

# BILL and SUE-ON HILLMAN: A 50-YEAR MUSICAL ODYSSEY

*50 Years on the Road with Bill and Sue-On Hillman*

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## GIG NOTES SECTION

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### Part VI: What A Ride!

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#### PART VI: CONTENTS

*Quick Links to the Anecdotes and Photos in this Chapter*

[www.hillmanweb.com/cards/21/newdateall.jpg](http://www.hillmanweb.com/cards/21/newdateall.jpg)

[www.hillmanweb.com/cards/21/boball.jpg](http://www.hillmanweb.com/cards/21/boball.jpg)

[Sun Rises and Sun Sets](#)

[www.hillmanweb.com/cards/roots/sun2all.jpg](http://www.hillmanweb.com/cards/roots/sun2all.jpg)

[Kevin Pahl - The New Recruit Takes Flight](#)

[www.hillmanweb.com/cards/70/kevinall.jpg](http://www.hillmanweb.com/cards/70/kevinall.jpg)

["There they are, James Bond!"](#)

[www.hillmanweb.com/cards/70/portageall.jpg](http://www.hillmanweb.com/cards/70/portageall.jpg)

[Kerry Morris: The Third Man Theme Plays On Mo' on K-Mo](#)

[www.hillmanweb.com/cards/80/kerryall.jpg](http://www.hillmanweb.com/cards/80/kerryall.jpg)

[Northern Adventure: Island Lake](#)

[www.hillmanweb.com/cards/70/islandall.jpg](http://www.hillmanweb.com/cards/70/islandall.jpg)

[Have Canoe, Will Travel](#)

[CFB Shilo Country Club](#)

[German Army Invasion](#)

[German Bluegrass and Garlic Clouds in Shilo](#)

[Winterfests - Volkfests - Oktoberfests . . . Manitoba Style](#)

[Journey to the Centre of the Earth](#)

[www.hillmanweb.com/cards/80/rocanvilleall.jpg](http://www.hillmanweb.com/cards/80/rocanvilleall.jpg)

[Following the Alien Monster Through the Subterranean Labyrinth](#)

[Cantina Jammin'](#)

[www.hillmanweb.com/cards/21/cantinaall.jpg](http://www.hillmanweb.com/cards/21/cantinaall.jpg)

[Curtola Band Reunites at the Cantina](#)

[www.hillmanweb.com/cards/21/jamall.jpg](http://www.hillmanweb.com/cards/21/jamall.jpg)

[Jammin' At SOO'S II: Uncle Smoky Comes In From the Woods](#)

[www.hillmanweb.com/cards/21/larryall.jpg](http://www.hillmanweb.com/cards/21/larryall.jpg)

[Shindigs at Manitoba's Ski and Maple Syrup Capital Way Down South in Sunny Miami](#)

[You CAN Go Home Again](#)

[Dancing in the Streets](#)

[Lofty Barn Dances](#)

[Highway 83 Convention](#)

[Higher Lernin' Gigs at BU](#)

[Yes . . . We Even Play Chinese Laundries](#)

[www.hillmanweb.com/cards/21/bandall.jpg](http://www.hillmanweb.com/cards/21/bandall.jpg)

[Mo's Beatles 'More Popular Than Jesus'](#)

[REFLECTIONS OF THE EARLY GUESS WHO?](#)

[www.hillmanweb.com/cards/gigs/guessall.jpg](http://www.hillmanweb.com/cards/gigs/guessall.jpg)

[I. Prelude To The Main British Invasion](#)

[II. Shakin' All Over Manitoba](#)

[III. The New Guess Who](#)

[High Desert Eden](#)

[www.hillmanweb.com/cards/21/edenall.jpg](http://www.hillmanweb.com/cards/21/edenall.jpg)

[Pioneertown](#)

["It Was "Fifty" Years Ago Today . . ."](#)

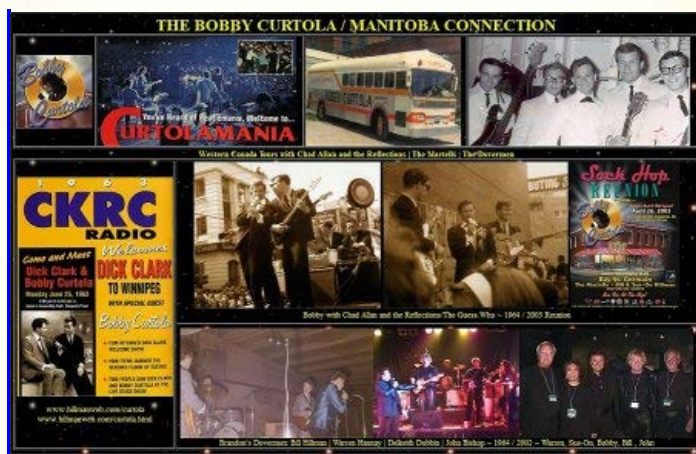
[www.hillmanweb.com/cards/roots/beatlesall.jpg](http://www.hillmanweb.com/cards/roots/beatlesall.jpg)

[Beatles Quest](#)

[www.hillmanweb.com/cards/sue-on/sueon4all.jpg](http://www.hillmanweb.com/cards/sue-on/sueon4all.jpg)



[www.hillmanweb.com/cards/21/newdaleall.jpg](http://www.hillmanweb.com/cards/21/newdaleall.jpg)  
50 Years Later and Still Giggin'  
Son Robin on Bass



[www.hillmanweb.com/cards/21/hoball.jpg](http://www.hillmanweb.com/cards/21/hoball.jpg)  
Rockin' with Bobby Curtola

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## Sun Rises and Sun Sets

[www.hillmanweb.com/cards/roots/sun2all.jpg](http://www.hillmanweb.com/cards/roots/sun2all.jpg)



I was born at the right time to watch the rise of Sun studios - a small Memphis recording studio owned by producer Sam Phillips. I first heard the music from Sun Records during late-night dial surfing on our giant Westinghouse radio -- probably in late '54 or '55. The exciting sound of the Hillbilly Cat and his Blue Moon boys entered the home through our radio's 12" speaker and I was transformed forever -- I had to have a guitar.

"Hillbilly Cat" was the moniker that radio station DJs in the deep South gave to a young singer from Memphis, who was in the forefront of the controversial new rock 'n' roll or rockabilly music: Elvis Presley. On the heels of this new phenomenal singer, whose style was so deeply rooted in blues, gospel and country, came a steady stream of other exciting artists from Sun Records: Carl Perkins, Johnny Cash and the Tennessee Two, Roy Orbison, Jerry Lee Lewis and others. Gaining exposure from live radio shows out of Shreveport and Nashville these new artists paid their dues by touring across the south, often on the same bill as well-known country artists from the Louisiana Hayride and the Grand Ole Opry.

