: Yeah.

GAMBLE: But I really like his early stuff. And Old '55, that the Eagles recorded. That's one of the few songs that the Eagles ever covered, was Old '55. But that, that's another marvelous song. And that guy that was the leader of Little Feat.

He's dead now. That was one of my favorite groups, Little Feat. Lowell George.

GRANT: Ah. Yeah that name does ring a bell.

GAMBLE: Well he wrote Willin'. And that's another one that - don't know what I do with my pick, but I, I don't know if I can remember Willin' or not.
GRANT: Okay.

GAMBLE: But Willin's another one. Linda Ronstadt covered it and she did it justice. I mean, between Lowell and Linda Ronstadt was one of his great friends. And of course, the woman who plays such great slide guitar. He taught her how to play slide guitar a lot. The redhead woman that the plays such great blues. Her father was a stage actor. Her father was a stage actor in New York for years. You'll know who it is, but -

GRANT: Not Bonnie Raitt.

GAMBLE: Yeah, Bonnie Raitt. Well, Lowell George worked with her a lot, before he died. But he showed her a lot of of slide. Those early albums of, those early albums were real good. I don't know if I can even do Willing. Willin'. But I'll try a little of it.

[01:34:02]

GRANT: Okay.

GAMBLE: [PLAYING GUITAR]

And I was out on the road late at night
I seen my pretty Alice in every headlight
Alice, Dallas Alice

And I've been from Tucson to Tucumcari
Tehachapi to Tonopah
Driven every kind of rig that's ever been made
Driven the back roads so I wouldn't get weighed
And if you give me; weed, whites, and wine
And you show me a sign
I'll be willin', to be movin'

I smuggled some smokes and folks from Mexico
Baked by the sun every time I go to Mexico
And I'm still...

I can't remember any more of the words.

GRANT: Ah, that was good though.

GAMBLE: That's a song called Willin' by Lowell George, on one of his early albums by Little Feat.

GRANT: When he says 'whites', is that what you were talking about earlier?

GAMBLE: Yeah weed, whites and wine. He played with Frank Zappa for awhile even.

GRANT: Oh, damn.

GAMBLE: But then he went on his own and formed Little Feat, which I'm sure glad he has, because Little Feat - tremendous.

GRANT: Oh yeah, absolutely. Would you mind if I took a picture of you?

GAMBLE: Oh.

GRANT: Maybe just right there I think is fine. As you are. This is good with the guitars. Very good, thank you.

GAMBLE: All right. Well, I don't know if Zena Beth asked you to stay for lunch?

[END OF RECORDING]