"SURE ENOUGH BLUES": THE LIFE AND TIMES OF EAGLE PARK SLIM

by

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"Sure Enough Blues: The Life and Times of Eagle Park Slim," a thesis prepared by Martin G. Weissbarth in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in the School of Music. This thesis has been approved and accepted by:

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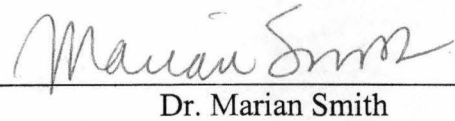
Approved: 

Dr. Marian Smith

Eagle Park Slim (Autry McNeace) is a Blues performer/songwriter, active professionally in nightclubs, recording, and as a street performer since the mid-1950's. This edited oral history details his experiences growing up in Eagle Park, Illinois. Early encounters with Albert King, Chuck Berry, and other seminal Blues/Rock and Roll performers fed Slim's musical development. Subsequent work with Sonny Boy Williamson, Jimmy Reed and others in the fertile music climate of the East St. Louis area are documented, along with non-musical work and personal relationships. Extensive professional and personal history provides a first-hand account of the social context for the musical developments from 1950's through 1980. Attention is given to the evolution of racism and violence, the disintegration of African-American neighborhoods, and the craft and politics of songwriting. This document provides contextual information about the postwar period of American popular music, and constitutes an artifact from the African-American storytelling tradition.

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DEDICATION

For my mother, Barbara Weissbarth.

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INTRODUCTION

Eagle Park Slim (Autry McNeace) grew up in a small town built by his family, friends, and neighbors. Between the devastating boll weevil infestation of 1920 and the rapid mechanization of agriculture during the 1940's, several hundred thousand Black farming families had left the South, migrating toward greater economic and educational opportunities in northern cities. Although many were headed for Chicago and New York, cities such as St. Louis often became permanent stopping places.[1] Slim's parents, James and Seola McNeace, had moved to Venice, Illinois from Arkansas sometime before 1940. The McNeace family, with nine children in tow, moved from Venice to Eagle Park, Illinois when Slim was a year old, during 1943.

During the late 1930's, the area which is now Eagle Park, Illinois was an unpopulated swampy high spot in the western leg of Horseshoe Lake outside of East St. Louis, Illinois (Illustration 1).[2] The town of Eagle Park was, quite literally, built on an extensive garbage dump; landfill allowed the construction of a small suburban hamlet, populated by families moving from nearby Venice, Lovejoy, and Madison.

Hauling their own drinking water, building supplies, and groceries from Madison, the McNeaces labored to establish a household. Slim's parents, along with his aunt Ruby and sister Dorothy, opened Eagle Park's first businesses, a tavern, restaurant, and

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[1] E. Marvin Goodwin, *Black Migration in America From 1915 to 1960: An Uneasy Exodus*, Vol.3, *Studies in Twentieth Century American History* (Lewiston, New York: E. Mellen Press, 1990), 18.

[2] Gousha, H. M., *St. Louis and Vicinity* (Chicago: Shell Oil Co., 1939).

Illustration 1. St. Louis and Vicinity (Eagle Park, Venice, Madison) 1939

hotel, building from scratch. These family-owned businesses served as a hub of social life for the growing community. They served also as the vantage point from which Slim observed life about town. The tavern and hotel drew vacationers from the East St. Louis area during the early 1940s, and the tavern nightlife provided Slim's earliest exposure to blues performers working in the area.

By this time, the East St. Louis vicinity was already famous for its musical activity. As early as 1910, St. Louis had a reputation as the capital of Ragtime music, with activity centered in a flourishing red-light district. In 1916, St. Louis's red-light district was closed down in support of the war effort, and much of the local musical activity moved across the Mississippi river to East St. Louis or Lovejoy. Lovejoy, Madison and Venice, all outlying neighborhoods of East St. Louis, had no restrictions on "merrymaking" and so allowed for unencumbered musical activity.[3] Early encounters with Albert King, Johnny Wright, Chuck Berry, and other musicians fed Slim's development as a teenage musician. His subsequent career as a blues performer, bandleader and songwriter took him many places.

Although historians have documented blues singer's lives, they tend to focus on performance-related aspects rather than non-musical work, family and personal relationships. Slim emphasizes his early experiences in school. His strong sense of self is reflected in his adoption of the movie hero "Cody's" name, and later the name "Eagle Park Slim." Basketball also served as an early character-building process for Slim, and along with music, continues to be an important part of his life. As Slim's own musical performing career began, he often played in the numerous teenage clubs known as "Teentowns" in the East St. Louis area. Slim's experience being exploited by the East St.

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[3] William Barlow, *"Looking Up at Down": The Emergence of Blues Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 254.

Louis music promoter Bill Stevens reflects a pattern characteristic of the racial dynamics in American popular music during this era.

Playing the blues around the East St. Louis area led Slim through rough, colorful territory. It opened his eyes to the rigors of drink and violence, teaching him lessons in personal responsibility and survival skills. Like many (if not most) blues musicians, Slim also worked many non-musical jobs. Bandleaders like Little Walter Westbrook and Percy Mayfield served as role models for self-discipline and persistence. He continued to have opportunities to play with blues masters like Muddy Waters and Jimmy Reed, seeing for himself the heavy toll which is often exacted by the blues life.

Slim's move to Denver in 1973 ushered in a new phase of life: new bands, new loves, and new street corners for performing. He began to broaden his geographical scope, making side-trips to Seattle, Los Angeles, and Las Vegas, sometimes with nightmarish results. During this period Slim found his singing voice, discovering the particular keys which allowed him to sing comfortably. He was no longer "just a guitar-player," but a singing bandleader.

Racism and violence in American society have undergone significant changes during Slim's lifetime. As a young black man living before, during, and after the civil rights movement, he was in a position to observe social developments firsthand. Throughout the tumultuous years of desegregation, Slim carried the survival-based advice of his father, who had lived through the unabashed oppression of the Jim Crow era. Slim witnessed the traditional organized crime of the postwar years developing into the new gangsterism of impoverished inner cities, along with the increasing impersonality of violence. Drawing on lessons learned in his youth while helping to establish the town of Eagle Park, he speaks in practical terms about the potential for rebuilding devastated inner cities.

Slim's experience with Albert King illustrates that exploitation in the music business occurs not only across racial lines, but also within them. Albert King had every reason to treat Slim well, especially in view of the support Slim's family gave King early in his career. As usual, Slim draws a lesson from the experience that informs his ability to survive.

Slim's perspective on the music of his time is important: the generation immediately preceding his learned its music predominantly from their colleagues, from live musical performances. Slim's generation also did so but, in addition, they were increasingly influenced by commercially recorded blues performances. This cusp between direct oral transmission and the newer mass media-based process is a significant transition in blues culture. The generation following Slim's had a strong library of recorded material from which to work, and much less direct access to the actual performers. They learned primarily from recordings.

Some of the characteristics which are most central to blues music (intensity of personal expression, intuitive improvisation style, convincing vocal delivery) are those based in the oral transmission process. Commonly lumped under the term "soul," these elements are becoming more scarce in commercially-produced blues music.[4] Historians studying the evolution of blues music in upcoming generations will face increasing difficulty locating musicians who learned their music though direct oral transmission..

When Slim began learning and performing music, it was during this transition from live/oral transmission to recorded transmission. He speaks also from another cusp, that of the entry of blues and black artists into the mainstream of popular American music via rock and roll. The 1950s, when he was a teenager and playing popular music, was a

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[4] Nelson George, *The Death of Rhythm and Blues* (New York: Penguin Books, 1988), 200.

time of major development in American music, and one of the first times in American culture when it became possible, if remotely, to become a black musical star. Despite periods of relative celebrity, Eagle Park Slim has not yet experienced success in conventional terms. He has been playing music professionally in clubs, cafes, "joints," and on street corners for over forty years, however, certainly long enough to speak with authority about his vocation.

One of the reasons that Eagle Park Slim's story is of historical interest is specifically that he is not a musician we have all heard about through mainstream recorded popular music. Although he has experienced regional fame in various cities, as he does currently in Eugene, Oregon, financial rewards have not followed. As he put it, "I'm the brokest famous person in town." The career histories of blues performers such as Muddy Waters, B. B. King, or Howling Wolf are stories of exceptionally successful ascent into mainstream American musical culture. For every Ray Charles there have been perhaps thousands of musicians whose experiences more closely resemble that of Eagle Park Slim: people who have vigorously performed blues music all their lives, but have also done many other things "to get by." Those players peripheral to the economy are by far the majority of musicians. These are players who have not yet "hit it big," yet continue to be blues practitioners. They carry on an inherited tradition, one that is a rich compelling embodiment of the African-American social experience.

I view this account of Eagle Park Slim's life not only from a current (1998) perspective, but as an artifact or primary source document which may be of use to future scholars who are examining the evolution of blues and rock music in America during the postwar period. The blues has been essentially a working class and, occasionally, a middle-class cultural phenomenon, comparable in some respects to the Meistersingers of 15th and 16th century Germany. These are not fine art traditions, and historians studying

them do so without the benefit of numerous primary documents left by the practitioners. Much of the information about the social context of popular music genres is lost over time. A detailed autobiographical document from a practicing Meistersinger, for example, would be an invaluable resource to scholars. The opportunity to examine the social life, work, personal relationships, music transmission process, the actual settings of gatherings, and player's thoughts about their own songs would greatly enrich our retrospective understanding. It is my intent to provide this type of document of Eagle Park Slim's life experiences, musical genre, and time period.

In his life stories we see the raw material of blues songs. It is worth noting that, when Slim talks about his own songwriting, an important criterion for judging a song is whether or not the song is based on an actual experience either of his own, or of someone that he knew. He refers to certain songs as being "true" songs. The tradition of "true" songs is one that has been documented among blues singers several generations before Slim's.[5] These narratives, based on both personal experiences or shared community experiences, resemble the historical narrative songs of many different musical traditions. Another evaluative consideration, from Slim's perspective, is how well people relate to or identify with particular song lyrics. He considers this universality of sentiment as expressed in a song to be very important. Slim evaluates a song also in terms of whether it is likely (or proven) to incite in the listener either dancing or more subtle expressions of enjoyment and fun.

The content of Slim's life stories coincides fully with the topics and sentiments expressed in and evoked by the blues songs. But, to sing the blues is one thing-- it almost prettifies the emotions, removing some of the emotional breadth, or at least fitting them

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[5] William Barlow, *"Looking Up at Down": The Emergence of Blues Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 327.

into a structure, progression, or particular mood. To live a blues life is different: the presumed progressions are often interrupted and cadences may occur in unexpected ways.

