

SPIV WILLIAMS

Good Afternoon. I am D.C. Williams, better known to this world as "Spiv." My family came to Creston in 1911, although I was born in Hillsboro, Illinois, in 1909. We lived for short periods of time in Stuart, Adair, and Sac City, before finally settling in Creston.

One of our first homes here was 303 North Vine Street, and my father was a barber at Zeke Brookman's shop underneath the old First National Bank. I often wondered how my father reared 6 of us full siblings and 7 half-siblings on a barber's salary, but, somehow, he did it thanks to the kindness of the people of Creston. We also lived in a house where the Elk's Club now stands. It was known as the old Willis house, but burned to the ground.

Life was very tough in those early years. My mother passed away when I was in grade school, and, for a time, my brothers and sisters and I were sent to live with relatives in Illinois and Nebraska. Eventually, our family was reunited, and we lived north of the old hospital.

This may be way further back than any of you here can remember, but I attended the old, old, old Franklin School which burned down when I was in 4th grade.

I really enjoyed going to school, especially high school which was downtown. My friends and I would skip school during study hall and run to Fred Russell's Pool Hall in the basement of the Iowana Hotel. All the guys in high school regularly made it to Fred's to play pool, drink pop, listen to the World Series, or just enjoy hanging out.

The Iowana Hotel was a hub for everything going on in Creston. Mrs. Alice Howell ran the coffee shop for the hotel and pretty well managed the hotel all by herself - not an easy task as conventions were held there, and almost every traveling salesman stayed there. She managed 125 rooms, and almost all of them were filled every night. My first job was at the Iowana - Alice hired me to run the electric dish washer in the coffee shop. I made \$10-\$12 a week. That was a very impressive wage for a young man in those days.

My next job was for the railroad cleaning and sandblasting the old engines. It was a very good job, but when the Great Depression hit, I got laid off. This really hurt, but since I had also been painting signs on the side since 1926, I was able to have a small income.

I learned this sign-painting trade with a lot of self-instruction, along with picking up pointers from more experienced painters such as Joe Anderson, Jack Pincus, Oscar Larson, and Shorty Rowe. I made a trip to California during this time, and while I was there, I painted a sign for a bar owner. He wanted to pay me with a bottle of Four Roses whiskey. I told him I didn't drink, and he told me to save it for a special occasion - which I did. I waited until I married my wife, Bernie, some 40 years later.

As much as I was around drinking, I really didn't care for the stuff - and that goes for tobacco, too! I never smoked until I tried a cigar at age 20.

Now during the Great Depression, I got into another career - what some might call bootlegging. It wasn't considered a stigma in those days of the Depression; it was a chance for me to make a much-needed buck or two. No able-bodied person ever turned down a chance to earn some money. About 25-30 other guys around here were doing the same thing to keep food on the table and roofs over their heads.

The only thing around here in the line of alcoholic beverages was 3.2 beer. The way our bootlegging system worked was for a wholesaler to send some one to Chicago to make the purchase. This was in the day of Al Capone - so the runner would go to a hotel; someone would drive by and pick up his car and money and take them away to fill the order. Later the car would be returned to the hotel so the driver could return to his town with a full order of alcohol. The runner would be guaranteed safe passage out of Chicago by the police and any other enforcement officers. One fellow I know always made his runs dressed as a priest - he never stopped or questioned!

Bootlegging was not without some danger, though. I do remember one incident in Creston. The two runners were returning to Creston with a load of alcohol. Unfortunately, they caught the attention of the feds who chased them all the way back to Creston. The two men raced back to the house on Townline Road of one of them, where he leaped out the car and ran into his house. "Pull the plug on the bathtub," he shouted to his wife as he ran through the house and out the backdoor to hide in the cornfields. He was never arrested. Not so for the other gentleman! The revenuers caught up with him and shot him dead.

After the runner got back to Creston, usually carrying 50-100 gallons of alcohol in his vehicle, the wholesaler would sell in for \$18 a gallon. The purchasers then would sell it around town for a profit. Four ounces - known as a split pint - would go for \$1.25. A half pint would sell for \$2.50, and a quart would cost \$10. That would bring about \$40 a gallon for the \$18 gallon purchased wholesale. Quite a business during these hard times.

A drug store in Creston sold and supplied the bottles. They literally sold thousands of bottles. People who bought the alcohol would buy the 3.2 beer and add an ounce of the alcohol to get the kick they wanted.

Of course, others just made regular mixed drinks. I personally never got into trouble selling alcohol, although some guys certainly did.

When Prohibition ended, I went back to the more mundane occupation of sign painting. That lasted until the late '30's when I discovered the joys of the jukebox industry.

In 1939, I entered the jukebox business working as a mechanic for Vince and Ab Bradley, also of Creston. Ab was a pilot and was killed in WWII, and Vince was killed in a car accident just a few years later in 1948. By this time, I loved the jukebox venture, so I bought out the business from Vince's widow.