Eventually, through national radio play and TV appearances, this stable of Sun artists skyrocketed to fame and popular music was changed forever. Rock 'n' Roll was born. Over the years, Sue-On and I have been lucky to see each of these acts in person, which was quite a thrill after hearing and seeing them so many times via records and broadcast media.

We saw Elvis in Las Vegas, Jerry Lee at the Minnedosa rock festival and the others in numerous shows in Brandon. More music excitement was to follow ten years later with Beatlemania. We had the privilege of visiting many of the Beatles haunts from their early days in Hamburg, Liverpool, London and clubs to the North -- we even played in some of those venues -- but the Sun explosion was the first. The Sun has now set. . . these R 'n' R pioneers are gone now, but they and their

music have been always with us on our long musical journey.

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## Kevin Pahl - The New Recruit Takes Flight

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Military bases have always been some of our favourite gigs. Being a war baby I've always been fascinated with the military -- seven of my uncles and my dad served in WWII -- RCAF, RCN and RCA -- and I had been in the Royal Canadian Air Cadets for eight years. We've played a multitude of functions in both Canadian and UK bases. The four main bases in Manitoba we played were Rivers, Shilo, Winnipeg, and Portage.

CFB Portage was a regular gig -- usually the Jr. Ranks, WO and Officers Messes. When Barry retired from the band after our US tour our first choice for a replacement was a former student -- Kevin Pahl from our hometown, Strathclair. Although very young, Kevin was a fine singer and keyboard player.

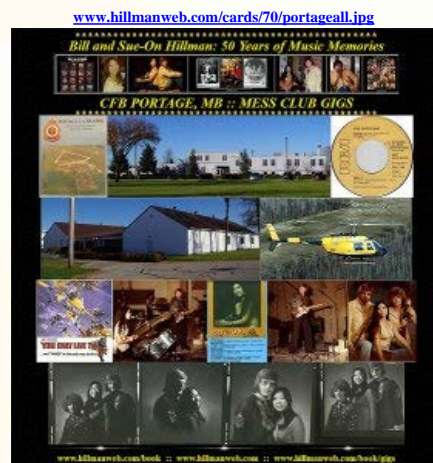
The first time Kev played with us was at CFB Portage. We had a panic first rehearsal the day of the gig -- all day -- and then over to Portage Jr. Ranks where Kevin played Sue-On's Hohner keyboard behind us for four hours. A year later Kevin was touring England with us and playing keyboards in our recording sessions.

Kevin had another talent -- he was and is an exceptional pilot. Before long we would return from distant gigs in time to drop him off at the airport where he worked as a flight instructor and crop duster. The best time for crop dusting is often at early dawn when the winds are lightest. Kevin has had an incredible career as a pilot. Years later, though, he survived a horrific crash when his duster plane struck a hydro power line and plummeted into a field. Kevin eventually recovered to fly again, but the aircraft was a total wreck.

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**"There they are, James Bond!"**

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We returned to the CFB Portage Jr. Ranks Club many times. Occasionally one of the military guys would join us for a few numbers and fiddler Stan Winistock, who had played fiddle on the

Guess Who hit, *Orly*, even guested with us one night. The audience was fun to play for -- and our memories of the the club are marred by only one event. Sue-On's best Zildjan cymbal was stolen one night while we were packing up. A friend swore he saw it on stage in a downtown Portage hotel a few weeks later -- it had distinctive tape markings on it.

The Officers' mess was a little higher class and served better food: we had our first frogs legs and haggis there and the drinks were always top notch. During one of the breaks while chatting with some chopper pilots, one of them mentioned that he had flown a helicopter in one of the James Bond films, and even had a line in the movie. While piloting he had pointed below and shouted, "There they are!" It was very sad to see the closure of most of these Manitoba's bases -- Rivers, Winnipeg and Portage -- great guys, great gigs, and great memories.

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### **Kerry Morris: The Third Man Theme Plays On**

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In the early '80s, Kevin Pahl left for Vancouver Island to marry his sweetheart, a former Strathclair girl, Debbie. He has carried on with his music career and crop dusting over the years. In fact, we have teamed up occasionally in later years for band reunions, weddings, and we even played many gigs around Manitoba with Mo Karrouze's Christian rock band and later with Mo's Beatles tribute band. Throughout most of our 50 years on the music trail we've worked mainly as a trio and some super musicians have filled that third man spot: Jake Kroeger, Barry Forman, Kevin Pahl, Kerry Morris and from the beginning of the 21st century, our son Robin.

Starting with our Federal Grain tours another former student from Strathclair Collegiate, Kerry Morris, joined the troupe's summer tours as drummer. Kerry is an amazing talent. Besides being an excellent musician, he won top awards for his computer expertise at University of Winnipeg, and we owe much of our early involvement with satellite dishes and computers to Kerry. He and his brother Kelvin are electronic whizzes whose Trail Amusements' juke boxes, games and vending machines have been well known across the province.

Kerry kept our band equipment in top shape and even built a recording studio in our Maple Grove basement. When Kevin left for the coast, we were lucky to have Kerry join us on drums and bass. Sue-On and he shared drum duties -- with Sue-On playing a stack of keyboards and synths part time when not on drums. Kerry was with us for most of our Call of the Wild Festival years and joined us for our arena dances and special gigs all around the province in the '80s and into the '90s.

Along the way Kerry started the very successful Protegra computer company in Winnipeg and married Edah. The couple now divide their time living in beautiful homes on Lake Winnipeg and in Edah's home village in Malaysia. We spent a wonderful month with them in Malaysia 2013 after which we spent another month touring through Sue-On's country of birth, China.

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### **Mo' on K-Mo**

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Kerry Morris is a longtime friend and music colleague. We go all the way back to 1965 when he was in my Grade IX class during my first year of teaching at Strathclair Collegiate. Even before this, his dad had been my principal and commanding officer of #317 Air Cadet Squadron in which

I had served for eight years -- rising to the rank of WO2.

Kerry developed into a talented musician on drums, bass and guitar, as well as becoming a top-notch techie in A/V and computer technologies. While in high school in Strathclair, he and another student, Hughie Stevenson, formed a teen rock band -- The Greensleeves -- in which I guested on a few gigs. Later, when drummer John Skinner dropped out of the Federal Grain Train troupe, we invited Kerry to join us on the tours. Since he could read drum charts, he was also asked by the Bardines to play in the pit band for the grandstand shows which appeared in most of the exhibition and fairs we played.

