

*Bob Kuban*

**MY SIDE OF THE BANDSTAND**

**BY Bob Kuban**  
**With Nancy K. Wenger**

**Bob Kuban**  
**MY SIDE OF THE BANDSTAND**

By Bob Kuban  
With Nancy K. Wenger  
November 2002©

Library of Congress, U.S. Copyright Office Registration Number  
TX-5-835-295

ISBN 0-9777426-0-1

Except for the purpose of quoting brief passages  
for review purposes,  
no part of this book may be reproduced in any manner  
without written permission granted by  
the authors or publisher.

Photographs provided by Larry Kuban and other members  
of the Kuban family, unless otherwise indicated.

Cover design by Jay Hungerford  
Cover photo by Gravemann Studios  
Back cover photo by Art Fleming, radio and  
TV personality and game show host

Epic Publishing of St. Louis  
St. Louis, Missouri

Including reflections and commentaries from more than  
sixty contributors who tell their stories from  
***The Other Side Of The Bandstand***  
Dick Bartley Rich Battelle Susan Heinkel Bayer  
Mary Bícigo Becker The Berkeley Athletic Club: Denny Penning,  
Mike Stroot, Mike Proctor, Glen Mehrhoff, Mike Steidley,  
Ollie Moeller, Don Nelson, Rick Henderson, Pete Gallagher, and  
honorary member, Carol Harris Cody; Diane Wisniewski Bishop  
Bob Carpenter Russ Carter Dave Cool Nick Costanzo  
Bob Costas Joe Craig Jim Doggendorf J. Thomas (Tom) Dunn  
Joe Edwards Vinnie Favale Charlie Fay Edie Edling Fay  
Rev. Edward Feuerbacher Christine Molina Frichtel Tom Frichtel  
Jim Fuller Carolyn Fyffe Tim Galvin Annetta Hartfield  
Mike Hawkins Tim Hawkins Grace Budzinski Hercules  
Bernie Howitt Denise Kavanaugh Patricia Sheerin Kelleher  
Jane O'Connor Klenke Donna Kuban Larry Kuban  
Doe Mana Laurenti Mark Mantel Bruce Michael Marren  
Dan Martin Judy Craig McCarty Patrick McDermott  
Patrick McGrath Andy Militello Mark Moerschell  
Steve Molina Patrick Molloy Kay Notheis Walter Notheis, Sr.  
Kevin O'Leary Lupe Ortiz Mary Ellen McGrath Paunovich  
Selwyn Pepper Lee Rauhut Dick Renna Ralph Rockamann  
Tim Roberts Joe Russo Michael Saputo Harry Simon  
Debbie Smith Paul Michael Smith Jan Hertling Streib  
Charley Taylor Randy Tobler and Becky Kuennen Zurweller

"Who's this you're writing a book about? Bob Kuban? Who's Bob Kuban?"  
*Andy Militello*  
"Bob Kuban is a personification of his times. He's a standard."  
*Judy Craig McCarty*  
"He's a legend in this town."  
*Jim Fuller*

## Table of Contents

Introduction, p. v

Notes To The Reader, The Other Side Of The Bandstand, p. vi

Chapter	Titles	Page
<b>Part I</b>		
One	My Thoughts: From Rockabilly To Rap .....	1
Two	Doing What Comes Naturally.....	7
Three	“Ya Got Any Drummers Out There?” .....	14
Four	The Back Door Opens .....	23
Five	Paying My Dues.....	32
Six	Transitions .....	39
Seven	Jackson Park.....	47
Eight	Singer With Soul .....	57
Nine	In The Fast Lane .....	64
Ten	Bait For The Sharks.....	69
Eleven	First Steps To Fame.....	75
Twelve	Somebody With Connections.....	86
Thirteen	Power Play.....	93
Fourteen	Breaking New Ground.....	104
Fifteen	Some History Worth Remembering.....	119
Sixteen	Emotionally, From The Top – All The Way To The Bottom.....	126
Seventeen	“Timing Is Everything”.....	134
Eighteen	Big Hellos, Big Goodbyes .....	141
Nineteen	You Can’t Stop The Press.....	151
Twenty	Catching Up After The Breakup .....	158
Twenty-One	Clubs And Hearts.....	167
Twenty-Two	“The Cheater” - End, Part I.....	179
<b>Part II</b>		
Twenty-Three	“You Guys Show Up”.....	190
Twenty-Four	“Let’s Keep The Party Going” .....	200
Twenty-Five	Hard Times .....	209
Twenty-Six	That’s Entertainment .....	214
Twenty-Seven	The In-Men In The Eighties.....	223
Twenty-Eight	A Fresh Start Fizzles.....	234
Twenty-Nine	Justice Long Overdue .....	240
Thirty	Fallout .....	246
Thirty-One	The Half-Life Of Fallout.....	253
Thirty-Two	Traditions And The Corporate World .....	258
Thirty-Three	I Love It When They Dance.....	268
Thirty-Four	A Lot Of Bumps, But A Pretty Good Ride .....	277

End Notes and Acknowledgments

Bibliography

## Dedication

This book is dedicated to the friends, fans, and followers  
who stuck by me throughout my career.

## Introduction

A groove is something that happens spontaneously and creates a kind of musical euphoria. It isn’t planned. It can’t be artificially induced, and a “book” musician can’t write it on a piece of paper.

You’ve got to capture a groove if you feel it about to happen. But a groove will only happen every once in awhile when everything is in its right place – like when the crowd is a good crowd, and it responds to the band in an enthusiastic way. The band, in return, plays to them. There can’t be any distracting circumstances. For example, if the owner of the club were to give you some sort of hassle, the groove can get blown away really fast.

If you’re lucky, you’ll recognize it and think, “Man, tonight we’re going to get a groove on this thing.” Energy is transmitted between the band and the crowd or, maybe, just among the members of the band itself and, then, a kind of creative magic happens. But, like any kind of special relationship, it can’t be forced.

Music, like life and all its experiences, isn’t made up of one groove after another. If it were, the groove would lose its significance. I’ve had some extraordinary experiences in my many years as a musician and performer and, in a way, I see my life as a metaphor for the groove.

Much of my life has been unpredictable and spontaneous – like the groove. I’ve always said I came into the music business through the back door. And, yet, if I were to think of my life in terms of a script, I couldn’t have written one with more twists and turns and surprises in it.

Nonetheless, I am certain that I was meant  
to find that back door and go on in.

*Bob Kuban*  
*St. Louis, Missouri*

## The Other Side Of The Bandstand

Notes To The Reader

Welcome to the other side of the bandstand.

Remember what it was like to attend a teen dance held in a crowded school cafeteria or gymnasium? Sometimes the dances were held outdoors in the fading light of a summer's evening, and you and your friends mingled shyly in the schoolyard as you waited for the band to set up its equipment.

Neighborhood parks sponsored dances, too, and radio stations held their "splatter platter parties" alongside the cool waters of local swimming pools. Barefoot and eager, you braved the hot concrete deck and sizzling St. Louis sun as you waited for the band to begin to play.

Then, you heard a voice over the big, boxy P.A. system saying, "testing," and, next a flourish of the drums. Maybe the horns chimed in and, before you knew it, your feet were moving and your body twisted or strolled along with a hundred other teens.

You looked up at the bandstand and began to experience one of the best bands that St. Louis ever produced. It may have been called, The Rhythm Masters, or Bob Kuban and The Rhythm Masters, or you might even remember the short-lived Bob Kuban and The Kuban Invasion. But, most of us remember Bob Kuban and The In-Men, the one local band that cut one of the nation's biggest hit records of 1966, "The Cheater."

But Bob Kuban's life story is more than "The Cheater," a tune that, in its own way, has become an important part of musical history. While Bob tells his story in his own words from his side of the bandstand, others have added their recollections of the times, places, and people who composed their youth. Bob Kuban and his music was an important part of the times. His story, paired with story upon story, recall the years when today's baby boomers were cutting their teeth on rock and roll.

Once again, you are engaged in hearing snatches of conversation from the *kids* in the crowd around you. Once again, you are a part of the other side of the bandstand. Have fun at the dance!

March 2005

# PART ONE

## The Other Side Of The Bandstand

**One**

"I really think that the Top 40 Era is framed by the years 1955 to 1973. The songs that provide the bookends to that era are 'Rock Around The Clock,' on the left end of the spectrum and 'Crocodile Rock,' by Elton John on the right end. In that eighteen-year period of time, the entire world changed. A major, motivating force was popular music, which both led and reflected social change and musical change. It literally changed history.

"Early rock and roll was a whole movement and it kind of materialized in the person of Bill Haley and 'Rock Around The Clock.' Little Richard was already making records; 'Fats' Domino had already made 'Ain't That A Shame.' So, there were a lot of records that you could say, 'This was one of the first great rock and roll records.' But, the shot heard 'round the world was 'Rock Around the Clock.'

"It was used in the film *Blackboard Jungle*, and it was played during the introductory credits. The kids were literally dancing in the aisles of the movie theaters.

"... Popular music evolved so fast from 1955 into the 1970s that it bears no resemblance to pre-rock and roll pop music. Before rock and roll, it was 'moon, spoon, and June,' basically love songs.

"You can just draw a great big red line between that music and what came after 'Rock Around The Clock.' It created change in popular culture: rock and roll just accelerated the movement.

"The envelope got constantly pushed. Elvis pushed it some more. Then, the Beatles pushed it and, by the late 1960s, you could write a song about anything – about life and death, and war, and loneliness and alienation, and addiction. You name it, and you could write a popular rock song about it."

Dick Bartley  
Award Winning Syndicated Broadcaster,  
Member of the Radio Hall of Fame and Host of  
ABC Radio's Rock & Roll's Greatest Hits  
telephone interview, May 16, 2001

## Chapter One

### My Thoughts: From Rockabilly to Rap

One beautiful evening a couple of years ago, I played a concert at White Birch Park in Hazelwood, a northwestern suburb of St. Louis. The sun was going down in the west and the sky was colored those golds and lavendars that just seem to burst out of a summer sky.