I first met Eagle Park Slim in the mid-1980s: he was playing on a street-corner in Eugene, Oregon. During the following years, we crossed paths at irregular intervals in nightclubs and at blues jam sessions around town. The blues community in Eugene is small, but surprisingly vital. Professional musicians working locally all know each other, and it is in this context that our relationship began. Slim regularly sits in with my band and others at local clubs. When I approached him about this project in 1997, he was not only enthusiastic; he had already begun. Some of the tape-recorded monologues transcribed for this project were recorded as early as 1993.

The narrative forming the body of this text is an edited compilation of many conversations with Eagle Park Slim, tape recorded interviews, monologues, and countless phone calls to clear up details. It is not a strictly transcribed oral history: the words are all Slim's, but the order is mine. The resulting narrative should be viewed as a hybrid oral history/autobiography produced in cooperation between Slim as a subject, and myself as a transcriber and editor.

In preparation for this project, I surveyed many examples of oral history, and much of the literature addressing the development of blues music and musicians (see bibliography). During this process, my philosophy regarding my role as an editor changed dramatically. Oral histories frequently reflect the interviewer's checklist, in terms of both content and sequence.[6] I had hoped to avoid this editorial intrusion, believing that the sequence chosen by a narrator is an important part of the story. Having transcribed much of Slim's story in narrated order, however, it became apparent that a

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[6] Jacob U. Gordon, *Narratives of African Americans in Kansas, 1870-1992: Beyond the Exodust Movement* (Lewiston, New York: E. Mellen Press, 1993).

chronological restructuring was necessary to facilitate reading. This restructuring is an important divergence from the manner in which Slim tells his stories, and to retain this important stylistic manner some digressions have been left as originally narrated. In similar editorial spirit, I omitted most of the instances of Slim's phrase "you know what I mean." In an effort to accurately reflect Slim's rhythm of speech, I have used ellipses to indicate pauses, rather than to indicate omitted text. Italics have been used to indicate words to which Slim gave particular emphasis.

All transcription was accomplished using a new voice-activated word processing software program, Dragon Naturally Speaking. One of the many unexpected challenges encountered in transcription was that the voice-recognition program uses grammatical context to accurately identify words being spoken. Because Slim's grammar does not always coincide with general usage, recognition errors were frequent, and often quite funny.

Many of the studies of early blues music I surveyed include firsthand accounts and short oral histories of blues musicians (Ramsey 1960, Oliver 1965, Keil 1966, Charters 1977, Titon 1977, Palmer 1981, Evans 1982, Barlow 1989, and others). In all of these studies, researchers present only brief oral histories which do not present the sort of editorial challenges raised by a narrative as far-ranging as Slim's. My search for models of effectively structured lengthy oral histories led me to examine longer first-hand narratives (Njeri 1982, Souljah 1994, Delaney 1994, Johnson and McClusky 1995, and others). The format that I ultimately chose structures Slim's story according to chronology and location (Chapters II, III, IV,V), and by topic (Chapters VI, VII).

There is a current trend in ethnomusicology to document individual musical artists who are deemed representative of particular genres or regional styles. Because of

this, it is important to note that Eagle Park Slim's story is not intended to fully represent a larger culture. Though his story is representative of the experience of many African-American blues musicians, it is one of individual experience. It is not just a blues experience, but Slim's experience.

CHAPTER II

EAGLE PARK, ILLINOIS: 1942-1960

I Don't Go Around Telling Folks Everything

Slim is Born, Goes to School, Becomes the Teacher's Pet, and Discovers Basketball

Hello out there in radio land, or tape land, or wherever you might be: this is Eagle Park Slim coming to you. I'm going to try to tell the story of Autry McNeace and Eagle Park Slim. Two names, and two different people in some ways.

First, Autry McNeace, he was born January 11, 1942. And, I can remember people pinching on me, kissing on me. I can remember that, going from home to home, everybody wanted to kiss me, to keep me. I never did know until I had grown up to be five or nine; that's when I started noticing, people used to tell me, "I used to change diapers for you." I'd look at them, I said, "oh yeah?" "Yeah, I changed many diapers on you, ask your Mama." There was ladies and men, they used to tell me that all the time. "I used to change diapers on you all the time. You stayed at my house, a couple nights. You're a good boy . . . you used to be." I had people that used to tell me that all the time.

See, I didn't start in noticing that until, it seemed like everybody used to hold me, or carried me around, or I stayed at someone's, the neighbor's house. You know, I guess people kept me, here and there, and everybody wanted to keep me, and everybody got their chance.

I also remember, they would tell me, we were in a different neighborhood at the time. Around the age of three we moved from one community to another one, moved

from Venice to Madison. And then when we moved, I remember from the age three to five, I remember working with my dad. He'd always have me, as soon as I was big enough to pick up a board, "go cut that off." He learned me how to use saws. I guess that was between the ages of six and ten; I started messing around the saws, I knew all about saws, all kinds of stuff. And he showed us how to shoot. Guns and his rifles, and stuff. Well, everybody had a gun laying around somewhere. There wasn't that much trouble, but you could have a gun out on the wall. Everybody had a gun, on the wall, you know, when you walk into their house.

Up until I started to school, I guess I was around the age of four and a half, turning on five . . . 'cause I was a big five; I was the biggest dude in the room. When I walked in, at age of five, I guess I was at least five feet something, five-one or something, must it been about five-three or something. Everybody else was like four feet . . . short.

I started off in Lovejoy school; we started off there. Then, something happened. I was going to school there, and then all at once they said you've got to change schools. Then they started busing us into Venice, 'cause Venice was right down the street there. So we changed schools, and then when I got down to Venice school, everybody was shorter than me, everybody was little; I remember when they said, "this is the first grade and kindergarten." They said, "you must be in the second." I said, "No, I'm in the first grade."

See, I was in the first grade down there down at Lovejoy, and I changed and came on down here, and I was still in the first grade. That lady, she said, "are you sure you aren't in the second?" She said, "go back and have a seat, then." I went back and took my seat, and all day long the first grade teacher and the second grade teacher was in a football huddle, pointing and talking at me, arguing between themselves. She said, "no, no, you take him, he's too big for here, my class looks awful with him in there." She

said, "no, no, just wait a minute." Second day: same thing going on. "He's still here." And they were running back and forth, and finally they was out in the hall, talking to the principal. The principal must have told them, "move him on over here, if he's smart enough." Man . . . right quick I was in the second grade.

I got over there and all the guys were smaller than me, there wasn't nobody over there taller than me. Nobody. There was one girl, named Arnata Jacks, she wasn't as tall as me, but she was bigger than me, heavy hipped. I know, because she brushed me a couple times, and knocked me over, I almost fell one time. She let me know, "hey, I'm just as big as you, Buddy!"

So right quick after I got over there, the teacher started treating me real nice. First, she tested me out, and she seen that I knew my lessons down, and she seen that I was almost as big is she was. I guess she said, "I better make friends with this boy, so he won't be bad." Which, I wasn't going to be bad, no way . . . just the idea of her making me the teacher's pet. See, I was the teachers pet. She would send me to Lovejoy, that other place where I want to school, there, to the malt stand to get malts and ice cream, she would send me to the drugstore or something.

See, I was always going out of the class, I don't know why. I mean, I had my lessons down, nothing but 'ones' in everything, that was an 'A' at that time. And all the tests came out great, I didn't fail no tests or nothing. So, she kept me on the good side of her. And she was a nice person, too. Her name was Miss Reeds, the teacher. I stayed in there, and Miss Reeds started talking to the third grade teacher, and pointing at me, you know.

The third grade teacher, she wanted me, and Miss Reeds wouldn't let me go. "No, I'm keeping him." They were fighting over me, 'cause she wanted me. So Miss Reeds came to me one day. "I want you to go over here and visit the class in the third

grade, Mrs. Washington, she's going to test you out, for next year." I said, "okay, I'll go over there," and stay all day. Every other day I would go over there, back and forth. She would send a couple of other kids over there too. So, she wanted me, Mrs. Washington; she wanted to keep me over there. Miss Reeds said, "No, no, he's mine, maybe next year." And so, she wouldn't let me go, so I stayed. But I was getting ready to get skipped again.

I skipped from the first to the second, and I was getting ready to get skipped from the second to the third, by me being a pet. She was liking me; she wouldn't let me go. That following year, I went back to school; I was in the third grade then, she was always sending me over there, "go over there, Miss Reeds wants you to do something." I'd come in the morning, and she'd tell me, " Miss Reeds wants to see you." I left Miss Reeds, but she was still using me, and Mrs. Washington used me too. And she would make sure, "when you get through, I've got something I want you to do." I was running for her and Miss Reeds then!

She started treating me like I was I was a teachers pet, which I really liked, 'cause it gave me some experience, to get away and see things. I didn't have to sit there in the class all day long; I got a chance to get around to get around and meet people in other towns, and folks was noticing me, too. "Where you just come back from? Where you just come back from? I had a note, I said, "I've got a note from Miss Reeds." I'd show that note. They'd say, "Miss Reed's got you going now!" Miss Reeds told me, "you show them that note, tell them I told you to do this." I was all over the streets, man. At the age of six.

Another thing, I remember I remember my nephew,old Boochie, when he first started school. In kindergarten, when he went to the recess or lunch, he would jump in my room, and jump up and down, "Uncle Autry, Uncle Autry!" I said, "boy, get out of

here, get out of here!" When he would go to lunch, he would come in with his lunch bag, and start shaking it. Yeah, I remember that, 'cause he would always come in there. It used to make me 'shamed sometimes, that they knew he was some kin to me.

I became the leader in the room, and Arnata was the leader of the girls. If they was in any trouble or something, they would come to me, they'd say, "tell Peter to leave me alone." And I would look at Peter and Peter would drop his head, he would leave them alone, for that moment. And then somebody would come by, "tell so-and-so to stop trying to trip me." I'd say, "hey, you stop trying to trip him!" "I ain't trying to trip him."

And the same thing with the girls, they went to Arnata, to solve the problems. If there was some boy that was giving a girl trouble, she'd come and tell me, "you better tell so-and-so to leave Mary alone." And I would look at her, and she really meant it. "Tell this boy to leave this girl alone." Arnata caught him one day and roughed him up. I came in, I heard the commotion in the hall, I said, "what's that? Who's out there?" "That's Arnata, whuppin' so and so." I said, "what!" And man, she was on top of him, too. Had his clothes above his head, she was punching him. Boy, she was big, strong. But a very nice person, I mean, she wouldn't bother you unless you were messing with one of them girls, then she had to come to the front for her. When it got to the place that they couldn't handle it, they turned it over to her. And boy, she could take care of it!