After our prairie touring years, since Kerry had filled in on drums during Sue-On's pregnancies, he was the obvious choice to join our trio throughout the '80s decade -- playing both drums and bass. The '70s had been our decade for recording. We had caught the recording bug and with the help of Kerry's expertise we designed a home studio in the basement of Maple Grove. It wasn't long before we added pinball and Japanese pichenko games and a satellite dish antennae to the adjacent games room. . . all with the help of Kerry. We now had an ideal place for jams and rehearsals. Sue-On and I provided the finishing touch by purchasing antique, full-sized oak Snooker table from Foxwarren pool hall. But we had to take it all apart -- overload our band crew cab truck -- and drag the giant slabs of slate down into the music room for reassembly.

These activities, combined with a full slate of one-nighters across the province made for an exciting decade. The '90s, however, brought a complete change in direction. We purchased and expanded Soo's restaurant to 265 seats and show hall and moved to Brandon. Kerry moved to Winnipeg, went back to university and pursued his true calling in the world of computers.

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### Northern Adventure: Island Lake

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In the early '70s we were invited to play two evening shows at Island Lake (Garden Hill), an Indian reserve on an island on Island Lake. The lake is the sixth largest in Manitoba and is situated 300 km northeast of Winnipeg on the Ontario border.

Sue-On, Barry and I loaded our equipment onto a plane at St. Andrews airport a little north of Winnipeg, and took off for the two-hour-long flight over the rugged Canadian Shield area. I'm prone to airsickness in small aircraft so I took recommended Gravol pills -- which made me sick before we even boarded the plane. Approaching the airport we could see that the runway pretty much took up the entire land area of a small island which was separate from the other communities on neighbouring islands.

The first thing I noticed after we landed was a mangled refrigerator dumped on the side of the runway. An aircraft, a few weeks back, had gotten too close to a recently brought in cargo and its propeller and new refrigerator had both been badly mangled.

Our transportation to our destination on a neighbouring island was waiting for us -- a canoe. We loaded our guitars, amps, drums, and cases onto the boat, but our tall Shure Vocalmaster PA speaker columns had to be balanced cross-ways, hanging a few feet over each side of the canoe. We made it safely to our digs -- the teachers' dorm which was now vacant since the teachers were all away on summer holidays. Since there were kitchen facilities in our rooms Sue-On bought

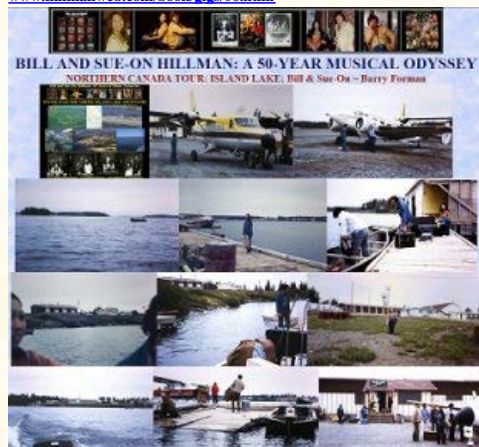
steaks at the trading post which she soon had simmering in a pan. We had a few hours to explore our rustic surroundings before setting up for our northern gig.

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## Have Canoe, Will Travel

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[www.hillmanweb.com/book/gigs/06.html](http://www.hillmanweb.com/book/gigs/06.html)



Our two shows on the Island Lake Garden Hill Reserve were in the school gym. We were surprised to see that there was no stage. We were directed to set up in the centre of the basketball court. Our audience, which consisted of everyone within walking or canoe distance and of all ages, encircled us and sat on the floor. We had expected a dance crowd, but for most of the performance the crowd stared intently and showed their appreciation after every number with polite smiles and applause.

Eventually, the areas beyond the spectators started to beckon a few dancers -- led mostly by exuberant white guys who lived and worked in some capacity on the reserve. The audience was very warm, but unlike any other we had experienced to that date.

The next day saw us back in a boat, but now we were being given a guided tour around the many islands in the area -- the most popular being one on which the locals had found enough clearings and soil to plant vegetable gardens.

Now that we knew what to expect we tackled that evening's show with a little more gusto and concentrated more on creating audience participation. After this performance we were invited to the chief's house for a small party, drinks and chitchat. Our flight back was scheduled for noon the next day, but we had time to visit the trading post again to purchase souvenirs and to leave a box of our record albums for them to sell. We then overloaded a canoe again and set out over treacherous waters for the island airport.

I never had a chance to re-visit, but many years later, while working as a travelling professor for Brandon University, I was slated to teach a remote university course in the area. The program, however, was moved to the Pukatawagan Reserve at the last moment.

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## CFB Shilo Country Club

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We made the rounds of all the Shilo stages and mess clubs: Jr. Ranks, Sergeants, Officers, as well as some of the L buildings and H huts -- but our favourite place was probably the Country Club. Here we played for golfers and curlers -- depending on the season -- plus many guests from on and off base, as well as some of the German army staff.

Sue-On spent part of one night hiding in manager Gord's office after some of the visiting German soldiers from GATES were determined to buy her fancy stage clothes as souvenirs. Sue-On still makes delicious clam chowder based on the Country Club recipe that Gord shared with her.

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## German Army Invasion

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Troops from many foreign countries, including Germany, France, Denmark and the United States, have trained at CFB Shilo. Between 1974 and 2000, 140,000 German soldiers trained there under the direction of the German Army Training Establishment Shilo (GATES) program. During those years we played at a great many functions for the German troops. Some of the troops married Canadian girls -- especially native girls -- and we had the pleasure of playing for some of their on-base weddings. Prize souvenirs sought by the German soldiers were furs, hides and stuffed animals from the wilds of Canada.

Many of the guys became so enamored with Canadian life and culture that they returned to live in Canada after serving their military stint. Being a part of their weddings and other celebrations was a real treat as we were fascinated by the mixing of the many different German and Canadian

customs, dances, food and drinks. A totally different experience was the playing for huge German stags where Sue-On was the only female in the building. It was a bit strange to see all the guys dancing with each other to our Canadian style R 'n' R, C/W, polkas and old time waltzes. Adding to the festivities were the kegs of German beer and heaps of steak tartar, breads, pastries and a host of other German dishes -- all flown over by military transport from Germany.