During the break after the first set, a young couple came up to me. The dad had a diaper bag slung over his shoulder and the young mother held their fourteen-month old son, Zack. They chatted with me about how much they enjoyed the music and complimented the band on its performance. As we talked, I see the kid straining to lean as far as he could away from his mother, trying to reach down to pat one of the drums with his little hand.

I handed him a drumstick and, sure enough, he took a swat at one of the drums. He continued to swat at it, and the mother accommodated him by leaning a little bit forward. He knew what to do. He knew those sticks were there to help him make a noise, a rhythm.

He had been listening to us for practically an hour, watching every move we made, and he had learned a little bit about playing drums. I asked his mom and dad, "Think he'll be a drummer?" And we all laughed as Zack kept reaching down, taking swipes at the drums.

Even at such a tender age, Zack had a natural, instinctive urge to imitate, to make a noise. Who knows, maybe someday he will become a drummer and have a band: The Zack Jones Brass, or something like that.

It wouldn't surprise me one bit because, when I was a little kid, I was always playing rhythms on something or other. My sister Donna remembers that we couldn't sit down at the kitchen table without me picking up my fork and tapping on the glassware, plates, or bowls. I was always fidgeting. I made the mistake of banging on my mother's coffee table with her hairbrushes, too. As I recall, I tore it up pretty badly. Yet, today, I think all those tabletop drum solos were actually a bridge to my future career.

That bridge didn't take me too far away from St. Louis, my hometown. Here, in St. Louis, I was inspired by some of the greatest musical talent who ever lived. These men brought a new sound to my generation.

The whole world knows "The St. Louis Blues" by W. C. Handy, but St. Louis was also the birthplace for the music of Chuck Berry and Ike

Turner. Chuck Berry was born in St. Louis and Ike came here as a young man from Mississippi. While their styles are different, these icons of rock and roll rhythms captured my attention when I was very young.

I wasn't limited to keeping time to their music that I heard over the radio. I witnessed these musicians, live and in person, and I heard their dynamic sounds from close range. These were two flesh-and-blood geniuses whose music awoke some deep emotion in me that urged me to become a drummer.

Often when you encounter a new situation, you learn from it and, usually, remember it. When I first heard "Shake, Rattle, and Roll" by Bill Haley and The Comets, its new and different sound was an unforgettable experience. Somebody brought that little 45 record to the Thursday night CYC teentown meeting at my parish church, St. Jerome's, in Bissell Hills. While a lot of the other kids my age just stood around talking and munching on snacks, everything about that tune captured my attention, and I was completely blown away by it. I knew I was going to have to learn how to play that song. I had loved the Big Band sound, too, but, by the time I was in my teens, rock and roll was strongly directing my love of music. As a young musician, I was committed to its new sound.

In 1954 or 1955, we teenagers didn't realize that Bill Haley's music was going to have as much impact on popular music as Glenn Miller's. As we listened to the harmonies and twangy guitar of Don and Phil Everly, we didn't realize that their new sound was going to put traditional country music and other pop music on the back burner.

These two new sounds and styles were eventually gathered under the rock and roll umbrella. Right around that same time, older adults cringed when they heard a young Bobby Darin puncture traditional pop music with "Splish Splash." Bobby kind of redeemed himself and won a large adult following when he later performed a pop-swing piece, "Mack, The Knife." But, already the music business was undergoing a major upheaval. New names, techniques, and themes ushered in the era of classic rock and roll. Traditionalists of that era would have never believed that names like Bill Haley, Chuck Berry, and Bobby Darin and their styles and beat would endure for the next fifty years.

In the past few years, we have seen rap and grunge hit the music scene. I wonder what the chances are of these types of music surviving fifty years down the road. We heard that this grunge group or that grunge group "went Platinum." And, yet, some of these same groups who appeared on national television five years ago aren't even playing today. Grunge. We saw 'em, we heard 'em, and many of us immediately wiped 'em out of our heads.

But, Chuck Berry, Ike and Tina Turner, the Beatles, Elvis - no one will ever wipe those names out of the archives of music, or our memories.

From the mid-'50s to the present, I've heard every rock and roll rhythm imaginable: from rockabilly to rap. And I've seen the confusion and jumble that has occurred over the decades because of its many-faceted range of expression. But, because of the time in which I grew up, classic rock and roll is sacred to me.

When I was a teenager and first thought about becoming a musician, rock and roll led me to play the drums. I absolutely enjoyed it. I was fulfilled by it. Like some of my idols, I, too, wanted to record. Those were some very basic reasons for becoming a musician. But, I also wanted others to experience the relationship that music forges with those who appreciate it. And I knew that I could bring music to others.

When I was a kid, I didn't know what an uphill grind I would have before me. You don't enter into any career knowing - or even being able to imagine - the kind of obstacles that are sometimes put in your path. Like other aspects of life, I couldn't foresee the landmines that would impact my career. Sometimes, the landmines are economic factors, and sometimes they are people. They are beneath the surface - you don't know where they are and you can't anticipate when they'll explode. Believe me, I found out that the music business contains many hazards, landmines included.

During the past forty years, I have played for President Bill Clinton, as well as for my friends at White Birch Park. Along the way, I learned the lessons about landmines - but that was long after I spent a happy childhood running with the neighborhood kids and going to neighborhood schools.

I worked as a paperboy and, later, worked two jobs during my high school years to help out my family. There wasn't much opportunity for music lessons until I had the proper introductions to music through classes in junior high. By that time, I had outgrown banging on the coffee table and, later, my parents were able to arrange private lessons for me. Those lessons, however, were a long way down the road for me, the eldest of three children born to Marion and Dorothy.

My father was raised in North St. Louis on John Avenue, a first generation American of Polish descent. My mother, who had a German, French, and Scots-Irish heritage, was born in Nebraska. Later, she and her family moved to East St. Louis and, then, to South St. Louis.

As newlyweds, my parents lived on the south side, but, shortly after my birth in 1940, we moved to a little house in Jennings, a northern suburb of St. Louis. During that time, my younger sister was born. I was all of two years old and, like most first-born children, I wondered about - and maybe even resented - this little newcomer. I actually

don't remember this part of the family lore, but this story has been recounted to me on many occasions. If I stood accused, I probably did it. I tried to poke Donna's eyes out.

I must have thought she was some kind of wonderful toy, and I poked her in the eyes to see them open and shut. She wailed out in defense, and, the next thing I knew, mom hustled me off to bed. Then, I wailed out in protest.

In those days, there was no air conditioning and, even if it had been common to have "air," my folks wouldn't have been able to afford it. The bedroom was hot, and a little black oscillating fan labored to move the stuffy air around. This primitive fan had a guard on it, but it was so open that an adult could put a fist through it. Now, this part of the story I do remember. I was mad and I kicked the thing because I had to go to bed early. When I did that, I almost cut off my big toe. I really started screaming then, and my dad came in the room to settle me down.

Back then, a good swat on the backside was part of child rearing, and that's how my dad chose to curb my temper tantrum, or what he thought was a tantrum. I'm sure he gave me a good crack on the butt when he turned me over his knee, but I wailed all the louder. My mom came rushing into the room and saw the blood from my toe and started screaming, "Marion, Marion, he's bleeding!" Dad panicked and thought it was something he did. Then, they saw my toe.

Little kids constantly push the envelope. It takes a couple of incidents that result in near disasters to give a kid a sense of caution. Little boys are a real challenge in this regard, and I was "all boy." If there was something to be messed with, I'd mess with it. I was only about two and a half or three when I became pretty fascinated with light sockets. I found out the hard way what happens when you put a lady's hairpin into one of them. I got knocked on my ass big time and blew out a fuse. I was lucky I didn't get killed. Shortly after that, I began to clean up my act.

At the end of World War II, we moved to Mary Ridge, a housing development off St. Charles Rock Road in St. Ann, a suburb of St. Louis. With the postwar baby boom just beginning as veterans returned to civilian life, the suburbs of major cities began to rapidly develop. In what had been a rural community ten years earlier, Charles Vatterott had built hundreds of houses in St. Ann's to accommodate young couples with growing families.

First, my parents bought a small home on Maryridge and, then, we moved onto St. Christopher, just a few blocks away. Our home was nothing fancy, but it was new and affordable. And, for hundreds of other families moving into Mary Ridge, these were solid, efficient,

little homes, not just houses on a tract of land. We kids played in the yards and streets, and every family on our block supplied at least two or three kids to the group that I ran with.

I was pretty little when the war ended and probably had no idea what it was all about until I met Michael Standish and his family who lived nearby. They had recently arrived in St. Louis from France. During the war, they had escaped the Nazis by hiding in the trunk of a hollowed-out tree.

After Germany invaded France, the grandmother and grandfather remained in their small home in the village, while the younger Standishes and their two children hid in the hollowed-out tree. When the Nazis arrived, they shot the grandparents at point-blank range, killing the grandfather. The soldiers left the grandmother for dead, but she survived and joined the others in the hiding place.

She was a dominant figure in the neighborhood: she could speak very little English, but she'd point to the scar on her temple where the bullet had entered while her grandson, Michael, narrated her story. Luckily, the bullet exited from the top of her head, missing her brain. Needless to say, we kids were spellbound by the story.

Michael was quite a bit older than I and was another experience altogether. When I was about six years old and he was about eleven, we decided to play with my BB gun. Toys like that were considered harmless, and every boy begged and pestered his parents until he wound up getting one. After all, cowboys and soldiers were our role models, and we had to emulate our role models as closely as possible.

This particular day, Michael shot a tiny bird. He rushed over to the creature and scooped it up in his hands, its body still thrashing with life. With a pocketknife, he cut out its heart and ate it. He explained that, during the war, sometimes the birds were their only food, the resource that allowed him and his family to survive.

That experience did something to me. I went home and threw the BB gun away. I could not deal with that kind of violence, even though killing a songbird and eating it during wartime is certainly excusable. In Michael's case, it probably saved his life. But, that experience was my first encounter with the realities of war, and war had certainly lost all its glory. This scene would come back to haunt me.