A couple of times she grabbed me. One of the guys told her, "I'm going to tell my brother on you." She said, "I've got brothers too." And boy, didn't she have some brothers . . . two or three of them, you know. So nobody didn't mess with her, and nobody didn't mess with me. Like I said, we was the biggest in the room, and a couple of the smartest. She was great. If I didn't have a problem, if she had a problem she'd come and ask me, " what did you get for number twenty-six?" And I asked her, "what did you get for number four?" It would be the same answer. If we would miss, we would miss

the same one, almost. We would compare papers back and forth. I mean, she didn't need me to get her lessons, and I didn't need her. She knew I made a perfect mark, and she made a perfect mark. She wanted to make sure.

I got to the fourth grade. Each time I got to the fourth grade, there was a nice teacher over there, too. She knew me, because the other teacher had introduced her. She would send me to the store, she knew I knew the ropes. I think her name was Miss Strickland. She had a couple of kids going to school there, too. So, I got in there, and started growing up. Each year each girl was looking a little better, and I started noticing girls, because girls started noticing me, around the age of six or seven years old. And they all liked me.

A lot of times we would race, outside. I had to dodge and duck. There would be four or five of them hollering, "come here, come here, come here!" They all wanted to play with me. They wanted to be around me. And when we played baseball, when we played the girls against the boys, I always had to be on the girl's side, the girls wanted me on their side. Because, you know, they couldn't hit the ball well, and all them boys could hit the ball way out there. Two, three boys could hit the ball just as hard as I could. I helped them out, you know.

Being that type of a boy in school, the girls began to ask me things, and they liked me, and wanted to know where I'm at. Questions that I couldn't even answer myself, at that time. This popularity grew for me. The next year was the fifth grade in school. The girls was getting cuter, the guys was getting stronger. Each year there was somebody else that would come in, the main man, you know.

I remember we used to go . . . there was only one movie theater around there. We used to walk through the cornfields and down the railroad tracks, they had a "chapter" picture called Cody of the Pony Express. All the boys in the neighborhood used to go

and watch that movie, chapters of it. I think they had fifteen chapters of it, and boy, nobody would miss a chapter. On the way back from the movie, we would get us some broom sticks and tie some paper on it like we was riding on a horse. So, I became the leader in that. 'Cody of the Pony Express,' and everybody would follow me around in the dirt like we was cowboys. So, the name 'Cody' kind of stuck on there. Cody of the Pony Express was a bad dude, he was always getting himself into trouble, but he was always getting himself out. So I took that name, all the boys took to calling me, "Cody, Cody, Cody." The boys would call me Cody, and the girls would call me Autry.

Then, we had moved to the new section of the Eagle Park. We built our home over there. First, we were living on the lake side. Then we started building over there in the main part of Eagle Park. I remember working, and going to school. I think, around seventh grade, I started playing basketball. They had a kind of a little grade school team. So, I got on the grade school team, I was captain of the grade school team. I played first five, clean up until the eighth grade.

Eighth grade is when things began to change for me; it seemed that by that time I had met this friend. Me and him became buddies, but some other things that he was doing wasn't real nice, and I was always known as the real nice guy. The teachers, especially Miss Reed, we had got a new school, and I had to pass by Miss Reed's room to go in and out; she was seeing me, she said, "I'm so *ashamed* of you!" She said, "you're not the boy that I used to know, waving your head and dragging your feet!" Like I said, I was just following this dude. He made me walk like him, talk like him, and everything. We just became friends, and so I wasn't that nice a guy no more, you know. And all the teachers started shaking their head at me. But we got along real good, I knew what they was talking about. And I don't blame them, because he was bad news for me. But I didn't know till a long time.

So, I started doing my own thing. Then, I went into high school when I got in the eighth grade. I had started getting kind of lazy. I wasn't real sharp on getting my lessons no more. I wouldn't study no more; I didn't have time, 'cause I was out chasing girls at night, or playing basketball, or working. I didn't take no time out to study, so it was kind of some hard years. I got lazy in some way. I kind of knew at the time what I wanted to do: music. I had been playing out, and made a little money. It was a choice, because I couldn't play basketball and play music. You see where I'm coming from?

So I had to make up my mind. The coach told the one day, he said, "what time does your band play, Mac?" I said, "I'm playing, starting around nine o'clock." He said, "I could let you play in the big games, and then you could leave for the late games." So we done that for a while. The basketball teams that we had, these guys they'd drink, smoke, and everything. When this coach came, his name was Stanley Lynch, I'll never forget him. The other coach would let these guys, they'd be drinking, staying out all night long. When this coach came, all that changed. He kept up with you. He told you, "don't be smoking, don't be drinking." He would hear somebody tell him about it, he would put you off the team.

When he first come, he made a lot of guys mad. They walked out. I mean, he didn't take no stuff. If you didn't want to listen to him he'd tell you to "hit that door!" A lot of guys, they left mad, and thought the coach was going to call them back because they was good basketball players. He didn't call them back. Because he had his own plan about what he was going to do, he had his own plan from the start. "I'll bet he's going to call me back, I aint going back, neither," that's what a lot of guys used to say. But when they left, the coach would never call them back.

When he first started, he put up a sign, "basketball practice starts at so and so a time," it said, "show up in the gym." We showed up, he had forty or fifty guys,

practicing. Everybody was there. And he came in, and he started talking, and rapping. He said, "first, we got to get you guys in shape." He took the ball, 'cause we had been shooting. He told them to put those balls away. So he brought out some ropes, and jumping gadgets, and heavy medicine balls, and all kinds and stuff. And he said, "okay, I want fifty laps forward." Boy, we thought we were going to play, we were used to playing games! See, he made us run fifty laps around there. Then he said "give me fifty laps running around there backwards!" Everybody started running backwards. "Now, run on your heels . . . now, run on your toes!"

Then, we got through with that, he brought some ropes out. He would jump first, showed us to jump rope, we'd never jumped no rope! Then, he got us down for push-ups. "Get down there, five push-ups, everybody!" After he would get somebody who knew how to do it he would say, "come up here get in front of the line, Mac." I done them push-ups pretty good, and he said, "come up here in the front of the line." And he said, "one, two, three, four, five." Then he had us jump up, leaning from side to side, with our hands over our heads.

Oh, man! And we done that. Guys was dropping out everyday. "I'm tired of this shit, man, I ain't coming here." I remembered this one guy; he quit, and then he came out the next day, and the coach said, "where was you at?" "Oh, I was sick." "Why didn't you tell me you was sick? Out of here!" He put him out. He's gone . . . he wasn't sick. This coach meant business, man ! We went down from about forty or fifty guys to about thirty people. 'Cause this coach still ain't brought no ball in there yet! We still jumping ropes, running laps, scrimmages and stuff. After about four days, he finally brought a ball in. Guess what the ball weighed? Twenty pounds! He said, "now, pass that around! Let's go! One, two, three, four, five!" Passing it back and forth, guys was rolling their eyes. "Speed it up!" I mean, it was like a chain gang. But, he was getting us in shape.

"You guys are so out of shape! Run some more!" He would tell you to run ten laps. "Go jump ropes!" He had us running from one end of that gym to another.

That's when I found out that I was fast, 'cause I was the fastest one. He was getting his guards out; the ones that was fast, they was guards. And I was the tallest, too. So I became a center, forward, and guard. He taught me how to play three positions. 'Cause I could handle the ball. Then, after he took that medicine ball out of there he brought in a ball. He let us pass that big ball around for about in an hour. He told me "Mac, dribble up to the basket." I started dribbling, the ball hit me right under the chin. My reflex was so heavy and so strong, you know, I had to take it easy. He said, "take it easy." I threw it to another guy, and the ball started dribbling, and it about beat him up! He said, "see there you guys can't even handle of basketball!" We started shutting our mouth *every day*.

That man was teaching us something, making us strong, and making us good. And then he would make us shoot free throws. I hated to shoot free throws. But you had to shoot fifty free throws before you could go home. There was a lot of guys out there shooting free throws long after everyone else had put their supper on the table. Yeah, 'cause I was one of those guys. I couldn't shoot no free throws . . . I didn't want to shoot none. 'Cause I was there, the guys had left around eight o'clock, I would leave at ten. Me and the coach would come out together, he'd say, "finally got those free throws together, eh?"

Man, I started practicing, throwing a stick up against the wall. I began to be a pretty decent free throw shooter. Three out of five. And, I learned a lot. He learned me how to tip the ball. 'Cause he used to throw balls up there, and they'd get up there and tip. "That's good, Mac, that's good. Keep that ball up above that rim." I was jumping way above the rim. I'm in the only somebody at my school that dunked the ball. I'm the

first one that ever dunked. Right in the game. I dunked in the game, man. An old schoolmate of mine named Earl Crawford, he told everybody, he said, "Autry is the only one that ever dunked!" And I had forgot about that. Ten years ago, I went home, and he was telling some guys, he was bragging. I was a good leaper. I used to get up pretty high. I was all over. I was Magic Johnson. I could have been. 'Cause I was a good ball handler.

A lot of the guys that played the year before, didn't play that year. They didn't want to do what the coach told them, so they was out of it. We went on that year, we had been eight in fifteen in that particular year and we turned it round to sixteen and thirty. We lost more than we won and the games that we lost, the coach told all of us, "y'all beat yourselves tonight." Man, we'd just drop our heads. We got to practice more harder . . . more rope jumping, and more running.

These boys . . . some little Italian boys had a new school right up the road from us. They beat us by twenty-some points, at their gym. Once they got the lead, we couldn't catch them. They had us sweating! Then, they came to our gym, and almost beat us. They ran our socks off. I mean, they got a twenty-point lead on us, right quick. We closed it it down to ten. Halftime was still ten-point lead.

Coach told us, "hey, we're going to have to outplay these boys . . . we've been trying to catch them all night, and they still have a ten point lead!" We came out in the third quarter running, I made a couple of steals . . . oh, man! Quick six points, and then we got a couple of fouls called, and we finally, up with those guys about middle ways in the fourth quarter, it was tied up. And then we started taking over the game, when the crowd came into the game. We beat them boys by four points. They beat us by ten points in their gym. I mean, it was ten to nothing, 20 to 10, 30 to 20, 40 to 30 . . . we couldn't catch them.