When we had occasion to visit Hamburg for the Tarzan Musical premiere many years later in 2008, we were flooded with many memories of those times -- especially the memories triggered by tasting German cuisine again.

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### German Bluegrass and Garlic Clouds in Shilo

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Many friendships developed during the years we played for the German army at CFB Shilo. Some of the families even visited us at our Strathclair home and we corresponded for years after they had returned to Germany.

A number of the visiting troops were obsessed with American bluegrass music and played many traditional songs in their own style -- complete with high harmonies, dog house bass, mandolins and banjos. This band of German pickers decided to put on a bluegrass and C/W show at Shilo's General Strange Hall Theatre. They hired us as special guests.

The audience seemed to enjoy the show, as did we, except for one thing. Our European cohorts had heard that true bluegrass musicians chewed garlic gloves before and during performances. The stage area was under a heavy cloud of garlic fumes. This made the close gathering around a mic to sing harmony with the guys a bit of an ordeal.

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### Winterfests - Volkfests - Oktoberfests . . . Manitoba Style

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Brandon's Lieutenant Governor's Winterfest is a major 4-day cultural event in the Wheat City, which certainly helps to shorten the long Manitoba winters. We were very involved in the planning and hosting of the Chinese Pavilion which took over most of Brandon's downtown mall and drew thousands of winter revellers. Many other ethnic groups hosted pavilions all around the city.

The German pavilion proved to be so popular that they added a summer version of their pavilion. This was held under a huge big top tent set up beside Brandon's South End Community Centre. As with the winter version, the volunteers served many different dishes of German food and of course, truckloads of German beer. To further enhance the German atmosphere the tent was well decorated, a large German brass "oopah band" played traditional music and a huge professional sound system encouraged the crowd to sing along with German drinking songs during the breaks. We were hired to play numerous sets of rocking dance tunes.

Kevin who was back in the area joined us on keys, son Robin played bass and Sue-On and I played our usual drums and guitar behind our vocals. We may seem an odd choice for such an event, but over the years we have played numerous Oktoberfest celebrations in the Keystone Centre and CFB Shilo - both before and after the departure of the presence of the German army which made use of the Sprucewoods "desert" sands for tank and artillery training. (The sands are actually part of the old delta deposits formed after the ice age where glacial spillways entered Lake Agassiz.)

We really didn't know much German music, but we played familiar songs with a heavy beat that most could sing, clap and dance along with. We always threw in a whole lot of polkas, old-time waltzes and novelty dances. Most seemed to enjoy our efforts, but I'm sure that if we ever found our way to the real Oktoberfest in the homeland that the native Germans would be scratching their heads in bewilderment and would consider us quite an oddity.

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### Journey to the Centre of the Earth

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Many of our life's greatest adventures have come via our gigs. A spinoff associated with a fairly routine graduation dance in Rocanville, SK led to an invitation to take a deep underground tour in the nearby potash mine. (The town's other claim to fame is the world's largest oil can that they've erected on the outskirts of town. This is in recognition of the over one million oil cans that a local factory produced for the WWII war effort.)

After assuring us that the world-famous mine was completely safe, our guide led us into a steel cage which plummeted us almost a kilometre into the stygian depths. We noticed distinct temperature changes and the lift shaft around us was dripping with water. When the cage jerked to a halt at the end of the descent we entered a huge, brightly lit cavern, which contained office rooms and various types of equipment.

A driver directed us into an electric-powered truck and soon we were racing through a horizontal tunnel-like shaft. There was no covering over the vehicle and we could almost touch the rock surface on the low ceiling which whizzed past over our heads. We were told that tunnels such as these from the main shaft spread out horizontally for about 16 kilometres.

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### **Following the Alien Monster Through the Subterranean Labyrinth**

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When our speeding vehicle eventually came to the end of our chosen underground tunnel we came upon one of the machines which creates this subterranean labyrinth. This huge alien-looking monster was a four-rotor continuous boring machine, which in the extracting of the potash ore cut a profile of 2.4 m by 8.23 m while advancing at a rate of up to 30 cm per minute. It was connected to haulage conveyors which moved the potash ore to shafts, which then took it to the surface for processing.

We learned later that, each year 3 million tonnes of potash are delivered by rail and ship to markets all over North America and Pacific countries such as China, Japan, Malaysia, Korea and Indonesia. This fertilizer promotes the growth of a great variety of agricultural crops: grains, corn, rice, palm oil, etc. It has been a constant source of amazement over the years when we think about the many fascinating places and situations that our music has taken us. This underground adventure had to be one of the most unusual.

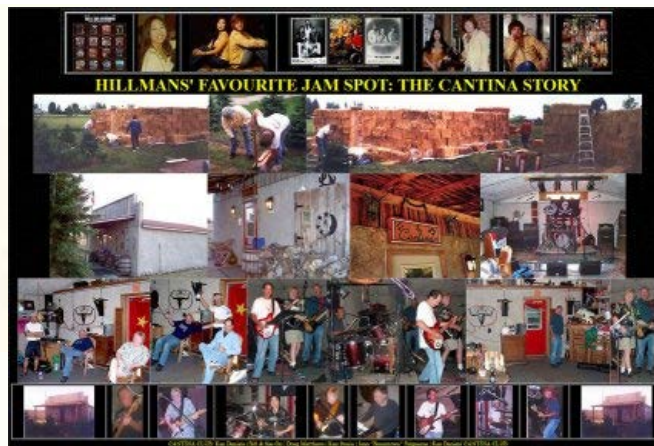
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### **Cantina Jammin'**

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We've enjoyed jam sessions in a wide variety of locations: Soo's Show Hall (part of our former 265-seat restaurant), Chicago, Pukatawagan Reserve, Minneapolis, Tarzana, English clubs, Legions, military bases, and many many pubs and bars.

The longest running -- and the best -- series of jams have been our weekly jam sessions at Ken Daniels' Cantina -- a one-of-a-kind building on his rural small holding. I know of no one more dedicated and more passionate for music than bassist Ken. This retired Brandon University professor built the unique Brandon-area building 20 years ago. Barn raising bees by farmers have been pretty common on the prairies, but Ken's raisin' was one with a difference. Musicians gathered to build the walls by stacking up flax bales Lego-style -- held in place by rebar. After the steel roof was installed and the exterior stuccoed, work began on turning the interior into a modern studio.