Much later, as a young man, I would have to confront  
the dread of war, sixties-style.

## The Other Side Of The Bandstand

### Two

"We had a small house on St. Christopher, and the attic was always very hot in the summer and freezing cold in the winter because it had no insulation. Bob found a hiding place up there that no one on this earth could ever find but him.

"He had this shoebox full of marbles that he had saved over the years, and he hid the marbles in the attic. One day, we upped and moved, and I guess he forgot all about the marbles. Years and years later, he remarked that he has always wished that he had remembered to take the marbles when we moved.

"I said to him, 'Actually, what you should do, Bob, is just walk up to the door and say to whomever opens it, 'My name is Bob Kuban, and I've lost my marbles.'"

*Donna Kuban*

"Bob's five years older than I am, so, when we were little, we really didn't do a lot of stuff together. But, I do remember one thing. I must have been two or three at the time, and Bob had made this big sailboat (Larry gestures with hands about twenty-four inches in length) – it was huge. He had it sitting alongside the bed. I didn't know it was there and I jumped out of bed and I broke it!"

*Larry Kuban*

**Kuban Comment:** Oh, man, do I remember that! It was a model of a cargo plane made of balsa wood. I had the fuselage done, and it would have had a wingspan of four or five feet when it was completed. It was hollow and very fragile. I had to use toothpicks and glue to piece it together and, then, I was going to have to wrap it in a special paper (to give it structure). Larry was only about two, and he fell out of bed in the middle of the night and broke the damn thing. Every time I see a picture of the Spruce Goose I think of it.

"I went to St. Gregory's with Bob and he sat in front of me at school. He used to tease me all the time ... I used to hit him on the back and tell him, 'Now, you cut that out!'" (Did you tattle?) "No, never!"

*Grace Budzinski Hercules*

## Chapter Two

### Doing What Comes Naturally

Because of the postwar housing boom, many new small businesses cropped up in St. Ann and other nearby communities. Mom and pop stores soon lined every corner and ran up and down both sides of St. Charles Rock Road. A woman who lived near our home ran an ice cream vending business from her garage and front yard. She had ice cream trucks and fifteen or twenty bikes equipped with coolers for her teenage vendors.

I was about five or six years old, and I decided I needed to earn a little money. Lots of little kids open up lemonade stands and "Kool-Aid" stands, but I figured my entrepreneurial talents could lead me in another direction. My neighborhood needed an ice cream "man" on his own special route. Besides I wanted to be a milkman, like my dad, and I thought this job was the next best thing.

The owner had a couple of pushcarts, too, and I knew that I could handle the job. I begged her to give me a chance. She agreed and she told me that I would earn a five percent commission! So, if I sold a dollar's worth of ice cream bars, I'd get a nickel. If I sold ten dollars' worth, I'd get fifty cents.

The cart resembled a two-wheeler, but it had an insulated metal housing on it that contained dry ice to keep the ice cream frozen. Once it was loaded with cartons of ice cream bars, it was awkward to push and I struggled as I pushed the cart down Maryridge. Not only was the physical part of the job hard to do, but my first day on the job was cold, rainy, and just plain crappy. Trying to sell ice cream was like trying to sell ice to an Eskimo. My little job turned into quite a challenge.

As I pushed my cart farther away from the old lady's house, I reached a point in the road where two streets form a "V." It's a landmark I'll never forget. As I stood there, three young customers, boys about ten or eleven, came toward me.

They asked me if I had any fudgesicles, and, before I knew it, one of the big kids hauled off and smacked me in the head! Another stole my coin changer, which had four or five dollars worth of change in it, and the other grabbed

a couple of cartons of ice cream bars. I began to cry - not so much in anger or because I was hurt - but I was worried about the fact that they had stolen my coin changer with all the coins in it. They ran off, laughing. And, I pushed the little cart back to the old woman's business. It was one of the longest walks I've ever had to make.

The old woman who ran the business didn't believe me. She accused me of being in cahoots with the older boys, even though I had been mugged, had all my ice cream stolen, and had even taken a punch on the side of my head. How many six-year-olds are capable of planning that kind of deception? Nonetheless, this old biddy made my parents pay for my losses.

My dad was making, maybe, fifty bucks a week at the most. He had to pay her five dollars in the lost change, three dollars for what I might have taken in, and maybe three more dollars for the fudgesicles that the kids had stolen. That was my introduction to the world of business.

Obviously, my father wouldn't let me go back and start another route: he knew *he* couldn't afford it!

When you're a kid, summers seem endless. You played with your friends from early morning until the streetlights came on in the evening. Then you sat on the curb, wished on the first star, and ran around the block one last time to catch a couple more lightning bugs.

The neighborhood was composed of a bunch of little kids, all horsing around and scrapping with each other, riding bikes, bouncing



I wanted to be a milkman — just like my dad who worked for Pevely Dairy. Even in recent years, people tell me they still remember that he delivered their milk.

down the street in wagons, and shooting marbles on somebody's driveway. But, those times spent on a summer's evening generated special friendships that have lasted over fifty years.

The Schwartz family, up the street, had ten kids. At least I *think* there were ten kids. There were always so many kids at their house that I can't be sure. Their home was the gathering place for the neighborhood, and it was a tradition that, in the late afternoon, twenty or thirty kids could walk in their front door to watch the only television on our block. We'd watch *Howdy Doody*, *Tom Corbett*, *Space Cadet*, and some other shows that, as I recall, aired in fifteen-minute segments. We'd stay there until our own mothers called us home for supper.

Day in and day out, poor Mrs. Schwartz put up with all the neighborhood kids in her tiny home. But, she, like the other moms from that period, welcomed us and never thought of us as intruders. I don't think any door in that neighborhood was ever locked to one of us kids on the block.

The Meyer family lived on one side of us and, in later years, Walter Meyer went on to become a state representative. I wound up playing some kind of political function for him. His son, Larry, became a lawyer. King Coyne lived on the other side, and he wound up owning a couple of car dealerships in Rolla, Missouri.

A fellow named Jerry Rokatis lived across the street and up the hill from where we lived. When he grew up, he became a probation officer and, a few years ago, I saw him at my singles dances. But, when we were kids, he and I had one heck of a fistfight over something silly.

I remember that I hauled off and busted him in the lip. I don't know if his tooth cut his lip, or if it was my fist that did the damage, but I know I felt terrible about it afterwards. I don't think I've hit anybody since. (I take that back: I had a few unpleasant encounters that provoked me to put up my dukes when I had a lounge. Even Mother Teresa would have smacked some people around if she had been in the bar business!)

My mother took a part-time job and, even though another young mother took care of us, I kept Donna under my wing. One day at lunch, our babysitter gave us a treat I'll never forget. She poured Hershey chocolate syrup in our glasses of milk. I wasn't one to drink a lot of milk, but I had never tasted anything so delicious. So, I kept asking for a refill.

She must have given me three or four glasses of milk when she finally said, "Enough, already! You kids are drinking up all my milk!"

I'll never forget how humiliated I felt. It was as though I was taking something from her that I shouldn't and, yet, she had offered it.

Her actions sent mixed signals to us. It was the first time that I discovered life is full of ambiguities.

Donna and I weren't sure how we would cope with this other adult woman in the future. But, one thing for sure, we learned not to ask for more chocolate milk.

St. Gregory's Parochial School in St. Ann's - that's where I attended the primary grades. One memory is especially vivid. I was about to make my stage debut in a little school play. Everybody was excited because, that evening, our parents were in the audience. My classmates and I were gathered in the new cafeteria, which was in a new addition to the old, white-shingled classroom building. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw something that turned out to be a pretty nasty electrical fire.

I don't think I had the chance to speak my lines for this little play. I just remember that I alerted Sister So-and-So and told her that the old school was on fire. Before you knew it, we all beat it out of there and that was the end of the performance that night.

I'm sure my role and the play itself was no Academy Award winner but, even so, the night turned out to be one of pretty intense drama. The fire department was called, but they were too late to save the old building. Fortunately, no one was in that part of the building and there were no injuries. But the idea of fire plus school, plus kids makes for a pretty frightening memory.

Just as my vision alerted me to that dangerous situation, my vision also played a very important role in my early educational experiences. Little did I know then, but I was - and am - very farsighted. While I could catch the flickering of a flame out of the corner of my eye, I could not read the book in my hands or on my desk.

I could see the blackboard from the back of the room when Sister wrote upon it. I could see the eye chart when the eye doctor made his annual visit to the school. Yet, I struggled to read the little red "Dick and Jane" book or to do the math facts at my desk.

My vision problems didn't end there, either. I see two of everything and, unfortunately, my problems with double vision went untreated until my college days. If your vision has never been "normal," how do you know the way things are really supposed to look?

I knew I could see things better at a distance, so I held the book away from my face because, otherwise, the print was blurred. But, nobody picked up on it. And, even though I saw two of everything, as far as I knew, everyone else saw things exactly the way I did: in multiples.

Parents only took their child to the eye doctor if the kid was nearly blind and went around banging into walls. I wasn't doing that. My

problems were much more subtle, and I went all the way through grade school and high school having difficulties with school.

I overheard the teacher tell my mother, "Well, he's just a slow learner," or "He's just a poor reader," which did nothing for my self-confidence. I knew my skills were not at the same level as the kid who sat in the next desk. Today, I know that the kid next to me had good vision, but, then, I simply believed that I was not a very good student. No matter how hard I tried, I felt I didn't "have the brains."

Today, children entering school are pretty thoroughly tested and their individualized learning styles are taken into consideration. Teachers are better prepared to understand learning disabilities - or at least to suspect and, hopefully, identify them. This was not the case forty or fifty years ago. Kids were just identified as poor students who weren't working up to their potential.

I learned to "compensate." That's the word educators use today. But, doubt chipped away at my self-esteem. The strain of trying to learn to read created a real problem with my concentration. It was nearly impossible to learn anything except by listening.