But, you had to be in shape. 'Cause he took you through them drills, like they take you through in the army, man. And it was discipline. I went on, I played tenth grade, eleventh grade. I had to make a choice between basketball and music. I could have played ball, but I turned it down because I was playing music. I wish I would have went on. Because I could have still been playing music. Sometimes, we don't do what we should.

I'm Not Bragging on My Life

Slim Sums Up his Early Decisions, and Advises Others

Youngsters out there now, get as much education as you can, these old wine joints'll be out here when you come out! See, that's what held me back . . . girls, and the clubs. I was already set to jump out there; I could have went out there at Carbondale playing basketball. You know, we say we coulda done this, and we shoulda done that. That's why I'm telling all the kids to go along and do it, don't do like me. I'm not bragging on my life; I've had a hell of a good life. It's just, all this happened, I'm still here. I've been through a lot. I don't go around telling folks everything.

I was always popular in school. At the age of fifteen I had my own car. I used to come outside, and I'd have girls sitting all over my car. I'd take them down and buy them an ice cream, I always had a little money, too. I'd make me some money somewhere. I always could find a job, somebody would give me a job. I wouldn't be looking for no job. Somebody would say, "hey, you want to make five dollars?" "Yeah." I go down there and rake the yard, something. But, I was always popular. I had girls hanging around my car whenever I came out of school. I was very popular in the neighborhood, people respected me. I mean, older people, grown people, they respected

me 'cause they never seen me do no wrong. Never seen me hanging out with somebody who was doing wrong. A few things happened to me right in grade school; I finally got away from that.

Right before I came out of school, my son was born, Donnie. Me and Julia, his mama, didn't see eye to eye. I mean . . . I seen him when he was a baby. His mama left and went to San Bernardino, somewhere. Then, I didn't see him between the ages of six and fourteen. I seen him when I went out to California in 1977. Then, I didn't see him again.

Mess Around and Play That Thing!

Slim Starts Playing Guitar, and Develops a Name Around Town

I'd like to go back to when my career first started. The first there was, Johnny Wright showed up. When Johnny Wright showed up, I started to get into guitar. I used to always bang on his, all the time, you know. He used to have me watch out for girls. He said, "you stay here, and play my guitar. If anybody comes up, a woman or something, you tell her that Johnny's asleep." I used to be sitting there at the window, looking out, strumming at his guitar. I didn't have it hooked up or nothing. It was electric, a Fender, you know. I couldn't hear it, barely hear it, just enough to not wake him up. I'd see a lady coming up the walkway, I'd run out there and say, "Johnny's asleep, he's asleep." "Tell him so-and-so stopped by." "Okay." After a while I'd go back, peep out the window again, I'd see another lady come up the stairs. I'd run out there and say, "Johnny is asleep, Johnny's asleep."

Lot of times, he wasn't asleep. He had another woman in there. Seemed like there was always a woman around. There was *always* a woman around. I think Johnny

Wright had more women than anybody, any musician that ever was born . . . Chuck Berry, Elvis Presley, any of them. Johnny had more women . . . 'cause it was always a different lady. If there wasn't nobody around, there was always Jesse Mae or Carrie Mae or somebody hanging around.

There was no time that a woman wasn't around Johnny Wright or he wasn't going to see some woman. He was a ladies' man, and his popularity grew fast. So I kind of hung around; I was about the age of twelve then. Along about thirteen, my nephew Brent came to town. He brought a guitar with him. I went over there, I used to go over and hang around him all the time. He was too 'shamed to go out and play; he would play around the house, and I used to go over there and he taught me how to do that Jimmy Reed riff. At first I learned that from him, and I started playing it on my guitar. I started doing it around town. On my amp, you know. People used to pass by, "boy, that sounds good! You're going to mess around and play that thing!"

And I was beginning to be better and better. Seemed like if I wanted to hear a guitar or something I would go over to my cousin Brent's house. 'Cause he always had that guitar, I was beating on it, I could just follow him around.

Then, as I started growing up in school, I had me a car, when I was around fourteen. The name 'Eagle Park Slim,' I had put my name all over the car. Everybody liked my car. They said, "I like the way you got it painted." They liked the way I had fixed it up. I remember that.

It Was a Big Party There

A Chance to Play With Young Chuck Berry

The first artist that I played with was Chuck Berry. I must have been around the age of fifteen years old. We was playing at my dad's place, because the band that was supposed to play didn't show up. The place was beginning to get packed, you know, 'cause he started a matinee at four o'clock in the evening. We was playing practically the last set, I guess it was, and Dad walked in. He said, "Chuck Berry's out there in the car, I'm trying to get him to come in." I said, "who?" "Chuck Berry!" I said, "you're kidding!" But guys in the band said, "tell him to come in!" My dad said, "he's got someone out there he's pulling on and kissing on." So my dad, he did go back out there, and some other people went out there and asked Chuck to come in and play a song.

So Chuck Berry said to this girl, "okay, baby, I guess we got to go in and play a song." So he got out of the car with his girl, and she was white. I'm not sure, but I think that's the same girl he got into trouble with. They say he had taken her from another country, 'cause she was awful young. She looked to be sixteen or seventeen years old. So Chuck got up on the stage, and he played 'Mabilene.' I mean, everybody was just clapping and singing along! It was a big party there. And he sung another song, I think it was 'Drifting and Drifting.' So, it was about the end of the night, it was time to quit. It was way nine o'clock before we quit.

I didn't know it was such a big deal. At the time, I didn't know, he was just another guitar-player that come into my daddy's place. I didn't know that he was going to turn out to be great. He had made a few songs, but he didn't have his greatness down. I knew him and Johnny Wright at the same time. Johnny Wright, to me, was better than Chuck Berry. He had a lot more tricks up his sleeve than Chuck. I met them both the

same time, and they both was playing at the same places. Only difference is, Johnny went the wrong way, and Chuck went the right way. But, it was such a pleasure to get a chance to play with Chuck Berry, 'cause when people see that on your card, that you played with Chuck Berry, they know that you ain't no amateur.

We Had Turbans on Our Heads

Slim Becomes a Teenage Star, Gets Ripped Off by Stevens, and Loses His Band

Long about fourteen or so, we started going around, me and Brent. I think we played in a talent show one time. It was down in Brooklyn. I remember we went out onstage, Henry was down there that night too; he done a Jerry Lee Lewis impression. They was crazy about him.

See what happened, we got out there and we played, and I remember Brent, he turned his back to the audience. He couldn't face the audience. The girls was yelling, "hey! Turn around! Hey you, turn around!" I told Brent, "hey, turn around!" He said, "I ain't going to do it! Man, cut this song off so we can get out of here!" "Come on, man, turn around!" "Man, I ain't going to do it, I ain't! I'm going to walk off!" I cut the song off, he picked up his amp and started walking off. They kept calling, "one more! Come on back!" I said, "we got to go on back!" He said, "I ain't going to be going back out there. You go on back out there, I'm staying right here." And he didn't . . . him and his girlfriend, they stayed in the car. Me and the others laughed, and went back on, and did another song for the people out there.

I remember how we teased him . . . he didn't care. He said, "I ain't going back out there! We played one song, and that's all we're supposed to play." The girls kept hollering, "hey, you're kind of cute!" He wouldn't turn around!

So we got booked at another show, I think it was Alton, Illinois. We played it at a place called the Ex-G. I. Club. This was just around the age of fifteen, then. Then, something happened. Brent didn't ever want to play out in public, so we didn't play no more.

Then I met a guy named Carl Brown, he used to work for my sister. He heard me playing one day, he said, "you play good. I want to play, myself. I got this harmonica, I been playing it." I said, "can you blow?" He said, "well, I'm just trying to learn right now. But I got this record by Little Walter, I've been listening to it. But I ain't got the keys to all the harmonicas. I guess I need different keys, I only got one harmonica." I said, "hey, I got some harmonicas in here." I had a whole bucket of harmonicas. He picked up one, he was blowing it. He said, "yeah, I need this here." I said, "take the whole bucket!"

He took the whole bucket home. He'd been practicing and playing every day. Everyday he'd come to me and say, "hey, you got time to come over to the house? I want to show you something." I'd go over to his house, and he'd put on a record. He would blow. Right then and there, I said, "that's pretty good, pretty good. . . ." On his lunch hour he would say, "I'm going to show you something . . . ." He took me over there, and got his harmonica. He was picking it up so fast. I wasn't thinking about no music at that time, I was playing basketball. But, he kept me interested. He always was showing me something. He said, "okay if I come over and practice with you sometimes?"

I used to practice in my Mama's barbecue pit through the week, you know, it would be closed down. One day he came by with his harmonica and we was playing, people started crowding around. I've never seen a young man work so fast. He was telling me, "we should do this, we should do that." I was busy, 'cause I was working and

trying to play basketball, and I had to work around the place. They was running and ripping me. I didn't really have time. So he practically put it together. A nephew of his played drums, and we got Brent to sit in one or two times. It seemed like we kept on having bass trouble . . . so we finally got two guitar-players, or something like that.

Evidently, somebody quit or something like that, we was always replacing somebody . . . somebody doing this, somebody running out. We finally found somebody to play bass, and we started playing around. Carl, he stopped playing harmonica and he started playing bass, and he started messing around with the guitar. Funny thing about it, he would turn the guitar upside down, 'cause he was left-handed. I said, "you can't play like that . . . you got to turn it around!" He said, "no, I can play better like this." So I let him take my guitar home, and he showed me, he played it left-handed. Boy, this guy here . . . he's learning fast! Pretty soon he bought him a bass. After he bought him a bass guitar, he started playing bass.

We started playing around the Teentowns, and schools, any place we could find around. We were just kids, ourselves, fifteen years old, sixteen years old. We wasn't old enough to go in joints, but we played in some clubs . . . two taverns. 'Cause my mother had a club, we played in there. A couple of times a week, when a band didn't show up, I could bring my group in. There was always someplace for us to play. We could always found a job, if we would reach out there. Sometimes we wouldn't have to reach out there, people would come to us. They'd want to hire us for their party and all kinds of stuff like that. All over St. Louis and East St. Louis we played Teentowns and a lot of the night theaters. We won all the first and second prizes.