Over the years Ken has hosted weekly jam sessions, music events, and has provided practice space for hundreds of musicians -- all free of charge. The stuccoed walls of this private "country club" are done up in a Mexican decor festooned with music memorabilia. The room is jam packed with dream gear: Marshall, Peavey and Fender amps ~ drums and congas ~ super PA and light systems ~ FX devices ~ Hammond organ with Leslie ~ synths ~ doghouse bass ~ large stage, bar, tables and chairs ~ LCD projector and screen, computer system with WiFi access to a huge A/V music library stored on Ken's dedicated server ~ wall memorabilia from his travels and from the many musicians who have jammed here over the years.

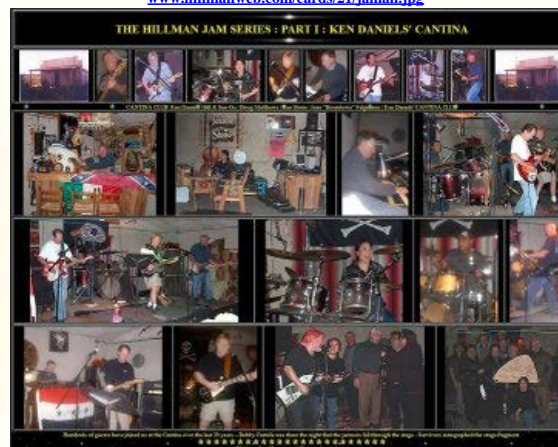
All of this is protected by an elaborate security system and all of it provided through the generosity of Professor Daniels -- a major supporter of Manitoba music.

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### [Curtola Band Reunites at the Cantina](#)

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[www.hillmanweb.com/cards/21/jamall.jpg](http://www.hillmanweb.com/cards/21/jamall.jpg)



For many years now the regular house band for the Cantina jams has consisted of owner Ken Daniels (bass), Ken Storie (guitar), Doug Matthews (keys and guitar), John Fulgaris (drums) and myself (guitar). We have welcomed a long line of jam visitors over the years -- and even Sue-On (drums) and son Robin (drums and bass) have made numerous visits.

Although we specialize in rock and heavy blues it's always fun when our visitors bring other styles of music to the jam and we've tried to make it known that visiting musicians from near and far are welcome. Ken has generously opened the doors to many other bands who have used the facility to party and rehearse.

Back in the '60s I had toured as lead guitar player in Bobby Curtola's band and it was a real thrill when Bobby moved to Brandon for a few years in the early 2000s. We had some great chats about old times over many of Sue-On's special meals at our house. Out of some of our late night chats came plans to put on a rock 'n' roll band reunion at Brandon's Keystone complex.

The natural place for us to rehearse was the Cantina. Two members of our old Dovermen band -- Warren Hannay (drums) and John Bishop (bass) flew in to do the show and we enlisted Cantina jammer Doug Matthews to play keys and Sue-On to join us on congas. We had a great get-together and the show played to a packed house.

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### Jammin' At SOO'S II: Uncle Smoky Comes In From the Woods

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When we took over the family restaurant, SOO'S, we expanded it into the neighbouring Dominion Tire and Radio building. The largest room in our 265-seat restaurant was a showhall with stage and bar. We hosted a number of events there: dinner theatre, mystery nights, dances, Remembrance Day dinner shows, karate tournaments and demonstrations, Blues concerts, New Year's celebrations, Dum Sum and wedding banquets, Chinese celebrations, etc.

One of the events we most looked forward in our Soo's Showhall was our regular Saturday night jam sessions. We never really knew who would show up or what type of music would be the highlight of the night. We were often in need of a bass player so our son Robin, a drummer, learned bass to fill the gap.

It was a real surprise one night when our old bandmate Larry Clark, "Uncle Smoky" and wife Linda showed up to jam. Larry, an all-around musician, played drums on some of our first TV shows and he played piano, organ and vibes on some of our early albums. The last time we had visited with the Clarks was at their cabin in the forests of Eastern Manitoba where Larry worked as a forest ranger -- writing and recording novelty campfire songs in his spare time.

We and the kids had a great time exploring the forest and streams around his cabin. There was even a bomb shelter on the grounds a remnant of the "Red scare" 1950s. It was a major thrill when Uncle Smoky invited Ja-On and me to make the dizzying climb up the long ladder to his observation capsule high atop the forest tower. Larry spent many hours a day up there scanning the horizon for the first signs of forest fires. He wiled away the time playing his guitar and small keyboard, and writing songs. In off-season he and Linda performed at many of the bars around the province where his novelty songs always excited his audiences. Their visit to our restaurant was a real treat for our Showhall crowd.

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### Shindigs at Manitoba's Ski and Maple Syrup Capital

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We played McCreary many times over the years at: the pub, Fair and Rodeo dances and monthly

hall dances during the ski season when the ski crowd from Winnipeg were regular weekend visitors. These dances were always wild and a lot of fun.

It wasn't uncommon for a horse and rider to come bursting through the door or weird objects to find their way to the middle of the dance floor: toilet bowls, trees, ski equipment, etc. On one memorable night a very inebriated young woman found her way to our off-stage dressing area and was sick all over Kevin's sheepskin coat. Her vomit also filled one of Sue-On's new fur-lined snowboots.

Many years, later in 2010, we played a huge reunion dance in the arena and we felt very nostalgic, especially when many of the dancers from the old days brought up our old vinyl albums and photos for us to autograph.

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### Way Down South in Sunny Miami

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Memories of playing in Miami, MB are all good ones, dating back to the '60s when we first played at their fair. A later gig that comes to mind is one in which our visiting friend from England, Mick Sandbrook of the Desperado band, played bass with us. Mick played on two of our UK sessions: Impulse in Newcastle and Guardian Studios in Pity Me near Durham. He used my Beatle Hofner bass -- and fit in really well considering that the bass was fretless and he hadn't rehearsed with us.

Thirty years later we were invited back to play for a lavish wedding dance in which the whole community was invited and a year later the Agricultural Society invited us back for old times sake for a fair dance. This time our son Robin played bass and our buddy Kenn Jarvin played synths. Two drummers, James Westbury and CKX's Shotgun McGwire gave Sue-On a break from drums. Most of the dancers hadn't been born the first time we played there, but we had a great time swapping good ole days tales with many of the "old timers."

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### You CAN Go Home Again

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Over 50 years into our performing career we're still pickin'. It's been said that show business is very hard to get into -- but even harder to get out of. Sorta gets in your blood. Many of our recent gigs have been arena dances for community reunion celebrations.