Because my eyes first see two images of every single thing, reading was very confusing. Then, almost instantaneously, my eyes put the images together to make one image. That is how my brain and eyes have learned to compensate for the problem of double vision, or diplopia. But, as a child, I wasn't exactly aware of that problem. For me, the farsightedness seemed to be the major obstacle in being able to read material close at hand.

One thing was certain: I became paranoid about reading because it was almost impossible for me to follow the words on the page. Everything ran together. I had difficulty reading aloud because I didn't want to get a smack on the wrist for being a dumbshit reader. And, since I couldn't make out the words in the first place, I was scared to death when I was called upon to read.

This kind of inner turmoil puts a kid in a shell. It's one of the worst things that can happen. I wouldn't even tell my parents about my confusion about what I could see - or didn't see - and my fears about reading. They simply hounded me to try harder. And, I'd do what all kids do: duck down in my seat and pray the teacher wouldn't call on me.

Even though my reading skills were poor, I was very good at math until, suddenly, I started to have trouble in math, too. I think that was a trickle-down effect due to my loss of self-esteem. However, something good came out of those turbulent and difficult years in grade school and high school. I headed my talents in another direction: music.

Oddly enough, years later, my vision problems were finally identified *because* of my interest in music. After I entered college, one of my teachers at the St. Louis Institute of Music diagnosed my problem.

When the teacher wrote stuff on the board in big print, I could read it from my seat. But, if he put it right down in front of me on paper, I couldn't read it. He said to me, "You know what? You're farsighted." With that, I went to an eye doctor who told me I have astigmatism and have probably had it since birth. So, glasses resolved that problem.

Later on, while still attending the Institute of Music, I knew I definitely had to become better at reading music. I knew, too, that I couldn't bluff my way through music classes at this level. One of my instructors observed me while I played a piece of music, and he noticed that I played four notes instead of two.

"Why did you do that?" he asked. I answered, "Well, I see four notes." And then I looked again and I said, "No, I didn't see four. I see only two. Why *did* I play four?"

It got to be a real problem when it came to reading sixteenth notes, or something like that. All I would see would be a long black line instead of the actual notes. I guess, eventually, I began to realize that something else was wrong with my vision. But, because my brain quickly corrected the problem, I wasn't able to analyze it until I was older.

In recent years, a neurologist told me that my process of compensation, to blend the two images into one, is "good." My eyes adjust almost immediately. But, the academic struggles throughout grade school and high school left a mark on my self-esteem. If it hadn't been for my natural ability to play the drums, I would have found school just about impossible.

Thank God, when it came to music - something that other kids found hard to do - music came easily, naturally, to me.

## The Other Side Of The Bandstand

**Three**

"I don't remember anything much except for my grandmother being there, and that someone – maybe Bob – carried me from the cab. We had to walk a long distance up the sidewalk from the street to the front door of St. Mary's Hospital."

*Larry Kuban*

**"RIVERVIEW TROOP VISITS OBLATE SISTERS OF PROVIDENCE**

"On Sunday, November 28, nine Riverview students gave an excellent show for the Oblate Sisters of Providence, an orphan home for Negro girls.

"Jim Tate was Master of Ceremonies for the show which started at 2:00 and ended at 3:15. The show consisted of singers and a combo and, of course, Jim Tate's jokes ... Joe Briscusco, playing the saxophone, and Bob Cuban (sic), at the drums, made up the Combo ...I think this swell group of kids deserves a bit pat on the back, don't you?" (sic)

"River-Vues," Junior High School newspaper, 1954

"I can remember sitting on the steps leading down to the basement, watching Bob serve Mass. When it was time for the servers to recite 'The Confetior' (a long Latin prayer said at the beginning of the Mass), I remember watching Father Poelker's back as he listened to both servers mumbling the prayer.

"First he looked to Bob on his right, then to the altar boy on his left. Then, back to Bob. I could see him just shake his head slowly as if to say, "Oh, my God!"

*Larry Kuban*

**Chapter Three****"Ya' Got Any Drummers Out There?"**

While we were still living in St. Ann, one of my friends and a classmate at St. Gregory's School was another seven-year-old boy named John Luby. Coincidentally, our dads worked together at Pevely Dairy, too. John's teenage brother, Chuck, knew something about playing drums. One day, when we were fooling around over at the Luby house, Chuck offered to show me how to hold the drumsticks. At last, I graduated from using my mother's hairbrushes but, unfortunately, this didn't spare her coffee table or anything else that I could beat on.

Right around that time, however, I learned that I would soon be saying good-bye to my friends in St. Ann. We were moving to a house in Riverview Terrace, just three blocks outside the city limits of St. Louis on the north side. By that time, my younger brother Larry had been born and the new home on Newby Street would provide a little more space, but not an extra bedroom. Yet, I would deeply miss the old neighborhood.

Naturally, a move meant having to go to a different Catholic grade school, and I wasn't too happy about making that big change, either. Our new home was located in the county, in a developing area that was not yet served by a Catholic parish church or school. Larry, now about five, was getting ready to enter school as a kindergartner, so the three of us were enrolled at Mount Carmel Catholic School on Veronica and Halls Ferry streets in the city.

Our new school was dominated by an arrogant pastor whose autocratic methods were known throughout the community. The nuns, our teachers, were so oppressed that they passed their unhappiness on to us, the students. The only good thing that I remember about that school is standing in the lunch line in the cafeteria, waiting to buy a bottle of chocolate milk.

I was miserable. Not only were we newcomers to the area, but my family had to learn to cope with the worst nuns and priest that God ever put on this earth.

In contrast to that poor excuse for a man of the cloth, I was fortunate to get to know Father Carl Poelker, the priest who had been assigned the task of raising funds to build Our Lady of Good Counsel,

our new parish church and school. He was a very personable, down-to-earth man, a guy who worked hard all his life.

As young as I was, I could see that he was a good leader, and I respected that. Father Poelker remained pastor of that parish until his death, having served the community of Bellefontaine Neighbors and the parishioners of Our Lady of Good Counsel for over forty years.

But, before he built the church, one having a very modern design for the times, he had to offer the Mass in the basement of the rectory, which was simply a typical subdivision house of the fifties. I was one of his altar boys who served Mass for him on Sundays. We young servers struggled to master the Latin responses to his articulate invocations. Some of them, like "ora pro nobis," weren't too hard. But others, well, we kind of mumbled our way through it.

I'm sure we tested his patience, and I can just see him, as he listened to our pronunciations, roll his eyes heavenward. After Mass, he'd comment on our attempts to speak Latin, and would even joke about our proficiency, or lack of it. Not that he didn't encourage us to try to do better, but he certainly didn't get too upset when we mangled that ancient tongue.

Unfortunately, sometimes power and position get in the way of being a good Christian. But, Father Poelker was a good shepherd and, in my opinion, will always serve as a good example of what the church strives to develop in its priests.

Those were tough times for my folks. We were poor and I was a typical kid who wanted stuff, like yo-yos, kites, and comic books. I was always looking for ways to make a little money, so, one day, I walked into a neighborhood grocery store and asked the owner if he needed any help. I was skinny, and he looked me over and figured that I was just the right size to crawl between and underneath the vegetable bins to dig out the rotting onions and potatoes.

He also let me carry bags for the customers and paid me fifteen cents an hour. He threw in a Vess grape soda for my labors, too. Even though the job was smelly and dirty, I thought I was really hot stuff.

More new houses continued to be built in Riverview Terrace, and I became a kind of freelance contractor who would prepare the yards of the new homes before the sod was laid. I'd grade the yards with a rake and pick up the loose rock and chunks of concrete that are usually left behind after new construction. Sometimes I'd earn four or five dollars a day at this job.

I also went to work for the *Community News*, a weekly newspaper, and had to try to collect a dime a month from hundreds and hundreds of homeowners in these new subdivisions. I traipsed through

the swampy front yards that had not yet been sodded and had the front door slammed in my face on many occasions.

The paper offered a little perk to its young employees. If we collected our subscription payments, we were given some little paper tokens that, eventually, could be redeemed for baseball gloves. I think I still have a shoebox full of these in my basement because I don't think I ever cashed them in.

We had lived on Newby only a few years when my mother decided we needed a new house. My parents were going to have a home built in nearby Bissell Hills but, for whatever the reasons, it was going to take a long time to finish. Our home on Newby sold quickly and, for a short while, we moved in with my grandparents.

They lived on Jamieson in South St. Louis and we took up temporary residence in their basement. Even though that was a hardship on them and us, there was one good thing about the move. I was liberated from Mount Carmel and enrolled in Epiphany of Our Lord School – a real welcome change, as far as I was concerned.

Soon, my folks found a nice little duplex to rent. It was on Prather, fairly near my grandparents' home, and we moved again. It was conveniently located right next door to Roe Public School, and we changed schools again. A young family man named Lee Hyde owned the duplex. Lee was a musician and bandleader who, for some reason, left his piano with his name on it in our part of the duplex.

(That was my first encounter with Lee but, coincidentally, our paths would cross again. Years and years later, my entertainment agency began to book his band whenever a client requested a jazz ensemble. Jazz was Lee's signature music and, sadly, he died in 2004. But, until the very end, he continued to play jazz and to write arrangements for other bands, mine included.)

One day while we were living on Prather, my buddies and I hiked all the way over to Clayton Road, a distance of two and a half miles.



The *Community News* sponsored me in a couple of soapbox derbies. The derby was held annually on a stretch of Highway 40 and Hampton, after officials shut down the highway for the event. Here, with me, are Larry and Donna.

We made a quick stop at a little ice cream parlor that was right next door to the Esquire movie theater. I bought a nickel ice cream cone, raspberry ripple flavored, and enjoyed every lick and bite of it.

On our way back home, we cut down Bellevue and headed toward St. Luke's Church. There was a catalpa tree growing in the front yard of a home right across the street from the church. Those trees were everywhere, especially in some of the older neighborhoods in St. Louis, because they are very hardy and are a fast-growing shade tree. Their fruit is a long, pencil-thin appendage known to kids everywhere as a "lady cigar."