Then we got to the place where we had to be special guests in some of the places. We played on some shows with Jackie Wilson, played on shows with Tina Turner and different people. Seemed like we was always opening up for somebody. And we was

always playing in parties, we was getting all kinds of stuff. I think back in those days we had so much going for us . . . we was already stars . . . at the age of fifteen and sixteen. I know I thought I was. Carl Brown and Johnny Foster, he got a drum from the school, we started playing around at Teentowns and stuff. We were doing real well at that, you know. Around town at that time, there was another group called the Premiers. They broke up, and one of the lead singers from the Premiers wanted to join us. His name was Bobby Foster. So we let him come on in, we were getting ready to do a talent show down in East St. Louis and he begged me. He said, "let me go out there with you! We'll tear the place up!"

I don't think he even knew how to sing with a band, 'cause he was singing with a singing group. But he came in, and he learned a couple songs. Then he had a couple of songs, a song called 'What Can I Do.' He sung like Smokey Robinson, way up high. He didn't really fit in, he was way too high. Some of the other boys, they wanted to let him come on in, so we let him come on in. We went down in East St. Louis, we auditioned, they had a big audition to try and be in the talent show. So I didn't know what was happening . . . he started talking to them. The name of the band was Eagle Park Slim and the Rocking Kings, suddenly the group become the Premiers of Venice. 'Cause there was another Premiers of East St. Louis that was going to be on the show, too. So when they announced it they said, "ladies and gentlemen, we got the Premiers of Venice!"

And we started playing, and Bobby Foster came out, and everybody started shouting. He ain't even started singing! They thought he was so cute, the little girls . . . which helped build our morale, there, before we even hit a note, we knew we was on the show. Then when we started playing, and started singing, they really started screaming. The crowd rushed to the stage, and this is just the practice! We're auditioning to be on the show . . . I mean, they ran across off the stage right quick. The girls, they was filling

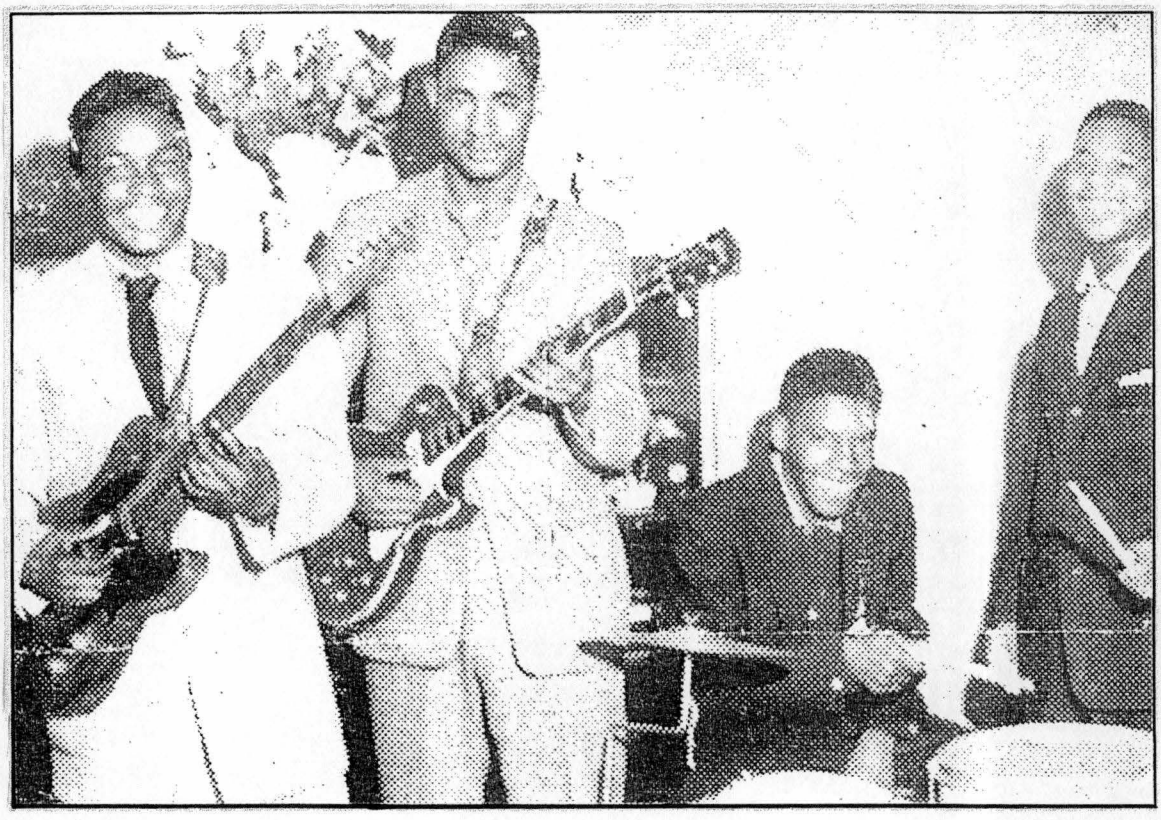

Illustration 2. Eagle Park Slim and the Rockin' Kings at the Village Tavern, 1959
(From left: Carl Brown, Eagle Park Slim, Johnny Foster, Robbie Foster)

up the gymnasium and people ran up there . . . the host said, "get back! Get back! What's wrong with y'all, what's wrong with y'all!" I mean, she had never seen nothing like that before . . . stars born right before her eyes. Who is this guy, Elvis Presley or what? This is way before Elvis Presley's time . . . she used see them screaming and hollering at Frank Sinatra, people like that, and read it in a book, but she seen it right there in front of her eyes!

It was also our first time, too. We never had nobody scream and hollering over us. We didn't get a chance to finish our song. Before we went back onstage she said, "I'm going to have to pull y'all off, maybe let you go out a little bit later. They ain't going to let the show go on." I said, "well okay, all right." To be last, just to play one song. We knew we was on the show. She said, "you guys don't have to play if you don't want to. Just show up on the night of the show, we have a space for you. I'm wondering where to put y'all. If it's like this the night of the show, we may have to put you last." I said, "no, we shouldn't be last." They only had so many contestants, ten or something. I said, "I don't care, I really don't care." They placed us number three or four.

I remember we went down there, we had turbans on our heads, dark suits and stuff. We were clean! Bobby Foster, he had some kind of brownish suit, he wasn't dressed like us. Right quick, he was taking over already. Although it was my band . . . but things was going so good, I couldn't say nothing. I didn't like it, but I didn't say nothing, and I didn't say nothing. So we just kept getting popular. The night of that show, they ran to the stage, they mobbed us. When we went outside we had girls all on top of our cars.

I remember, too, at that time I was going with one of the Lincoln high school cheerleaders. We had a game that we had played down there; she remembered me. 'Cause I'd talked to her for a minute. I remember going around to her house and we was

going to make love, it was supposed to happen but it didn't happen. I didn't even get a chance to see her, in fact I never did see her 'cause she come up dead or something. Something happened to her.

Anyway, at that time we was very popular, and any girl was our's. It got so we couldn't play on no more shows, we couldn't play on the talent shows, 'cause we couldn't compete. I think we played over in St. Louis on a show with a couple stars, in some of the high schools, I remember. Jackie Wilson was the star of the show. The first time we played, Dave Dixon had the talent show. They didn't know us. All them St. Louis groups was always hot over there. They had five or six groups over there, and at the time they didn't know us.

We came out onstage, and there was a lot of girls from Lincoln High School in St. Louis, and that place was packed. It was all backed up on the stage, behind the building, and everywhere. They had to lock Bobby Foster up in a room, locked up in a room! I don't know how that went down, but I didn't like that either, 'cause I couldn't even talk to him, I couldn't tell him nothing. It was just like, you get onstage out there, then he'd run out. You know, I didn't like that. The girls was pounding on the door trying to get in to see him. We had girls pounding on our doors, too.

They was all screaming to see Bobby, screaming to see Bobby. The first act went on, and right after that they screamed, "Premiers of Venice! Premiers of Venice!" Everybody was hollering . . . they said, "everybody be quiet, we've got other acts before the Premiers of Venice!" Someone else came on, and they clapped for them. I think we were about number three. Then the announcer said, "the Premiers of Venice!" Man, they was screaming and hollering, about two or three hundred girls. Man, I couldn't believe it! We didn't know whether to run or fly!

We had our turbans on that day, and we was looking good . . . I had a big pin up in front of mine. The girls, they rushed up there, right quick they started snatching our stuff off us. They snatched my pin. They took this, they took that. They took my cuff links, they was cleaning us out, man. Some girl said, "give me that tie!" "No, I got this tie, this is mine!" There was some girl over there and she said, "I didn't get nothing!" I said, "here. . . ." I gave her my cumberband. She took it, and the other girl, she rushed at it. She said, "I'll trade with you!" They left there and went on down the street, happy as they could be.

Bobby Foster had ran off the stage somewhere, in a room in the back there, someplace. They was trying to take the drummer's drums. They took anything that they could take. I never seen anything like that. We had to get out of there. We couldn't even finish our song. Man . . . after then we started getting popularity, they knew us. We done a show at the Keel opera house, the big one. All the groups was there, all the groups from St. Louis and East St. Louis. We was right there, too. The Keel auditorium, I always wanted to play in that place, and say I played there. And I did play there . . . twice.

The first time that we went down, it was this talent show. We won third place. Somebody won first place, Kool and the gang, or something. And they was bad! We won third place. But we was just as popular as anybody. They said, "now, the Premiers of Venice!" The place went wild. We come out onstage, and done a couple of songs. We knew who they wanted already, the first group, we knew that. They had more fans there than anybody.

At that time I was doing things with Johnny Wright. He was around at that time, working up in Granite City and Madison. He recorded a song called 'I got to have you for myself.' It was going good all over St. Louis and different places. So he began to

move around, and he was real popular. He was getting so many jobs, he couldn't even handle them. He needed an agent or something to work for him, because he couldn't handle it. He got to the place where he would forget where he was supposed to play at. He'd called somebody that he was going to play over here, look around, he was playing over there. Sometimes his boys would show up that one place, but he meant another place.

See, he was out there drinking and going on, and womanizing every night. You ain't got your mind on no business, see . . . I think that's what ruined his career. Things was happening so fast for Johnny that he couldn't handle it. Everybody wanted him, and he couldn't play at four o'clock at two places. And when he'd go to sleep, he'd forget that he didn't talk to this club owner over here, and he'd told his boys to show up on Fourth Street. Sometimes the boys would be over here, and he'd be over there. 'Cause he was forgetful and he started losing his mind. Like I said, he never did quit.