We felt especially honoured to be invited to our hometown celebrations in Newdale and Strathclair. The Newdale community were first to acknowledge us and it was real hoot playing to their huge arena crowd during Manitoba's Homecoming year in 2010. This was especially meaningful to us since both our families had businesses in Newdale for many years.

The following year we were invited to play in the Strathclair arena which we hadn't played for decades. We had played one of the first Strathclair Pig and Wiggle arena BBQs and dances over 30 years ago, so our return brought back many old memories and renewed old friendships when we played in the current version of this event.

A few months later Sue-On and I performed in the same arena for the anniversary of Strathclair Fair -- this time as a duo with acoustics and congas. We were delighted to have former student and excellent musician, Scott Watson, join us for a few numbers on stage. We had moved from permanent residency in Strathclair back in the early '90s when we purchased SOO'S restaurant and prepared to teach at Brandon University. It felt great to come home again.

For most of our more recent community reunion dances, Sue-On, son Robin and I were joined by Kenn Jarvin on keys and Jim Andrey on drums -- two fine Brandon musicians from Brandon bands (One Body, Beetles, Krakerjack, Cantina Jams) we had gigged with over the years. Jim brought along his trailer full of equipment currently in use by The Beetles band: drums, keys, amps, lights and PA. Fun events.

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### Dancing in the Streets

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Summer street dances are a tradition in many country towns on the prairies. Usually a flat bed is pulled in for a stage and the main street is blocked off by snow fence. People of all ages fill the street and often there is an adjacent beer tent. We enjoyed these events if the weather cooperated

and if we remembered to bring mosquito repellent.

At most of these dances in the early days, Barry's fiddle was very popular. When Barry retired from the band in the mid-'70s he let me put many of his fiddle tunes on tape. If called for we could play old time waltzes, polkas and butterflies by playing live behind the taped fiddle track. People often wondered where the fiddle was coming from, but when they saw Kevin's or Sue-On's stack of keyboards they became convinced that the sounds were from a synthesizer.

The small towns that hosted these shindigs are too many to remember, but some of the standouts were Douglas, La Riviere, Morris, Austin, Rivers. . . and the one we played in hometown Strathclair was certainly unforgettable. We played the gig, packed up and rushed to Winnipeg Airport to catch a plane for a tour in England.

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### Lofty Barn Dances

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Barn dances aren't too common anymore, but they used to be a real attraction. During the summer most of the livestock would be out to pasture so some farmers cleaned out their grand old barns, hired a band, and hundreds of locals of all ages would show up for the party.

I remember setting up in barns near Virden, Carberry, many Saskatchewan towns just across the border, and even England. We returned to a barn south of Whitewood, SK, many times -- often to play for a wedding dance. Like many of the barn gigs these dances were held up in the loft. Some of the equipment had to be carried up a ladder to the stage area . . . quite a workout.

This was back in the time when liquor regulations and liquor inspectors were much more lax. There was no formal security, but I really can't remember seeing any real problems.

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### Highway 83 Convention

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Highway 83 runs from Swan River, Manitoba, all the way down to Mexico. The annual conventions of the 83 Association were held at key points along the route and were sometimes hosted by locations in Manitoba. These were fascinating events to play for because there were attendees from all along the route -- and many of them showed up in representative costumes: Mexicans in sombreros, cowboy Texans with 10 gallon hats and spurs, farmers, Indians, businessmen, ethnic groups, trappers, etc.

The first of these events that we played was in Brandon and the next one was in Roblin when Sue-On was pregnant with our second son, Robin. She played during all her pregnancies right up to deliver time, but in the later weeks of the pregnancies she didn't play drums.

For the Roblin gig we asked Paul McCartney look-alike Doug Sullivan to fill in on drums and Sue-On devoted all her energies to singing. Doug is one of the best drummers we've worked with, but curiously we didn't have the opportunity to play together again for another 30 years. This was under the bigtop at a Neepawa Lily Fest show and dance. This time, Robin who was not yet born at the Highway 83 gig, now was our bass player.

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### Higher Learning Gigs at BU

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Brandon University has played a major role in our lives. Sue-On and I both received Bachelor of Science/Arts and Education degrees there. I went back and earned a 4-Yr B.Sc. Hons. and Education Master degrees after which I was recruited to work as a prof in the Faculty of Education.

Sue-On has taught for many years with the EAP program based in the Science Building. The music association goes back to around 1961 and 1962 around the time that the new dining hall was under construction. Some buddies and I used to jam in the basement of the new building while it was still very much under construction. At the end of these late-night sessions we usually returned to our rooms covered with plaster dust and sawdust. We also did some jams in the Evans Lecture Theatre.

Through the years, Sue-On and I played numerous shows in various buildings for educational

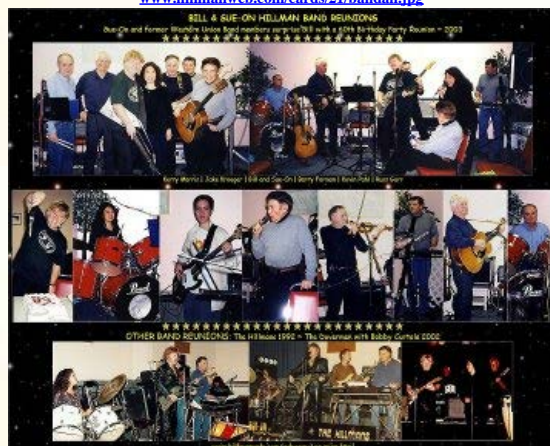
events, exchange students, student dances, Xmas parties and blues shows. When the Guess Who were given honorary doctorates I provided all the GW memorabilia for a large display in the Music Building. One of my Yamaha guitars hung for years in my office where it was within easy reach to take down to my classrooms. So you see music is never very far away, no matter where we are.

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### Yes. . . We Even Play Chinese Laundries

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On the evening of January 11, 2003 I was celebrating my 60th birthday at home -- alone -- for a few hours. Sue-On was tied up downtown for some of the evening helping out at the lunch bar connected to our family-owned laundromat. I was preparing to drive down to pick her up when she called and said we were invited to a friend's house for coffee -- suggesting that I change into more appropriate apparel.

I grabbed a clean T-shirt: "PUK University" -- a gift from my Pukatwagan class that I had taught in a Brandon University northern satellite classroom. When I arrived at the Laundry/Diner I noticed that Sue-On had closed the site early and had turned off the lights. I walked in and was hit with a cacophony of shouts, song and lights - "HAPPY BIRTHDAY."