One of my buddies had a bright idea and said, "Hey, let's smoke some lady cigars." I wasn't too keen on the idea but, not wanting to diverge from what the rest of the guys were going to do, I, too, took my first - and only - couple of puffs of the lady cigar.

It didn't take too long for me to literally turn green. I threw up the raspberry ripple ice cream and continued to vomit for a couple of days. I'll tell you this, if you ever want to keep a kid from smoking, just force-feed him some raspberry ripple ice cream and then have him smoke a lady cigar. That could cure someone's smoking habits for life real quick!

Schoolwork had never been easy for me, and I knew I was no rocket scientist. But, by this time, while at Roe, I seemed to be ahead of the other kids and was quick with the right answers. My teachers praised me and, finally, I began to experience a feeling of success in school.

When I was a seventh grader at Roe, my younger brother Larry was just a little guy in the first or second grade. One day, while we were at school, Larry became very ill. At first, the school nurse just thought he was horsing around, but she let him rest on a cot in the office for a while. During the lunch period, Larry came upstairs to my classroom.

The poor kid had to hold onto the wall for support. Luckily, my classmates and I were still out in the hall, just coming in from recess or lunch. He told me how sick he felt and asked me to intervene for him with the nurse. I knew he was sick and wasn't faking it. His pain was severe and I finally convinced the nurse that he was really sick.

The nurse conceded that Larry might have appendicitis. Someone at the school tried to notify my parents but had trouble tracking them down. It happened to be my dad's day off, and he and my mom were not at home. The school was finally able to reach my grandmother by phone, and I was told I could accompany her and Larry to the hospital. My grandmother and I then took Larry by cab to St. Mary's Hospital, and she gave her permission to perform surgery.

His condition was serious and Larry almost died. It wasn't his appendix at all; it was a burst kidney, which the surgeons removed.

Up until that time, our family had been spared serious illness or injury. Once when we were still living on St. Christopher, I took Donna for a ride in my wagon and we hit a pothole. She fell out and broke her collarbone, but that was the only health disaster, thank God, that our family had experienced.

Larry's recovery required several months of quiet and bed rest, and our family was faced with much stress and worry. Both my parents worried about their youngest child and my mother, who was already a *worrywart*, became especially anxious. Yet, we were drawn together in family unity as a result of his ordeal.

By the time the next school year rolled around, we were back in north St. Louis County, living in our new home in Bissell Hills. It looked like all that bouncing around from house-to-house was behind us.

I was only entering the eighth grade, but I learned that I would be attending Riverview Gardens High School. As younger students, we eighth graders were usually separated from the high school kids, but our classrooms were in the same school building. I was determined to get into the band and try out on the drums. It didn't take long to find out that the school always had enough drummers. So, drums were out.

The teacher stuck me with the trombone, the only instrument he had left. At first, I was okay with that instrument because I wanted to be in the marching band. I can still remember how I'd march around our basement, playing marches on the trombone, pretending I was in the marching band - and driving my mother crazy! I sometimes wonder how my parents survived it. But, in my heart, I never gave up the desire to be a drummer.

Later, the school needed a saxophone player, so, I ended up on the saxophone. Again, the school furnished the instrument, thank God, and I was grateful for the opportunity to study music. But, I wasn't any happier playing the saxophone.

Yet, as music continued to become more important to me, I was also aware that a new kind of music was being played on the radio. If you had asked me back then why it appealed to me, I couldn't have given you an explanation. I just knew that the kids of my generation



Just getting ready to climb behind those drums.

were hearing a new sound, unlike the typical pop music of the day. It caught my ear – and my fascination with this sound and its new, distinctive beat began to grow.

It's pretty safe to say that the average curriculum for the typical grade or high school back in 1954 did not include any kind of introduction to rock and roll or blues. But, for some reason, our school hosted an assembly in music appreciation that, in a way, put the spotlight on contemporary music. It was a bold move on the part of the school because this assembly included music that was in its infant stage: rock and roll.

I remember sitting on the basketball court with my classmates, listening to the guest speakers. They'd talk for a little bit, then, give a demonstration of the type of music they had just talked about. We were all pretty engrossed in what they had to say.

Jazz was a pretty hot musical genre among the Juniors and seniors who were in the school band. These older students were really into Dave Brubeck and jazz artists like that. These kids conveyed a kind of superior attitude that suggested that the new music of the day was "beneath" them. And, of course, contemporary music included the emerging rock and roll tunes that were just beginning to hit the airwaves and flood the record stores.

Rock and roll featured the guitar and drums in a combination of rhythms that we hadn't heard up until this time. Besides, in the 1940s and '50s, mainstream bands only used the guitar as a rhythm instrument. Now, it was the principal instrument – and the drumming was different, too.

It was more than a new sound: it was a different kind of emotional experience. It was rooted in blues, but rock and roll was fast-paced and upbeat, as opposed to the moody and melancholy blues. Rock and roll was a celebration. The blues were all about suffering and pain.

A tall, lean black man was there with his electric guitar. His smile and attitude told us he wasn't going to be mired in suffering and pain. He was ready to take off and let the rest of the world catch up with him. He gave a brief oral presentation and then called out to the audience. "Ya' got any drummers out there?"

I was sitting with some friends, one of whom is Chuck Smith, a friend for all of these past years. I hung with him and some other guys and they knew me well enough to know that I wanted to play the drums in the worst way.

They picked me up and threw me out onto the basketball court so I could go up on the stage to play the drums. I blushed and, flushed with anxiety, my heart raced because I was suddenly on public display.

The drums belonged to a student named Willie Fiedler. I couldn't quite figure out why Willie didn't get up there right away because he was a great drummer. Looking back, trying to assess this whole turn of events that happened so long ago, I think two things: Willie was really into jazz and he didn't understand the new sound that this performer was introducing to us and, secondly, as a jazz drummer, he didn't have the technique to know how to play the stuff.

I sat behind the drums, nervous as hell, and picked up the sticks. The performer looked over at me, smiled broadly, and gave me a little nod. He called a tune, I think it was a thing called "Maybellene," and started to play. I just kicked in right behind him even though I had never before played a single note on a set of drums until that moment!

We played four or five songs. I knew then that I had a good ear – I could hear something and knew instinctively how to play it. I knew I was "winging it," but I must have sounded pretty good to the guitar player, too. When we were through with our little session, he turned around to me and said: "Hey, you a pretty good drummer. How long you been playin'?"

"About ten minutes."

"Whadda' ya' mean?"

"I've never played before in my life."

"You kiddin'!"

"Naw."

"Well, you did one heck of a job!"

That little verbal exchange with Chuck Berry, the "Father of Rock and Roll Guitar" changed my life forever.

And "forever" started right then and there. My music teacher came up to me right after the assembly and said, "I didn't realize you played drums." I answered, "I really haven't, until now. But, I sure would love to."

"Let me switch you off the saxophone and put you in the drum section," he added. He, then, went on to explain he was having problems with the drums, anyway.

Shortly after that, two older guys at Riverview, Connie Coneski and Joe Briscuso, asked me to be the drummer for their band. I was only an eighth grader and I was really flattered that these upperclassmen asked me to come along with them and help form the Jo-Co-Bo Trio. Connie played the bass and Joe was an excellent sax player in the band.

Everybody has to pay his dues in this business. We started paying ours right away when some other kids from my school decided we should share our talents with the world. We'd perform anywhere and everywhere, and wind up passing the hat for the March of Dimes or some other charity. We'd put on shows for residents in orphanages

and nursing homes. It didn't matter to us if the old folks liked us or not! We were out there showing our wares, playing for free, and loving every minute of it.

I really can't imagine what it must have been like for those old-timers, listening to us as we played the Nursing Home Circuit. I hope they didn't suffer too much because I often think, "God, those poor people, having to put up with us kids!" Talk about a captive audience.

Coming together in a kind of remarkable way, these events were to change the course of my life. Despite my ambition to be a drummer, no matter how hard I tried to get this message across, I was constantly dissuaded from playing the drums. Yet, at that same time, a twist of fate puts the one and only Chuck Berry at my high school.

Suddenly I am thrust onto a stage with a chameleon set of drums (none of them matched), and I'm playing a set with the man who later would be credited with "creating" rock and roll.

I often laugh at myself when I think about how I finally wound up behind those drums and how Chuck Luby, years before, had shown me how to hold the drumsticks. He showed me wrong! I had never actually played a note on a drum, and I was familiar with rock and roll rhythms only insofar as I had heard them on the radio.

Yet, I knew what to do. I just drifted in.

## The Other Side Of The Bandstand

### Four

#### "RIVERVIEW'S HIDDEN TALENT IS REVEALED"

(By) Barb Alewel

"... The third contestant was Bob Kuban, who played a drum solo. 'Boy, Bob, you really beat those drums!' After his solo, the students asked if Joe Briscuso would play a solo. He played 'Biscuit Mix.' Bob Kuban and Mr. Koenig accompanied him.

"The assembly in itself was a very good assembly, but the reaction of the students was very poor. Some of the students who were to perform backed out at the last moment because of the actions of some of the rowdy students."

from "River-Vues," Riverview Gardens High School,  
Vol. 3, No. 6 (1958)

"I dated Bob Kuban. I helped him carry his drums."

*Rosetta Marino Petti*

"I heard this story from Jim Keating, my boss, who hired me at the Metropolitan Sewer District. Jim went to high school with Bob. Jim told me that, one day after tryouts or practice for soccer, Bob turned over his soccer shoes to Jim. Jim asked him why he was giving his shoes away, and Bob replied: 'I think I'd rather be a ladies' man than play this sport.'"

*Mark Mantel*

"Bob has a good personality. When I see him perform, I see my friend up there, not the entertainer. Somebody will say to me, 'You know Bob Kuban?' And I'll say, 'Well, yeah, I went to high school with him. In fact, I've known him all my life.'