Anyway, he introduced us to a guy named Stevens. We was doing all right until we met Stevens, but Stevens was supposed to bring our hopes up high. Going to record us and all this stuff. We hadn't recorded no record yet; we were trying to find something. Here's a guy coming out of the woods, got Johnny's thing going for him, got him a car and all that stuff. Later on we found out that Johnny had spent a lot of money that he wasn't supposed to spend. See, the checks came to Johnny, and Johnny spent them. He got him some money out of them; he'd go up there and borrow him four hundred dollars or whatever. See, Johnny got a little money out of Stevens.

Then when we came in, we met Stevens, and he's going to record our record. He had a little old paint shop over there, had a little studio going on in the back there. We got back there, and we played a couple of songs; they taped us down. And they said, "we're going to try to get a 45 out on you guys." We were signing a contract for a 45.

He brought some phony contract out, copied it out for each guy. Each guy let his parents look at it, at that time, "you all want to sign it, I'll sign it, I don't know . . . he says he's going to make a record and give you so-and-so, so-and-so. . . ."

We didn't even know, at the time, that this guy was going to cheat us. So, we went on and signed it. When the record came out, we knew the record was going good, 'cause we was taking a box every weekend, and selling twenty out there. We played every weekend at my mother's place and we would sell a box of records of twenty. And I was taking those twenty dollars, and taking it up there and giving it to him! Finally, one week . . . 'cause he wasn't giving us nothing, we was using our own money to buy gas and oil to get back and forth to all the personal appearances that we was doing.

We was making a personal appearance over here at Woolworth's in St. Louis, every Saturday. We'd go over there, we'd dress up, we'd play our songs, that was for pushing the record. Right then and there, people would buy a record. They sold a lot of records, yeah! They sold a lot of records, but they told us they was just pushing it. And we was going over there on Saturday and Sunday doing this. . . .

Finally one Saturday, we had a saxophone player blowing on the record named 'Little Man,' a great man. So he called me, he said, "I want to shake your hand, man, you finally made it. You ought to be raking in the dough by now." This was about our third time over there. I said, " no, man." He said, "all I'm getting out of here is just union scale, which is thirty-five dollars." I said, "you're getting thirty- five dollars? I ain't getting nothing!" "Nothing? Something is wrong here, this is a personal appearance right here, and personal appearances paid big bucks." So we went on and played that Sunday, and we got nothing.

So I was talking to Mama. I said, "Mama, I need some money to get some shoes." "Take some money from that record and buy some shoes, just tell them to deduct

that from your money, when you get it. Y'all got money coming, ain't you?" I said, "yeah, they said we is, but I ain't got nothing; they always say ain't nothing happening yet." Mama said, "I don't know, seemed like you all was doing better before you all met that old man. You had money, and everybody had money." She said, "Something must be wrong someplace. So, anyways you take that twenty dollars, and buy you some shoes."

So I took the twenty dollars and I bought me a pair of shoes. I didn't go up there till about Wednesday. Wednesday, I said I'm going up there and I'll take this twenty dollars. I called him up and I told him that I was coming. He said, "yeah, come on up." When I got up there, my car had a flat tire right up front of his house. So I goes in, I says, "I needed some shoes, I had to spend that twenty dollars from those records." He said, "Slim, you shouldn't have done that. We need to keep account of everything, 'cause we're spending a lot of money out on this. And we ain't got nothing back yet."

At first, when I pulled up, his daughter was pulling the rest of the paper off a brand-new Cadillac! A brand-new Cadillac . . . I came up and she said, "Slim! Look what 'Shirley' bought! Shirley was the name of the record we'd recorded. I said, "oh yeah?" She said, "yeah, things are going good, we went on down and got this here to ride around in. The old Caddy is going down." So I goes in the house, I said, "you got twenty dollars? There is a Cadillac out there!" "Oh, ain't nothing happening, we got to keep that money."

I said, "Well, I needed to get some shoes. . . ." He said, "well, I know about that, but first you should check with me; we would have let you have the money, but check with us first." I said, "man, I needed some shoes to get up here." He said Billy, his son, had to go down and borrow some money to pay on this Cadillac. "Ain't nothing come in, we checked with Memphis. They're supposed to be letting us know something." He was

just bullshitting me all the time. His daughter had already told me, "look what Shirley bought!" His daughter liked us; she was just a kind of chubby type of girl. She just liked the band, and she wanted to hang out with us, but she couldn't. She wouldn't tell us no lie.

Right after then, we began to split up. We had lost our job, we were playing in this place right outside Granite City, the Downtown club or something. The man gave a us four nights a week, more money than we ever made. Back in those days you would only make fifteen or twenty bucks . . . we was making forty bucks a night. This is back in the early '60s. We had been playing there are about two weeks. In the process, we had just met Stevens, so after we've recorded the record, he started taking Bobby Foster off and pantomiming the records . . . but we had went there with Bobby Foster, as a group.

This guy that owned the club, he didn't like old Stevens, no way. 'Cause he said, " I don't like that guy, he's a cheat. Y'all will find out!" He was right. He came to me one night, he said, "Slim, when I hired you guys, I hired a five-piece group with Bobby Foster. This guy Stevens, he came in here, he's hurting you guys, and he's hurting my business too. People come in asking where's the singer, and he ain't here. People call on the phone asking, "is the singer going to be there tonight?" Sometimes he was there, and sometimes he wasn't.

They paid Bobby regardless of whether he was there or not. 'Cause Bobby would be going off with Stevens, pushing the record. But he made *us* pay Bobby out of the little money that we were getting down there! I didn't like that. One day the club-owner said, "I'm going to tell you something, I hate to do it, but I'm going to have to let you guys go. If Bobby Foster can't be with you guys, I'm letting you go. I don't like Stevens doing that, he's coming in here and taking the main attraction. All he's doing is breaking up

you guys. People see you one way, and then they see you another way. He should be here with you guys all the time. Ain't he a part of the group?" I said, "yeah, he's part of the group." "Well then, he should be here, or you should be with him." I said, "yeah."

I seen what the man was trying to tell us. He said, "they're out making money . . . see, you're paying a guy that ain't here! You all can split the money up anyway you want to, but I don't appreciate paying a guy that ain't here." So, Stevens and the man got into it, and they got another band in there. We was down to nothing. The only job we had was playing at my mother's place, on Sundays. Or when a band couldn't show up.

All that work, all that build-up time, and boom . . . then next week after that, the drummer, Johnny Foster, showed up with his dad. His dad was a preacher. The preacher, he talked to my mom. He said, "there is something wrong. These boys here had more money before they was working for you. Now, it seems like every week I have to put gas in my car. I got nine children. I need my station wagon on a Saturday. It would be different if they was making some money. When my boy comes back with my station wagon, all the gas is drove out. I got to haul water."

At that time we was hauling water and everything into Eagle Park. Saturdays was the only time he had, he worked. Every Saturday, they would go up down and get their water. Having nine children, he really needed his station wagon. "Something is wrong," he said, "in the name of the Lord, I'm going to talk to this man. 'Cause I don't like what's going on." Mama said, "I'm with you."

So we had a big strike, right there in front of the place and everybody showed up. Fathers and mothers was there. 'Cause there was something happening. Bobby Foster wasn't there at that time. They had been taking him away from us, here and there. About this time, here he come, with his Cadillacs, two of them in a row . . . flags waving and stuff. He runs into town and the preacher held up his hand. He said, "Slim, you ready to

go? We need to talk!" "We need to go, ain't got time to talk." The preacher, he held up his hand, he said, "we're going to talk now! My son ain't going noplace." "Okay, all right, we'll take five minutes."

The preacher said, "no, we're going to take more than five minutes, 'cause my son is worth more than five minutes. I got to talk to you." So we goes in with him and his son, and somebody else was there. We was standing around the table. Reverend Foster was talking, he said, "I just can't see it . . . it seems like you could afford a way for these guys to get there. Couldn't they ride with you in the Cadillac?" He said, "no, I can't put that stuff in the Cadillac. You're asking me to do something I can't do." Mr. Foster said, "well, I need my station wagon. I've got to shop all day with my station wagon. Then, my son, he's been hauling stuff over there every Saturday . . . he comes home, no money. Come on! There's got to be some money!"

He said, "no, sorry, ain't no money come in. We've been talking to Memphis and Nashville, and we haven't heard a word. You'll have to wait it out; things are going to be okay." The preacher said, "no, this is wrong . . . these boys had money all the time before they met you. Now, there is never no money, there's never no gas, no nothing." My mama spoke up at that time. She said, "yeah, something is wrong. We got to find out. It seems like since these boys recorded a record, they should have something." "You people just don't know, it takes a little time to put something together. We got to go here, and Billy's going down to Memphis Monday to try and speed things up."

It was a lot of bull, nothing but crap! So, Stevens called it off that day . . . he took Bobby. He told Bobby, "we've got to forget about these other guys, they're plotting against us. Here is a hundred dollars for you," and he walked out on us. Stevens was white, and we weren't supposed to talk back to him. Things might not have got so bad if we could have talked back. He had everybody thinking that we was the villains, see?

But he is the one who broke up our group. After then, everything ended. We didn't get nothing, 'cause them old contracts that we signed wasn't no good. He had his brother notarize them; that went on a lot in those days, that's how people got cheated. We was just kids, you know, sixteen years old. We wasn't even out of school. After that happened, the band started really breaking up. Pretty soon they was gone; I didn't have no band.

I Been Able to Go On

Slim Starts Another Band, and Works Around the St. Louis Area

About this time, I was out there on the basketball court one day. A guy came up to me named Earl Thompson. He said, "you still got your band?" "No, I ain't got no band." He said, " Well, I sing." So me and him got together, and started practicing. And he did know a few songs. He had a sister, too. She could sing, too. Her voice was much better than his, but they both sung.

So we started a little group with Forest Fryson. So we got together, me and Forest, Frog, and Earl, and started a little group. We started playing around at Bambino's and Teentowns, and stuff. This is in East St. Louis. I remember one time we walked in, some kind of a tavern down there, and they let us get up there and play a tune. We got up there, and we killed them! We killed the crowd!

Right quick, the guy wanted to hire us. At the time, a man called Frank Ezel was playing there. So we went there, and the club owner wanted to hire us. He said, "I can't pay a lot of money. Through the week, I can only pay fifty dollars. On the weekends, I can paid seventy-five." I said, "we got to have more than that." All the other clubs, they wasn't paying too much more than that. He said, "we can take up a collection at the door

if you want." I said "no." So we agreed to coming in there Thursday night, Friday night, Saturday night.