Stunned, I looked around to see the grinning faces of all our former bandmates, longtime friends, and our kids: Ja-On, Robin, and China-Li (all three are also talented musicians who now regularly accompany us on stage). Obviously, Sue-On had been planning this for some time, since many of the guys had quite a distance to travel to be here. She also had made arrangements with our friend Jim Andrey and a few other SOO's Saturday night jam buddies to set up a PA, drums and amps. What followed was an incredible gathering in which we partied into the wee hours swapping old road tales and playing the old songs.

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### Mo's Beetles 'More Popular Than Jesus'

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Mo Karrouze, an English Muslim converted to Catholicism (a brave act considering Islamic apostasy), spent many years touring worldwide with rock bands as a percussionist. In later years he emigrated to Canada to settle down, start a family and begin a successful hair salon business. His first music project in Canada involved performing and recording global world beat music. His second major project was the founding of a Christian rock band: *One Body*. An important member of the band was Mo's wife, Heather, who performed most of the lead vocals.

I moonlighted with this group for a few years as lead guitarist -- never had a chance to sing with them, "You sound too much like a hillbilly" :) We didn't see much money out of this project, but since hearing Elvis' first gospel album back in the mid-'50s I've really appreciated this style of music. The band was excellent and the guys/gals were a treat to work with. Unfortunately, the contemporary Christian hit parade material we played didn't have much relation to the old time, hand-clapping Southern gospel songs I love. I've been an atheist since I learned there was no Santa Claus or tooth fairy, but the experience of performing at outdoor festivals and in ornate Catholic churches and halls around the province was quite fascinating.

I, and rhythm guitarist Jim Andrey, supplied our PA equipment for some of the gigs, but many of

the churches had their own elaborate sound systems -- complete with lighting, grand pianos and huge pipe organs. Eventually, around the time I was having major medical problems, the group evolved into a much better paying act: a Beatles tribute band. I played guitar and sang in many rehearsals in our home studio and even did a New Year's gig before moving on to other projects.

It was great fun playing again with our longtime keyboard buddy, Kevin Pahl in these groups. When Kevin left for the Coast he was replaced by Kenn Jarvin, another of our all-time favourite keyboardists. Mo's band, *The Beatles*, went on to become a much-more-in-demand and polished proponent of '60s music. I'm reminded of the John Lennon quote: "We're more popular than Jesus now. . ."

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## REFLECTIONS OF THE EARLY GUESS WHO?

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*Most of the following memories have been shared in expanded form elsewhere in our Gig Notes series, but here are few highlights meant to accompany the images in the related mosaic poster. Refer to the photos as you read along.*



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### I. Prelude To The Main British Invasion

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I was playing with many different bands in the early '60s. PA systems were primitive and very few local bands featured much in the way of vocals. In our three-piece *Blue Angels* group I played guitar instrumentals for almost four hours at every one of our dance gigs. The arrival of sax and piano player Alan Jones from England added a much welcomed bit of variety to our repertoire. Al also brought news and recordings of the latest bands back home -- and we soon recognized that much of the music from across the Atlantic was familiar, since we had heard many of the songs played by *Chad Allan and the Reflections*.

Chad's friend Wayne Russell had supplied the *Reflections* with a steady stream of the latest hits from the UK dating all the way back to the formation of Chad's first group, "Allan and the Silvertones." The *Reflections'* excellent interpretations of this material featuring Chad's Cliff Richard influenced vocals and Randy Bachman's echoey Shadows-style guitar licks made them unique to the Manitoba music scene. As their repertoire evolved into an increasing number of Beatles songs, Manitoba had a taste of its own local Beatlemania long before the mop tops' American debut on the Ed Sullivan Show. Since I also played in the house rock band at Brandon's Roller Rink where Chad and the boys played regularly, it was intriguing to watch the band grow professionally and to see the influence they had on other bands in the area -- both musically and in showmanship.

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### II. Shakin' All Over Manitoba

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Through an amazing coincidence Chad and I met up again at University of Manitoba summer school in 1965 where we were both taking an Atomic Physics course. This led to my attending many of his band's nightly shows at downtown Winnipeg's Town and Country Lounge. The scaled down band featured Chad, Randy, and Jimmy Kale (drummer Garry Peterson was

underage and playing upstairs in the main showhall). Incredible guitarist, Lenny Breau, often joined them at the gig. We even went over to Chad's house to study physics a few times, but we were more interested in the new Rickenbacker guitars that had just arrived.

Our band toured with Bobby Curtola that winter and I found it interesting when Bobby told us that the Reflections had toured as his backing band a few months before. By now the band had a hit record with "Shakin' All Over." This song had been a real crowd pleaser at the Roller Rink gigs and we were thrilled to hear that they had finally recorded it and that it had become a hit. It was at U of M's UMSU building that I first had a chance to see "The Deverons," a young up-and-coming band that featured teenage wunderkind, Burton Cummings.

Looking back, it is interesting to reflect on how these two musical threads would be woven together later on down the road. A few months before we were married in 1966, Sue-On and I had a chance to see the band -- now known as *The Guess Who?* -- playing at the Pink Panther dance club in Transcona. Big changes were starting to take place in the band's direction. Burton Cummings had been recruited to play keys and to share lead vocals with Chad. Soon after, Chad left the band.

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### *III. The New Guess Who*

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After leaving the band he had founded and nurtured for so many years, Chad Allan returned to University and embarked on many solo recording and television projects. One of these projects was to serve as host on CBC television's network show: *Let's Go* in which Chad's old band, The Guess Who provided all the music. By this time I had a reel-to-reel recorder, which enabled me to make off-air audio recordings of many of these shows.

Curiously, we have the distinction of having Chad take part in one of our album recordings. While recording a rocker at the old Century 21 Studios we called on anyone within hearing distance to join us in the studio to add hand claps on the track. Chad, who was doing many recording sessions at Century, happened to be visiting the studio, so he was enlisted as one of these hand-clapping sidemen.

The last time we crossed paths with the Guess Who was at CFB Shilo when the band -- now fronted by Burton Cummings -- came into the Jr. Ranks Club after taping a CBC show in nearby General Strange Theatre. They joined us on stage and the jam went on into the wee hours. Within days the band was in New York recording "These Eyes."

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### High Desert Eden

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Our association with Edgar Rice Burroughs, Inc. of Tarzana, CA has led us on many trips throughout North America and Europe. California is always a favourite spot and each visit leads us to many new adventures in the entertainment field. During the Burroughs Centennial year we participated in a great variety of events across the state, including two spectacular conventions, special premiere film showings on the Disney Campus, the dedication of an ERB Commemorative stamp from the US postal service in Tarzana, a major interview focussed on legendary pulp authors in the L. Ron Hubbard Studios on Hollywood Blvd, and many more.