"We played in the concert band and marching band. He was the snare drummer. I carried the big bass drum and my twin brother, Ron, played the cymbals. That's why Bob talks about Ron holding the cymbal for him ... Yeah, Bob wore those funky uniforms.

"Mr. Fisher was the band teacher, and Bob was noted for having a talent for music. He'd let Bob direct the concert band. He'd bring Bob up as a protégé and Bob would direct one or two songs. You'd have to be recognized as a pretty good talent to do that."

*Rich Battelle*

## Chapter Four

### The Back Door Opens

Whatever you choose to call it - a natural ability, an instinct, a God-given talent - this gift seemed to surface that very day. It was like somebody had planned this whole thing.

That's what I mean when I say, "I came into the music business through the back door." All of a sudden, I was "Bob Kuban, this guy on the drums in the band," and I continued to be in the band the rest of the way through high school and, after that, as a lifetime calling.

Oddly enough, shortly after my debut as a drummer, Willie Fiedler put his drums up for sale. I think I had more energy than talent, but I loved those drums. He wanted \$125 for them. I didn't care that they didn't match. It was a set of drums, and that's all I cared about. Yet, they came at quite a price.

Even though I was only about fourteen at the time, I worked a forty-hour week at two jobs after school and on weekends to finance the purchase of those drums. I envied the kids who had time to play baseball or football, and I envied the kids who could sit down and read a book.

My workday began immediately after the school day ended when I went to work at a drugstore. Later, around six-thirty, I'd go to work at Art's Market. I worked all day Saturday and part of Sunday, too, in order to save up the money for Willie's drum set. Eventually, my parents were able to arrange for me to take lessons from a fine drummer named Roy Germauche.

My dad was a milkman for Pevely Dairy and even had a little side job making jigsaw puzzles. My mother did typing at home and was

paid a penny for each label or envelope that she typed. So, the income from my part-time jobs was to help out the family and, I'm sure, take care of my needs as a "typical teenager."

One of these early work experiences was under the supervision of one of the meanest sonuvabitches that ever lived. He was a professional man, a doctor, who enjoyed demeaning young people. I seemed to be a favorite target, and probably never did anything right to suit him. Yet, I don't think anybody could perform a job to his satisfaction. He paid me twenty-five cents an hour and gave me all the crap that he could dish out. He tested us to our limits.

To illustrate how miserable and mean he was, somewhere out there, there is a sedate, black woman who is probably a grandmother now in her mid-sixties. She could tell this story better than I can.

She worked behind the soda fountain and, one day, he picked away at her about the way she cleaned the malt machine, or something. Today, people would say he was verbally abusive because of the way he chastised her. Anyway, this guy pushed her too far. She seethed internally for a couple of seconds and then muttered the F-word, loud enough for some of us to hear.

I was young and, of course, language like that was not as common as it is today, especially coming from a woman. She was the first woman I ever heard use the word. Man! That almost put me into shock for the rest of the day! Yet, I admired how she handled the situation and sympathized with her a hundred percent.

This jerk flaunted his wealth and enjoyed treating the rest of us like trash. I pitied his family for having to put up with him, because they weren't like that. He is one of about five people in this entire world about whom I will never be able to say one good word. Thank God, I was eventually able to give up that frustrating job before he could damage my sense of self-respect.

However, I learned something from that asshole. I learned that arrogance, self-importance, or position does not entitle you to respect. Today, as an employer of a number of people, one thing of key importance is to treat my staff with respect. Performance, attitude - everything pivots on the respect that develops between the employer and employee, and I don't know why the heck that guy hadn't been able to figure that out.

In contrast to that horrible experience, I worked for Art Hicks at Art's Market. He was a fair and considerate employer, and everybody at his neighborhood store treated one another like family, or, perhaps, even better. I kept this job long into my teens, but it wasn't easy work.

I'd stock shelves, bag groceries, and do some cleaning each day at the store. Then, on Sundays, I'd do more of the same and clean out

the meat freezers and clean up other messes from the rest of the week. Instead of a day of rest, Sunday was a day of slave labor for me.

Meanwhile, I became acquainted with my new role as drummer in the school band. It was a basic, no-frills kind of arrangement. We didn't even have a cymbal stand, so, one of the kids in the band would have to poke a drumstick through the cymbal and hold it for me during certain songs.

Two of my classmates who had to hold the cymbal for me at various times were Ron Battelle and his twin brother, Rich. Recently, Ron has retired as Chief of the St. Louis County Police Department, and, for years, Rich owned a family hair care center in Florissant, a northern suburb of St. Louis. It's great to be able to look back and know that we all started out together.

In contrast to the sad events that have taken place at some of our nation's high schools during this past decade, my high school experience was positive and full of promise. If you, too, went to high school in the 1950s or 1960s, you'll know just what I'm talking about.

Junior high and high school were great experiences. Grade school, well, I knew I had to get through that. It was a pain in the ass. And, later, college: that was a means to an end. I needed college and the degree in music in order to teach. But, I loved the high school years.

And, as busy as I was during those teenage years - working two jobs, playing in a band, and doing my schoolwork - I still had fun. That experience in the eighth grade, when I shared the stage with Chuck Berry, had been a turning point. Suddenly, I was noticed.

Even the upperclassmen granted me a kind of celebrity status. Seniors came up to me in the hall and said stuff like, "Hey, you were really great on the drums." This just knocked me out because I was, after all, still in junior high. Joe and Connie, who had asked me to join their band, were juniors. Twin brothers, Rich and Bob Bono, passed a couple of compliments my way, too. I had admired their musical talents from afar and, now, with their acknowledgment, I felt that I was accepted into a kind of musical brotherhood.

When these older kids who were skilled musicians complimented my talent, I felt both honored and humbled. Music, however, was the thing that helped me emerge from my shell.

High school was a time for us to grow in social responsibility and in social graces. I dug up and used some of the school's old newspapers to help jog my memory in writing this book. I was reminded that some of my classmates saw and interviewed Carl Sandberg. Other kids participated in a model U.N. seminar; others, in voluntary civic causes. We were growing up, and society urged us to make the most of this time to refine our teenage selves and become upstanding

young men and women. In a way, I believe society expected a lot from us. And, even at the ages of seventeen or eighteen, we felt the need to live up to society's expectations.

I made many friends during my high school years and seemed to always be included in the activities that were coordinated by the student leaders. I guess it was because I was the kind of kid who just couldn't turn away from responsibility. In my sophomore year, I was elected to the student council. Usually the brainy kids had that sort of honor and responsibility, and I sure didn't stand out as a scholar!

Later on in high school, I was chosen to escort one of the candidates for the prom court, ran track in my senior year, appeared in talent shows, and even had my name in the school paper for going steady. That's a Leo-thing, getting involved with many different kinds of activities. It was kid stuff, sure, but it created a sense of self-confidence that I didn't have when I was younger. It gave me a sense of belonging.

As for the social side of life, one of my first real dates was to escort one of the maids to the school's annual Sweethearts' Dance that was held at a local country club. Ed Bonner, a popular disc jockey on radio station KXOK, was the emcee who announced the court and crowned the queen.

My class at Riverview Gardens was fairly small, with only about 125 graduates. We were together five years, beginning with the eighth grade year, and became a very close-knit group. There were, of course, the athletes and the intellectuals and a range of kids in between. I'm sure there were some cliques, and we had a couple of rough kids in the class, too. Then, there were also a couple of eccentric students, the kind who kept to themselves and just seemed kind of sensitive. You never knew how they'd react if you tried to joke around with them. Even the teachers treated them with kid gloves.

I only wish I had been able to become involved with the school drama club or had been a part of the musicals. But, the athletic program and music program and other activities really gave all of us some good opportunities to stretch and grow as young adults.

A good friend, Larry Buffington, and I ran track and hung around together a lot. I remember standing in the kitchen at his house, saying, "You know what, Larry? I don't want to graduate. I've had too much fun and I want to do it all over again."

Even though the scholastic side of high school was challenging, I managed to have a blast. Maybe, for a while, it was kind of an "Ozzie and Harriet" life. No real crises popped up. But, before my graduating class could celebrate our tenth anniversary, some of my classmates had become casualties of the Vietnam War. Larry was one of them.

We graduating seniors hadn't given much thought to those dramatic life struggles, like war, even though the draft was a very real presence in our lives. Military service was commonplace. Yet, we didn't realize that a military action in a remote place like Southeast Asia would soon expand and cause Uncle Sam to come knocking at our front doors. In June of 1958, it was beyond my imagination to think that, just a few years later, Larry would be killed in action. As it turned out, I had been with him, laughing and talking over old times, two or three weeks before his death.

Those classmates heading for college made up a small percent of our class, but marriage was another reality for many kids who were just out of high school. Even at eighteen or nineteen, we had been groomed to accept responsibilities. Many young romances blossomed during the high school years and, after a young man or woman held a job for a year or two, they chose to get married.

Yet, even the newly-married graduates stayed in touch with our school via the "River-Vues." The school newspaper was always ready to report the latest on everybody's social life, even the young marrieds. If you were going steady or had become engaged, you'd probably find your name in a little gossip column. If you happened to be without a steady, your name would be mentioned in a column titled, "Open Stock." Even though dating and relationships were an important part of our school days — and of growing up — I didn't think seriously about marriage until some years later.

Of course, I was never very far away from the drums. When it came time for us seniors to draw up our Last Will and Testaments, I even willed my drumsticks to "anyone crazy enough to want them."

At that point, I wasn't quite sure where life was going to take me, but I knew my ambitious dreams included music. I wanted to continue my education and I wanted to pursue a career in music. I had been playing with a band, the Rhythm Masters, and the exposure I had to music through the school's music program was definitely leading me in this direction.

Toward the end of my high school years, a couple of buddies and I would sneak up to Club Imperial located on West Florissant and Goodfellow Boulevard in Jennings. The club had a section for underage patrons and, as I recall, you paid your dollar or two to get in. It wasn't as though my friends and I were going there to drink. I didn't drink. But, it was a club situation geared to adult patronage. Yet, Club Imperial had something for me far more intoxicating than alcohol. It had Ike Turner and the Kings of Rhythm.