By this time, the company, now called Creston Amusement, rented out and serviced about 40 jukeboxes. By 1955, I had approximately 100 jukebox locations in Creston and within a 65-mile radius of the town. By this time, games such as pin ball were becoming popular, and I had about 20 game machines around my district.

I firmly believed that as a juke box operator, I needed to pick exactly the right records for my machines to get the maximum number of plays, and therefore, the most money. No record ever went into my machines without me hearing it and approving it.

I also learned not to just buy records that I personally like. It might really strike my fancy, but never get a play on any of the machines. When I did like a tune, I would buy it for my personal collection, never for my locations.

Mostly, I bought popular hits and country/western music for the jukes. Rhythm and blues genres never took off in this area, so I purchased about 40% country/western and 60% pop music. Always seemed to work well, and I sure was making good money.

When the popularity of the records would run its course, I had buyers from Katz and Walgreen's drug stores who would buy my used records, which brought me back almost what I had paid for the records new. What a great business. In 1955, I was at the top of my form. Just to let you know what was happening in the music world, here is a list of what songs I was buying in 1955. Anyone at all recognize any songs or artists?? An interest mix of crooners mixed in with the up-coming artists of the rock n roll era, don't you think??

LIST OF TOP 1955 JUKE BOX HITS

1	Cherry Pink & Apple Blossom White	Perez Prado
2	Rock Around the Clock	Bill Haley & the Comets
3	Yellow Rose of Texas	Mitch Miller Chorus
4	Autumn Leave	Roger William
5	Unchained Melody	Les Baxter
6	Ballad of Davy Crockett	Fess Parker/Bill Hayes
7	Love is a Many Splendored Thing	Four Aces
8	Sincerely	McGuire Sisters
9	Maybelline	Chuck Berry
10	Ain't That a Shame	Pat Boone
11	Melody of Love	Billy Vaughn
12	Hard to Get	Giselle Mackenzie
13	Sixteen Tons	Tennessee Ernie Ford
14	Learning the Blues	Frank Sinatra
15	Hearts of Stone	Fontaine Sisters

16	Mr. Sandman	Chordettes
17	A Blossom Fell	Nat King Cole
18	Honey Babe	Art Mooney
19	I Only Have Eyes for You	Platters
20	KoKoMo ((I Love You So)	Perry Como

Like I was saying, 1955 was a banner year for me. I was written up in the prestigious *Billboard Magazine* for inventing a way to electronically keep track of all my record inventory; inventing a gadget to keep track of all my jukebox keys, and devising platform stands for the machines themselves so they were not damaged by janitors or patrons.

The magazine named me as the top and most progressive of all music operators in Iowa. Living the dream - and speaking of living the dream., I finally got married to my dream girl, Berniece Weber in 1965.

Remember that bottle of Four Roses that I received in payment for sign painting back in the 1920's. This is when I finally opened it and shared it with my wonderful wife. I retired that same year at age 56. Pretty sweet! My last purchase of hit records was 1965. How music had changed. Take a look at the change of music and artists.

(List on next page)

LIST OF TOP JUKE BOX HITS 1965

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| 1 | Wooly Bully | Sam the Sham & the Pharoahs |
| 2 | I Can't Help Myself (Sugar Pie Honey Bunch) | Four Tops |
| 3 | Satisfaction | Rolling Stones |
| 4 | You Were on My Mind | We Five |
| 5 | You've Lost That Loving Feeling | Righteous Brothers |
| 6 | Downtown | Petula Clark |
| 7 | Help | Beatles |
| 8 | Can't You Hear My Heartbeat | Herman's Hermits |
| 9 | Crying in the Chapel | Elvis Presley |
| 10 | My Girl | Temptations |
| 11 | Help Me, Rhonda | Beach Boys |
| 12 | King of the Road | Roger Miller |
| 13 | Birds and the Bees | Jewel Akin |

14	Hold Me, Thrill Me, Kiss Me	Mel Carter
15	Shotgun	Junior Walker/All Stars
16	I Got You, Babe	Sonny and Cher
17	This Diamond Ring	Gary Lewis/Playboys
18	"In" Crowd	Ramsey Lewis Trio
19	Mrs. Brown You've Got a Lovely Daughter	Herman's Hermits
20	Unchained Melody	Righteous Brothers

Music had certainly changed in those ten years between these two lists. We now had many British artists, more rhythm and blues, and yet there was Elvis still having hits in the top ten tunes of the year. Did you notice that there was one song that was on both lists? Anyone remember? It was Unchained Melody, and it just goes to show, a beautiful love song will always endure.

I have so enjoyed my time with all of you this afternoon. Keep the music in your life and enjoy every minute as Bernie and I did.

Thank you so much.