We had a real nice crowd. Off and on, his other group was playing there. They was kind of jealous of us in some way. 'Cause we went in there and took their job. We went on, and we played different places: Granite City, Brooklyn. The Eagle Park Slim Band was on the road again, and we began to make noise around town. They respected me again. We played for a long time, almost a couple of years. The guys started getting better and better. I trained Frog how to play, and I trained Forrest.

We had a little four-piece, there. We played a bunch of places. All at once, some guy named Joe came along. I will never forget that. Here goes my band again, breaking up. The stuff that they was playing on, Joe went out and bought him a new bass, new mics, new everything. And I think he played piano, keyboard or something; I don't know what he did. Somebody told me, he said, "Hey, man, you still got your band? No, man, I think they done quit you. Earl was telling somebody that they was going with a guy named Joe." I said, "oh, yeah. . . ." He said, "I don't think they going to show up, Slim." "They ain't going with this guy. They ain't even told me nothing. Nobody said they got a gig on a Friday."

Lucky it was time enough, I went out and I found some people by jamming around. An old bass player named 'Time,' a drummer named Bad Boy, and I put a little group together. And so still, I had a little thing. We had a good little thing there. Saturday night, and everybody come looking, "where's so-and-so, I don't see him?" Different band up there, and I'm still playing right on. . . . One thing about it, I don't care who came into my group . . . they never been able to stop me.

I been able to go on. I was glad that guy came and told me, that day, that these guys weren't going to show. I rushed out and got these guys, and we had a hell of a little

time there. So they was gone, they played out of town there. See, he took them out of town. Back at that time, you could play on a job out of town. You could say, "I'm going to go up here," you could go fifty miles, and a set up a little hall out there. And two or three bucks would come in. That's what this guy was doing, taking these boys out of town. And see, they were used to big crowds, right around there in Eagle Park and East St. Louis; but the places he was taking them was way up in Alton, Sioux City Sue, or somewhere.

So the first week, it was all really new stuff, and they was happy. New microphones, the boy got him new drums, he's happy. New bass, new everything. So, this guy had another job, second week. Then, I think, he didn't have nothing. Here they come easing back. First, Earl come back, singing. Then they all wanted to come back. So, I let them come back for a little while . . . and we got together and played. A couple little jobs, here and there.

Just Like a Ordinary Man

Backing Up Sonny Boy Williamson

I had started putting another band together. I went down to a little place called 'Lorraine's.' It was down at 15th and Lawrence, somewhere down there. I knew Lorraine's sons, he had a couple of sons. One of them really liked my music, and we used to hang around.

One time he come up to me and said, "are you playing anywhere tonight?" I said, "I ain't playing nowhere, I'm looking for something, though." He said, "we need a band to back up Sonny Boy Williamson." I said, "you're kidding me!" "No, Slim, ain't no jive; my daddy's out looking, and he told me, in case if I see anybody. If you got a band,

drummer and bass player, that's all you need." I told him, "I got a drummer, and I got a bass player." He said, "well, let me go over and tell my dad, so he'd don't get nobody else." So he went and told his dad.

A guy named 'Frog' was playing drums for me at that time, and 'Time' was on bass. 'Chops' was on horn. So we met there, that night. I think a guy named Fred Grant had showed up, too, 'cause he wanted to play. Sonny Boy was on his drunk spree. His record company had just put him down, and he was having all kinds of trouble. He was running around little towns and stuff, and he was drinking a lot. He came out there that night and he said, "I count it out, you kick it off . . . it goes something like bopa dopa dopa dee. . . ." I said, "okay, Sonny Boy." He said, "this first song is going to be a fast song; I know you guys heard it before, 'Don't get me started to talking" Everybody knew that song, because we'd played it before. He started off, "don't start me to talking, I'll tell everything I know."

Oh man, he had that voice! He'd sing, like, two songs and then he'd quit and start to drink whiskey. People was slipping him whiskey all up on the table, slipping him shots and stuff, all while he was singing. He'd blow on his harmonica, but he didn't do too much. He did more drinking than he did anything. Because people was buying him drinks, 'cause he wasn't an uptight guy, he'd let you know. "Hey, I don't care, gimme a drink!" He'd drink as long as you'd bring 'em. So, we played with him that night, and it went well. Then, we showed up that next night, and played with him again. Like I say, he didn't do too much playing. He would do about four or five songs, and then he would let us play.

We done that for five nights in a row! Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. I had a chance to see what a person is, what a person could be, and how a person could lose their sanity. I seen him, and you know, I was just a young kid, about

nineteen then. I thought, "is this the great Sonny Boy Williamson?" He was just like a ordinary man, kind of looked like my daddy, when he was drunk. His eyes would be dancing in his head. You know, he drank a lot of whiskey that day, and they were telling me he had a fifth in the back. They was giving him all he wanted to drink, 'cause they wasn't paying him that much. It was just a little old tavern on the corner, you know? Mack's or something. I'm so glad I had a chance to play with Sonny Boy. After really listening to his music on records and tapes, I really like his sound.

I heard he was a pretty funny guy too. 'Cause I heard a story this bass player told about Sonny Boy when he was over in London. I think it was Willie Dixon, yeah, who played bass. He said that they had got off their job and they was hungry, they wanted something to eat. Where they were, the restaurant was closed down. And Sonny Boy had one of them little steamers, you know, and he was hungry. He had a couple of cans of beans, so he put them beans in the steamer and they started cooking. So, a man came upstairs and knocked on the door, bang, bang, bang! He yelled, "is anybody cooking in there?" Sonny boy said, "no, ain't nobody cooking nothing!" So the guy went on back downstairs. But as the food got doner, the fumes got louder. So the guy down stairs is thinking, "somebody up there is cooking something!" So the guy banged on the door again. "Mister Sonny Boy, are you sure you ain't cooking nothing in there?" Sonny Boy said, "yeah, I'm cooking some damn beans!" Ha! I thought that was the funniest story.

I just got to the place where I had to move away from home. Me and my son's mother had broke up at that time. I needed to get away, I needed to go someplace, because she was worrying my mind. She was coming to my mother's house, I was still staying at my mother's house. Her and my sister would be in there washing dishes and

she would be telling my sister, "oh, girl, I went to this fabulous place in East St. Louis . . . carpet this thick on the floor. Ah, the waiter brought out this, he served us, and blah-blah-di, and it was great. We drove away in a pink Cadillac!"

I had to hear this stuff every evening, while my sister was washing dishes. It seemed like she knew that I had just finished supper, and I would be back in my room. She said it loud enough for me to hear. And my sister would be, "yeah, girl! uh huh!" They'd be laughing, she was laughing. My sister, I don't think at that time she knew how much that was hurting me. She didn't know. She just wanted to hear something exciting. And she'd be going out there telling her, "girl, we went here . . . girl, we went there."

But I couldn't leave, 'cause my car had been broke down; I needed some brakes on it. So I got my brakes fixed, I worked all day. I said, "I got to get out of here!" I worked all day and night on them; Mama was trying to send me here and there. When I couldn't work on them, I got me a friend of mine named Jonas, lived across that tracks; he came over. And he worked on it in his spare time. Between me and Jonas, we put it together. 'Cause I had to get that car moving, to get out of here, and move my stuff. I had already seen about a room down in East St. Louis. All I had to do was just go, you know. I'd talked to the people already, and they said, "you can get the room."

CHAPTER III

EAST ST. LOUIS, ILLINOIS: 1960-73

Down in the Bottom

Slim Has His Eyes Opened While Jamming At the Bottom, Works with Little Walter Westbrook, and Talks About What He Has Learned

During that time I played with different bands. I was at the age of twenty-one, twenty-three. I remember I played with a guy named Raleigh. I hadn't been playing, 'cause my band had took off and left me. And I had run into my friend 'Time,' and he was telling me. Raleigh needs a guitar player. I said, "where are they playing?" "Right now they're playing down on 4th Street, but Raleigh, he can hustle." So, 'Time' told him about me, and he came out to Eagle Park. He said, "my name is Raleigh, and I need a guitar player. We'd be glad to have you, man." "Okay, I'll come out and play with you guys." He said, "well, we're going to be playing Thursday night down here at Mose's." I said, "Okay."

At that particular time there was another guy who had been hanging around, his name was Clarence. He was a singer. So, he came the in one night and sung with us. And Raleigh hired him too. We had three guitar players, bass, drums, a couple horns . . . he tried to have a big band. Couldn't nobody in the band play! 'Cause Raleigh wasn't that good, he was a great motivator, and he could get jobs. He knew how to get jobs, he could go out and book them. So I played around with him for a while.

There was a place called John's, Big John's, down in the bottom. We called it a bottom, 'cause it was down, kind of in a valley. I remember 'Time" told me about it. He

said, "you ought to go down there to John Brown's tavern, down there. They need a guitar player to play today. If you ain't doing nothing, it would be a good place for you to play. A lot of old boys will be down there." He said, "you're young, you'll kick their butts!" So I goes down there, it was right down there in the ghetto neighborhood. I knew this old guy, he would drive a Cadillac, park the Cadillac right out in front of his place. I goes down here, and the guys just set up the instruments and stuff. "Put your guitar over here, we're going to get to playing pretty soon." There was three or four other guitar players there too.

So, they was waiting on something . . . I said, "what's they waiting on?" There was a table there, like a card table. Everybody was sitting around that table. People said, "you guy's going to start playing pretty soon?" "No, not right now, wait till he brings it out. . . ." They kept waiting, and waiting, I was wondering what they was waiting on. So, the boss, he walked in. We was supposed to start at four; it was about quarter after four. He said, "you all haven't started yet? Assholes!" He told the waitress to do something, and he came back and set up a fifth of whiskey and about six or seven glasses. These guys dove for that whiskey! I didn't know that this was the pay! This was all they was getting, was a fifth of whiskey.

See, I didn't know, 'cause this was my first time down there, 'cause 'Time' told me to go down there. "There is some good players down there." A fifth of whiskey a night, beer and stuff. When the boss set it down, he said, "now you sons of bitches get to playing!" They drunk a couple shots of whiskey, and they hit the bandstand. They played for a couple of hours, then they come back and finished off that little bottle they had there. Some people brought some more stuff; they was bringing up more whiskey. I went up and played, and when I came down, I let this other player get up. I said, "I got to go," I really had to go. I wasn't playing for no drinks, 'cause I wasn't even drinking at

that time. See, I was getting around, playing different places, getting my name known. I went down there, and that was the worst thing I ever seen in my life. Guys going for whiskey.