This was before Tina joined the group, and Ike was in sole command of the performance. Talk about a kick-ass group! We used to

go to Club Imperial at every opportunity. His music, his sense of showmanship, just blew me away. I was a good dancer and all the older girls liked to dance with me, but I was primarily interested in checking out Ike and his music.

Ike's drummer was a guy named "Stumpy" and he was an excellent talent. I used to watch him play so I could emulate some of his techniques. Finally, I got up enough nerve to talk to Stumpy. One night, he said to me, "Hey, why don't you sit in with us sometime? I'll ask Ike. I'm pretty sure he'll let you sit in."

While these were the very words I hoped to hear, I was so surprised, I could barely spit out the words as I said, "Ah, no, no, I couldn't." Part of me wanted to run out the nearest exit and part of me wanted desperately to play with Ike Turner. Luckily, this part pushed the reluctant part out of the way.

I could tell Ike was a little apprehensive about me sitting in with his band because he didn't know how well, or if, I could play. I remember he kicked this song off, a shuffle rhythm tune and, when I started playing, he turned around and looked at me like, "Holy Mackerel, this kid can play."

I want to tell you, playing with Ike Turner was one of the biggest thrills of my life. I left Club Imperial that night, and many other nights, too, just totally exhilarated. The adrenaline was really pumping and I was in the throes of a real musical "high." Then, whenever he'd see me, Ike'd say, "Hey, Bobby, you want to sit in for awhile?" You can bet that I never turned down that invitation.

I had been sitting in with them for two or three months when, in the autumn following my high school graduation, I broke my foot in a go-kart accident. I crashed into a curb and this mess put me in the hospital for a week or two.

I've always had an infatuation with fine-driving machines. Even as a little kid, working as a paperboy, I roped the *Community News* into sponsoring a soap box derby car for me so that I could compete in some little races around town. I loved the thrill of it. So, I guess it came as no surprise to anyone when my buddy, Dave Henning, and I bought a fast, little go-kart shortly after we graduated from school.

Right away, we decided to enter it in a race, which was scheduled for the very next day. We thought we'd better check it out mechanically and see how fast she'd go before we put her in competition. Dave and I brought the go-kart over to the parking lot at Riverview Gardens High School. The parking lot had a blacktop surface that was just as flat as it could be, but there was a curb around the thing that stood about ten inches high. Otherwise, driving conditions were just about perfect.

As I was driving the go-kart, I got her up to about forty-five mph and happened to take the damn turn too wide. I got off into gravel, on the side of the blacktop, and went into a skid. The go-kart's wheels were only six or seven inches high; there was no way I was going to be able to jump the curb. I slammed up against the curb, was thrown out of the go-kart, and landed on my back.

I remember laying there for God-knows-how-long, probably only a matter of seconds. I didn't pass out, but I was stunned. There I was, looking up at the sky, arms outstretched, kind of semi-aware that all did not feel exactly right with my body.

I managed to sit up and, with that, looked down at my right foot. I was wearing desert boots, a kind of shoe made of soft, suede leather that fit up over the ankles. What I saw was the sole of my right shoe facing up at me. My right foot was still in the shoe, but my foot had been so badly broken that it was completely convoluted and twisted out of its normal position. I swear to God, I thought I had cut my foot off.

I grabbed the foot and manipulated it back, wedging it around to a normal position, but I yelled so loud, you could have heard me for miles. Dave was way at the other end of the parking lot, probably a quarter of a mile away, and he came running as fast as he could. Then, he drove me to DePaul Hospital on North Kingshighway and, by the time we arrived at the hospital, my foot had swollen up so much that it actually busted the shoelace of the desert boot. My leg was so badly swollen that it was black up to my kneecap.

I had broken the foot in three or four places, including the heel bone. But the doctor said that I did a hell of a job, kind of setting the foot when I did. I was already in my room, about to spend the next week or two in traction, when my sister and mother arrived at the hospital. They had called my dad at work and he was on his way to this unusual family gathering.

It wasn't going to be easy to break this kind of news to someone like my father. I was sure my dad would really have a fit and, most likely, would kill me on the spot. Mom, well, I knew she'd be pretty upset with me, but my dad would be really mad. Pretty soon, Donna said to me, "Oh, Bob, here comes Dad."

I had already been put in traction with an assortment of weights attached to my foot. The bed was slightly inclined and I held onto a kind of trapeze bar with one hand that helped me lift myself up and lower myself down. With that, I fell back into the bed, flattened out on the big pillows, and pretended to go into a coma. I figured I better go into one before my dad put me in one!

He surprised me with being pretty sympathetic about the whole thing. I think Dad was so stern with us about these things, like the totally unwarranted risks of go-karting, because he had been such a daredevil in his youth. He frequently hopped freight trains to Chicago. On one occasion when he hopped a train, he assumed it would stop in Chicago, but it didn't. My dad wound

up freezing in the cold, in North Dakota, with a police officer at his side. So, at least once, Dad had to face the consequences of dealing with his own father when he got back home.

Once I was released, the doctors fitted me with a walking cast and I lugged this thing around for about the next three months. And, it was three weeks or a month before I was able to go back to Club Imperial.

I had been trying to practice the drums at home, even with the broken foot. I couldn't bend my foot, so I learned to work the pedal of the bass drum off the ball of my foot. I strengthened the muscles in my groin area and, instead of having a temporary handicap, I had a blessing in disguise. Later, I realized it helped my endurance for drumming long pieces.

After playing a band job one Tuesday night about a month after the accident, I went to Club Imperial. Naturally, I was still in the walking cast, but I went up to Ike and asked if I could play that night.

He said, "Kid, you can't play with that broken leg." I figured he was going to say that, but I was ready and said, "Trust me, Ike, I can."

"Aw, no, you can't play with that broken leg!" said Ike. Once again, I assured him that I could.

"Aw, well, c'mon, jump up here on the drums. Let's see what you can do," said Ike.



Ike and his Kings of Rhythm (and, later, Tina Turner) made Club Imperial the happening place for many years. Ike's sound, rhythms, and innovative style changed music's history.

I just blew him away when I started to play, broken leg and all.

Move the clock up twenty-five years, and I was hosting a show on Storer Cable called *Spotlight on Entertainment*, when I had the opportunity to interview Ike Turner. I introduced him as Ike Turner, one of my mentors, and asked him if he remembered the old Club Imperial.

He smiled and said,

"I remember you, man! You used to come up there and play with that broken leg."

#### The Other Side Of The Bandstand

### Five

"Growing up in the late '50s and early '60s was a time of innocence: we watched *Spin and Marty* on the *Mickey Mouse Club*, and the new teenage hit show, *Dick Clark's American Bandstand*. We watched Bill Haley's *Comets* in the movie *Rock Around the Clock*, and Elvis in *Love Me Tender*.

"We danced to dances like the stroll, chalyпсо, and the shag at Holy Ghost's teentown in Berkeley, after which we'd circle (cruise) the Steak 'n' Shake at the Riverview Circle or the one located in Jennings."

*Becky Kuennen Zurweller*

"In St. Louis, everybody had their own ground. You had the Italians on 'The Hill,' and you had the Irish and German neighborhoods. I guess this derived primarily from soccer, the poor man's sport for the Catholics growing up with these traditions. Battles were common on the playing field, and this carried over to teentown dances. Each high school would have their tough guys – maybe the wrestlers or football players – and many an evening you almost had to fight yourself out of the parking lot after these dances. ... Looking back on it, it was a lot of fun."

*Ralph Rockamann*

"Bob used to play at Teen Nights at the Lindell Theater on Grand Avenue. The theater had a band perform, right before the featured movie. On Saturdays, the theater sponsored competitions among area bands and Bob's band would go up against other bands.

"My brother knew these guys in the neighborhood who had a band, and they expected my brother to go to the 'Battle of the Bands' to cheer for them. He was a little concerned that, if he didn't go there to support them, they would beat him up!

"I later saw Bob at the YMCA on Grand and at many of the teentowns."

*Mary Bicigo Becker*

"I totally enjoyed my teenage years. I think we went to teentowns almost every night of the week. I had always enjoyed watching and listening to the Del Tones when I went to St. Anthony's teentown, and I knew a few guys in the band who went to St. Mary's. I found out they were looking for a girl singer. I auditioned and got the job and loved singing with them."

*Doe Mana Laurenti*

"When we lived on Roxton, I remember the band being at the house all the time. I don't know why we weren't run out of that neighborhood. Can you imagine how loud a band would be? Poor neighbors!

"We'd listen to records or the radio and, since I knew shorthand, Bob would ask me to take down the words to the songs. It was difficult to get all the lyrics by listening to a song just one time."

*Donna Kuban*

"I started working with Jules Blattner in 1959, and I was with his original Teen Tones. Jack Carney was a disc jockey with (radio station) WIL at the time, and he was sponsoring a concert at the Ritz Theater on South Grand Avenue.

"Jules was supposed to play the concert, but he had a real bad car accident. Jules and our guitar player, Bobby Caldwell, were in the hospital. Johnny Catalano, our drummer, and I went down to the Ritz, and that's when I first met Bob."

*Harry Simon, tenor sax  
Bob Kuban and The In-Men*

**Kuban Comment:** We filled in for Jules that time.

## Chapter Five

### Paying My Dues

Everybody has to pay his “dues.” I firmly believe that. And, if you don’t start paying ‘em when you’re new to the business, you’ll eventually have to pay them sometime down the road. The dues guarantee you a “membership,” and they’re something you’ll wind up paying, anyway, for the rest of your life. Once you quit paying them, you’re out of the club.

I once heard Bette Midler tell a story about the early days in her career. She and Barry Manilow were working in some little clubs together, and Bette remembered that they had to go through the kitchen to go onto the stage.

Right away, I knew this woman had paid her dues. “Oh, you’re the musicians? You gotta go through the kitchen.” Musicians are usually at the bottom of the pecking order. It’s only after you achieve the stature of a diva or superstar that they’ll even hold the elevator for you.