It was exciting opportunity to meet many musicians, Hollywood celebrities, and to explore studios and film locations. One of the most rewarding meetings was with the best-selling author of medieval novels, Robin Maxwell. We had provided some of the materials for her PowerPoint presentations on her new novel: *Jane - The Woman Who Loved Tarzan*.

At the end of formal festivities, Robin and husband Max - a yoga master - invited us to their unique California desert retreat: High Desert Eden. We spent many wonderful days there enjoying their hospitality, marveling at their solar and wind power facilities and exploring the endless variety of desert flora and fauna. As usual, music was never far from our minds. We had some great jam sessions with this multi-talented couple who are excellent singers.

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### Pioneertown

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Max and Robin's High Desert Eden is a short distance from Pioneertown, a famous movie location in which countless westerns were filmed starring Roy Rogers, Gene Autry, Cisco Kid, et al. Amazingly, the whole area has recovered from a massive desert fire a few years back and being among the spectacular rocks, gullies, mesas, rugged structures, vegetation, and desert skies is like entering a dreamworld for every fan of western films.

One of my very early music influences was the western music sung by the singing cowboys of the movies. In keeping with the long history of shootouts and action in this town, a troupe of local actors put on daily western shows in the streets.

A short distance on is the Joshua Tree area. We made a point of visiting the motel there where famous country rocker Gram Parsons had died, and the desert location where friends had cremated his body by a huge rock among the Joshua trees.

On the night before we left the high desert, Max and Robin took us for dinner and an evening's entertainment at Pappy and Harriet's Pioneertown Palace -- an historic rustic restaurant and bar. We were intrigued by the colourful clientele and the wall displays of photos from the many famous singers who have performed there. We had commitments back at Eden that night, but were able to stay long enough to catch a set played by one of the local bands. The next morning found us rolling eastward to more music adventures in the Wild West.

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### "It Was "Fifty" Years Ago Today . . ."

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Early 2014 saw a flurry of Beatles excitement in the media, since it had been 50 years since their appearances on television's Ed Sullivan Show -- an appearance that had launched their "invasion" of North America. Thinking back there are a few things I remember about that exciting time.

I had been waiting to see the Fab 4 for some time in the early '60s. Alan Jones, a bandmate from England had a brother in Yorkshire who'd been sending reports about an unusual pop band with a funny name and strange haircuts who were the latest rage with teens and the media in England. Since I was a real fan of British music and was always looking for new songs to learn, he had been



sending us Lonnie Donegan and Shadows records. He then started to enclose a few Beatles singles in his packages. Around this time Chad Allan and the Reflections, who made regular appearances at the Brandon Roller Rink where we worked as house band, started to feature Beatles songs in their act. Interest piqued by all this and the stories in the imported UK papers which I bought occasionally at Brandon newstands, it was a thrill to finally see the band on the Ed Sullivan Show.

This North American debut kicked off a tremendous change in the music, fashion and attitudes of the young. We soon let our hair grow longer, bought Beatle boots, tailored our trousers to a skinny fit, shopped for jackets with Nehru collars, replaced many of our band instrumentals with vocals and harmony, tried our hand at writing our own songs, looked at Gretsch and Hofner guitars with even more admiration, and developed an even stronger fascination with all things British. It is quite amazing that someone so stodgy as Ed Sullivan became a major force in launching two music and cultural revolutions. Back in 1956 I had been just as excited and inspired when I watched Elvis, the Blue Moon Boys and Jordanaires on his show.

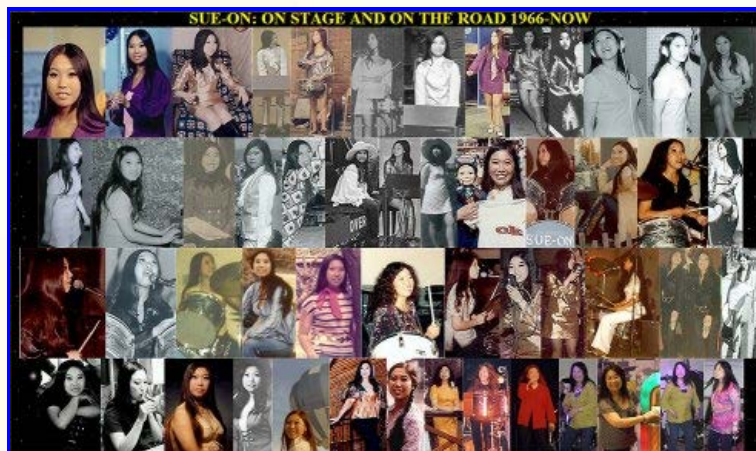
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### Beatles Quest

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Thinking back over the last 50-plus years and reading through our "Music Odyssey" project notes I realize just how influential the Beatles have been on our music. I've jotted down some of the highlights of this "Beatles Connection" that we've expanded upon elsewhere in this tome:

- Not only did they inspire changes in appearance, music styles and social attitudes, but they also provided the incentive for us to book studio time in Canada and England to record our own music
- My sprawling packrat collection includes a full library of Beatles books, magazines, records/tapes/videos . . . as well as numerous Beatles-inspired instruments
- 50 years ago I also married an Asian girl . . . and we too have two musician sons . . . but going beyond Lennon's lead, we also produced a beautiful daughter :)
- I had the thrill of singing through John Lennon's favourite mic during a recording session . . . which I accidentally broke -- very embarrassing
- The engineer for one of our albums had worked at Abbey Road on the White Album sessions
- Spent time exploring Liverpool during one of our England tours in the '70s . . . where we were ticked off to find that the original Cavern Club had been demolished
- Played many of the same clubs in Northern England that the Silver Beatles had played in their early days
- Spent two weeks in the Reeperbahn district of Hamburg visiting and photographing the clubs and haunts where the Beatles had evolved their act
- Two afternoon meetings in the London Soho office of Dick James whose company had notoriously taken over the Beatles' Northern Songs publishing rights
- Performed a stint in a Beatles "tribute" band
- A highlight of our last New York visit was attending the Letterman broadcast in the Ed Sullivan Theatre and taking an afternoon hike to the Dakota Apartments
- The Beatles figure prominently in our Rock Roots section: Hamburg Years Tribute and Post Hamburg - Fab Four Years



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