I often wonder how many of today’s young performers have paid their dues. Have they met the challenges of the initiation process? Do they know the variety of people they will meet along their professional journey - and will they have the training and talent to find ways to satisfy such diverse appetites for music?

When performers of my generation were starting out, we were not “hyped” on the back of boxes of Eggos, or on tee shirts that sold for \$9.99. None of us were “overnight sensations” but, usually, most of us had some degree of real musical talent.

Some of the most successful groups today that receive nationwide attention are nothing but skillfully marketed groups that appeal to the young teen set. And their managers admit to this, in print, for everyone to read. A lot of these performers can’t read a note of music, but they look right for the part. They can sing, have all the stage moves, and can entertain the fifteen year old out in the audience. But, in a lot of cases, they can’t really perform. They can only generate a rush of hormones for their fans.

Well, we did that, too, but that was the icing on the cake, not the cake itself. Essentially, back then, the audience got the band’s concerted effort to provide good music by good musicians, dished out at 110 percent levels of energy and talent.

This was definitely the case in the 1960s because all the local bands were extremely competitive. And, that same competitive drive was present among the groups that were vying for number one spots on the national charts, too.

Today, I’ve got kids calling my entertainment agency who tell me, “My daddy bought me a seven thousand dollar set of drums and we want to play Riverport or the Fox Theatre, and we’d like to open for some group down at the ...”

And, I ask, “Well, where have you played?”

“Oh, we haven’t really played anyplace - we’ve played a lot down in my basement for the last two years, and we made a CD.”

I’m thinking, “What?”

Sure enough, they’ll send me a nice CD and it has a really nice picture on the front of it. Somebody made up some original songs and they’re all listed on the back of it. And, I’m thinking, “Holy mackerel! These kids haven’t even had a job yet and they’ve already got a CD.”

Something is definitely wrong with this picture. These kids obviously haven’t paid their dues. They haven’t even applied for membership!

As for some of these young groups who have had national acclaim, and really have exhibited some talent, I still have to wonder what kind of dues this or that little teenage drummer has paid.

I paid some of my dues riding the bus down to Boyle and Olive to the Musical Arts Building once a week to take drum lessons from Roy Germauche. He was a great drummer and a fine person. The routine of taking that bus every week got real old real fast. But, each time I took a lesson from Roy, I was enthused. I was elevated. This guy was a real gas.

One day, the weather was very stormy, probably during the tornado season, and my mom didn’t want me taking the bus in bad weather.

I decided to call him to let him know that I would be missing my lesson. Someone picked up the phone on the other end, and I knew it wasn’t Roy. So, I asked to speak to Mr. Germauche.

The next thing I know, the man on the other end of the line says, “I’m sorry to tell you this, but Mr. Germauche is dead. Apparently, it was very sudden and unexpected.”

Well, shock is the mildest word I can think of to express my surprise. God, he really was a great drummer and it was sure terrible to get the news that he passed away. After a while, a couple of my friends turned it into a kind of bleak joke. “He died on the day you were supposed to have a lesson. What does that tell you?” they said.

But, I didn’t let their gallows sense of humor bother me. I still wanted to play the drums - and play them well. Next, I took lessons from Joe Cardinelli, another fine drummer who lived in nearby Walnut

Park. Joe had a very good name as a jazz drummer, and he worked with me on technique.

Mack Rayford was really something. He had played with Count Basie for a while. He was always completely gassed at the way I played drums and I was gassed at the way he played drums. Our drum sessions wound up to be a time when he was showing me stuff, and I'd show him some of my stuff. We'd spend the afternoon just trading off, and he loved it.

He wasn't familiar with rock or the contemporary at the time. He was a Big Band drummer, but he loved the new stuff. This really impressed me because a lot of musicians, good musicians, wanted to write rock and roll off like it was nothing. Like it didn't exist.

Considering his talent, it was a thrill to have Mack as a teacher. He set a clear-cut example for me: he showed me he was determined to further his skills as a drummer by adding contemporary rhythms to his style. Regardless of his age, he was determined to grow professionally.

Looking back, I had a unique experience in getting to know Mack. I was a young white man taking lessons from a black man. I didn't think much of it at the time, I only knew I was taking lessons from a really neat guy and a great drummer.

Even though that wasn't the typical experience for many young white guys in the mid-1960s, it was a wonderful one for me whose blue-eyed soul band became identified as a true exponent of soul and rhythm and blues.

Good music has to do with genius and talent, and Mack Rayford and Ike Turner exemplify those qualities. It didn't matter to them that I was white. And it didn't matter to me that they were black. I was an eager student who wanted to know everything about how they created their sounds, and I wanted to be able to do the same thing. I will always be grateful for how they touched my life and shaped my skills.

I had made my debut as a drummer with the Jo-Co-Bo Trio, but the band broke up when Joe and Connie headed off to college. Fortunately for me, a guy named Rich Krupa saw me playing drums somewhere and he asked me if I'd be interested in joining his group, the Rhythm Masters. His drummer was leaving town and, even though I was still pretty inexperienced, I was doing some neat stuff with rock and roll. What's more, I was singing, too. I was doing Ray Charles stuff and imitating other singers, like Bobby Darin and Gene Vincent.

Today, Phil Collins who had that great English band, Genesis, does vocals – but he is first and foremost a drummer. Buddy Miles is known more for his singing; but, he, too, is a drummer. There are lots of talented instrumentalists who later became vocalists but, even back



The Rhythm Masters' makeover began when I joined the band. Rock and roll, here we come! Shown here, Ron Sartori, bass; Ralph Fechter, sax; Rich Krupa, accordion.

then, I recognized the fact that if I wanted to keep on drumming, I needed to sing, too.

In a way, I guess I was a novelty. I became an asset because the band needed a drummer AND a singer. It's like someone suddenly throws you a ball and you've got to catch it. In this case, I caught the ball and ran with it. But, not right away. At first, as the new guy in the band, I just went with the flow.

The Rhythm Masters was first organized when I was just a little kid, back in 1947, and over the next ten years, it had become well established as a wedding band. We were probably the second generation to carry on the name.

We were quite versatile: ask us to play a polka, we'd play a polka. Ask us to play a waltz for the bride and her father, we'd play a waltz. Ralph Fechter was the sax player, Rich Krupa played the accordion, and our bass player was a guy by the name of Chuck Connors who is an announcer and voice-over specialist for NBC affiliate station KSDK in St. Louis. He's the guy who does all of the set up for many of the big network shows.

All in all, we were a pretty rockin' group and were good musicians. Even though, today, it's hard to picture an accordion with a band that plays contemporary music or rock and roll, you'll see accordions and "button boxes" with Zydeco bands and groups like that. Back then, however, an accordion was actually better than having a piano. Later, Rich went on to buy an electric piano and I continued to guarantee my job as the drummer who could sing.

And, after a little while, I began to interest Rich and Ralph in the drummer who could sing *rock and roll*. The Rhythm Masters needed something. They needed the exuberance of youth, they needed a kid who was willing to take chances, they needed a young guy with young ideas. And the timing was such that that young guy happened to be me.

By late 1957 or early 1958, I had definitely begun to shape the image of the Rhythm Masters. Consequently, the band had really begun to branch out. We weren't just a wedding band anymore. The kids were beginning to talk about us.

Many Catholic churches sponsored youth groups called "teentowns," which met in parish halls and cafeterias each week. These teentowns provided a wholesome, social atmosphere for the kids in their congregations - and the kids were beginning to hear about us and talk about us. "Get Bob Kuban and the Rhythm Masters," they'd say. Whether or not it was because I was a drummer who did the vocals, or because I brought in rock and roll, for some reason I was noticed.

The local teentowns began to call us for their Thursday, Friday, or Saturday night dances. One of the first to book us was Sts. Peter and Paul Catholic Church down in the Souldard section of South St. Louis. Soon, we were busy two or three nights a week. And, as word began to spread, we started to pick up quite a following in my neck of the woods, North St. Louis and North County.

Somebody reminded me not too long ago that, right around that time in 1958 or '59, her teentown booked us for its big winter dance. They had a total budget of \$100 to spend. Out of that, they had to put \$45 down as a deposit to rent one of those revolving mirrored balls with the little electric motor. They had \$25 to buy the decorations, soda, and chips for the guests. Thirty bucks was left to pay the band! And, that's pretty much how all the teentown events went back then. Our entire band worked for twenty-five or thirty bucks a night.

Just think of that: it cost more to rent the revolving ball than it did to hire the band!

## The Other Side Of The Bandstand

### Six

"Bob was the first president of our teentown at St. Jerome's. He and the band would play for ten dollars a night. He was the only teenager I ever met who knew what he wanted to be when he was only seventeen or eighteen years old. He told me that he wanted to have the best band in town.

"One Thursday night, I was hearing confessions before going over to the teentown meeting to help chaperone it. The last person had just left the church when, suddenly, a policeman came up to me and asked me what was going on over at the meeting. The kids were making quite a ruckus. They were parking their cars everywhere or circling around the neighborhood, looking for places to park.

"I told him that a local musician was playing at the teentown that night and that he was becoming quite popular with the kids, that's why we drew such a big crowd. The name of that musician was Chuck Berry."

*Rev. Ed Feuerbacher*

"Kids today don't know how enjoyable it is to hear a live band perform. All they're accustomed to is hearing a disc jockey playing CDs. I guess I'm out of touch. I don't have a clue as to what kids do today. I don't think they have as much fun as people who, today, are in their fifties who grew up listening to live music.

*Mark Mantel*

"We'd follow Kuban wherever he was. Whenever Kuban or Oliver Sain was playing, the floor would be packed. Even when I was too young to go to the teentowns, we'd go up to the school field and watch the kids dance at the outdoor CYC.

"Kids today don't have that experience. They don't know what a big rock and roll band sounds like 'live,' with real musicians."

*Mary Ellen McGrath Paunovich*