The boss, he came out and said, "do you drink?" "No, I don't drink nothing much, just Pepsi or something." "Well, are you hungry?" "Well, you get yourself a free meal and something to drink, I ain't giving them sons of bitches nothing!" That was the way he talked. Ha! He asked me to come back. He said, "you come back anytime you get ready. . . ." I didn't go down there the next week, but the week after that I did go. They was glad, "there he is! We're going to hear some shit tonight!" I was so glad that they thought a lot of my guitar playing. 'Cause I was self-taught and everything, I'd taught myself everything I know. I learned little runs from other people, here and there.

That was a great experience right there, when I went down in the 'bottom' there. They kind of adopted me, they wanted me to come play down there. But it was a rough part of the neighborhood. You'd get your butt whupped, and your pocketbook took, down there. It was scary to even walk through there, to even drive through there. So I didn't never go down through there without 'Time.' 'Time' would say, "ain't nobody going to mess with us, come on, I'll take you down there!"

There was some store down there, you use to be able to get cheap stuff, cupcakes and twinkies. 'Time' used to take me down through there. That was an exciting time in my life. Just seeing musicians play for booze . . . those guys were playing for booze! I knew right then, that wasn't the right company for me. I had been playing around with Raleigh, at different places out on Route 3. He couldn't control his band. They were saying Raleigh didn't pay them. I think one of Raleigh's troubles was he had too many girls that he was trying to see after. And he also had a wife at home. It was too much of

that, that's why his band didn't go no place. I quit playing with him, but I played with him for three or four weeks.

I just kept playing in different bands, so I didn't never get a chance to use my songs. I was always playing with somebody else, somebody else's songs that they wrote, like Little Walter Westbrook. He recorded a single. He had a single out, 'Jump' or something. We used to play that all the time that was our first number starting off, playing that. It was his identification card, when he played that song. It was a great song. And I didn't mind playing it every night, 'cause that was one of the greatest songs that he played.

See, he would come up and open the show, Little Walter, and then he'd let me take over. We'd do some James Brown, Wilson Pickett, Otis Redding and Al Green-type stuff, and then he'd come up on the second set and start it off. "Now ladies and gentlemen, we've got Little Walter," and he'd break out his harmonica. And he'd do a few of Little Walter's numbers, some blues and songs and stuff, things that he wrote. And people didn't like it, 'cause he didn't have no real voice, and he always kept a couple of good singers with him. A guy named Smokey, and he had a guy named Calvin with him, he had 'Cat-Man,' all these guys were vocalists. He could call on them anytime if he needed a vocalist.

Because with just his singing, it just wasn't enough. But some nights, he had to go without a vocalist. He went on . . . Little Walter was a strong man. And he didn't like this, and he didn't like that. We had to sit up and act right. There wasn't no smoking done in his car, or nothing like that. You couldn't put your feet up on the seat; he would keep his van clean. His house was clean, everything was clean! Boy, when he set up his bandstand, it was neat and clean, he set it up the best way he knew how. He was that kind of a dignified man.

I respect him a lot. You know people talked about him, "oh man, you're playing with Little Walter. . . ." But I learned a lot from Little Walter. I learned how to treat musicians, and how musicians are supposed to treat you. I seen a lot of musicians mess with him, and he used to always tell me, "Slim, see there?"

I remember one night we was going to play at the Keel Opera House, no, it was some big hotel, I forget the name, but it was way out there by the hospital. It had three or four big rooms, with several different things going on at once. It was kind of like the Hult center, or the Keel Opera House, one of those type places. We played for a wedding there; we were supposed to be dressing up in black suits and white shirts. The drummer, he showed up in a pair of blue jeans and an old plaid shirt. Walter said, "hey man, where are you going dressed like that? I can't let you play."

See, Walter, he had learned how to play drums; he couldn't play that good, but he could keep a little time. He could make something fit. The drummer said, "I didn't have time to go home, man. I was over at my girlfriend's house all day." Walter said, "that ain't got nothing to do with it! Every man is supposed to take time to go home and clean his butt! You probably ain't took no bath, then! Man, I can't let you go out there like that. I'll play drums and you go home and clean up, put on a suit and stuff." The drummer said, "it may take a while." "I don't care how long it takes, just go!" So he took off in a cab, and went home. When he came back, he was mad. Walter said to me, "Slim, see there, he could have messed this whole thing up for us. The man done told me, suits and ties. The man's paying me a lot of money, and I'm paying you guys well." He used to always tell me, "Slim, I'm glad you ain't like that." The night before that, the bass player was late coming in.

Walter, when we'd go out of town, he wouldn't let us stop nowhere to get no drink or nothing like that. He would keep going. He would let us stop just to go to the

bathroom. I remember we drove all the way from Blysville, Arkansas all the way to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and we got out to use the bathroom twice. And we stopped one time to get some hamburgers and stuff, and then we was back on the road again. He didn't lie, or fool around, 'cause he knew how guys was. You know, we'd be on the road, and we'd stop, and some guy would jump out to get some hamburgers. He'd say, "no, it don't take me but five minutes to gas up, and I got to get back on the road." And they'd have to wait fifteen minutes for the hamburgers. He told me, "Sometimes I feel like going off and leaving them." I'd say, "yeah, I see what you mean."

From all of that, I learned. I was learning, because I was just a youngster myself. Now I see why I lost my boys; I let them done what they wanted to do. If you're a band leader, you got to keep everybody intact, and let people know that you're the boss. So I learned a lot from that man. I didn't make a whole lot of money, but he kept me busy. This was 1963, and then I stopped working with him, and started playing with another band. Then I worked with him again in 1969, 1970 and '71.

He called me one day, 'cause I worked with him a lot, we went up and down, everywhere. One of the places he went was called Fayette, Missouri. Cape Gerardo, Missouri. Bowling Green, Missouri. We had some great times, we played for some great people, some parties. I miss all those years, I always said I wanted to go back and play with him again. 'Cause he's still playing those towns. 'Cause I didn't know what I know now. When we was going through those towns, I wasn't singing. There was somebody else singing, I was just playing guitar. Man, I would love to go back through those towns. That's a dream of mine. And it's going to happen someday, 'cause it's going on further and further.

Working Pepper's Lounge

One of Slim's Roughest Gigs

One time I run across an old boy named Londale. Londale and me he had played together with Little Walter in some places, 'cause he played drums and sung, Little Walter Westbrook . . . and we was going every place. Decatur, Metropolis, to Layetteville, and Boonesville, and Fayetteville. And all kinds of Missouri's; Sykeston, Scott City, we went all over playing here and there. I had stopped playing with him, and I was down at the filling station, and I seen an old boy I knew named Londale. He was trying to get him some gas . . . no, he was walking down through there.

Anyway, he said, "what are you doing? Are you playing anywhere?" I said, "no, I ain't been doing nothing." He said, "I heard they need a band over here; I'm trying to find some people to put something together over here at Pepper's lounge." I said, "oh, man, I don't know nobody." He said, "I know Will; he's got some drums, and I can played drums and sing sometimes." He said, "I know an old Boy named Tommy. I was just over at his house, jamming. If you want to take me out there, we can catch him now, 'cause he's just getting off of work."

So we went out there; we could hear him playing. He was down in the basement. So we walked in. Lionel said, "are you interested in getting in a band?" "Yeah," he said, "with who?" He said, "with Eagle Park Slim and me." "Oh, yeah . . . hey, Slim, how're you doing?" He said, "I've been practicing; I got my chops up." I said, "sounds all right to me." He said, "we was playing down here the other night, and I left my bass on, I come down and it was still on, all night and all day." Well, I said, "if we get this job, we won't have no time to do a lot of rehearsing." He said, "I'm sure I can pick it up, if its blues."

We left there and headed back to Pepper's. We pulled up in front of the place; Pepper was sitting outside the place and he had a 45 on his side. He fired at two rats that ran across the place. Pow! Pow! I said, "Lonnie, this must be the place!" "Yeah," he said, "that's Pepper, right there."

So we walked up and Lonnie said, "Pepper, this is Eagle Park Slim. We come down to see about this job." "Yeah them guys is fired, I got rid of them. I got three nights, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. That other band messed me around; I want to start a Sunday, but I got to get these going. I had to get rid of them. They kept coming in late; they played good, whenever they'd get here."

I said, "man, yeah, I'll take the job." He said, "I can't pay but forty bucks a night." "Okay, I'll take it." Forty bucks a night, and there was four of us . . . ten bucks apiece. We started working there, and the second week I played there he gave me forty-five bucks. He said, "Slim, you done a good job tonight. People are really talking about it. Man, I'm so glad, thanks a lot."

I was having trouble keeping a drummer, 'cause every night there was a fight in this place. I remember the very first night we played there. The singer got glass in his eye. As soon as we started a song called 'Knock on Wood,' somebody threw their glass up, and it hit the microphone. I got a little in my eyes, too. He got most of it. Right quick he said, "man, I'm quitting!" And he was tough . . . he didn't quit, though. The next night somebody came in with a sawed-off shotgun, and waved it, and everybody ran out of the place. I guess he didn't see who he was looking for, and he left. I didn't know what was happening, 'cause I had my back turned on the whole thing. When I turned around, I was looking at this guy with the sawed-off shotgun! He shook his head, like "I'm not after you."

So people thought I knew him! So when the boss come, he asked me, "Slim, who was that come in here? They say you knew him." I said, "no, I didn't know him. They ran off and left me, 'cause I didn't have time to get my stuff together. Everybody ran out. When I looked at him, there wasn't no need of running 'cause if he wanted me he could have shot me down." Pepper said, "I wish I would have been here, I would have shot the son of a bitch!" He was tough, man. "Who was he looking for? I hope he was looking for me, I'll chain-whip him!" Pepper was tough, he didn't back down for nobody. Like I said, every night there was a fight in there.

But, you know, those were some glory days of my time. At that time I was driving an old piece of Cadillac. I had a roady, I had everything. I had met a guy named DumDum. He would set up my stuff, and drive my Cadillac around to the front; he would go off on trips with me. He was working for me, in some ways. I liked the old boy. He really made me look big. I didn't have to do nothing, making about ten bucks a night. I played there at that place for, I believe, six or seven months. Then the axe came down. It was time to get out of there, I couldn't keep no drummer. We went through like, ten or fifteen drummers, and no drummer wanted to play there a second time with me.

So I went to the boss, I said, "man, I got to quit." He said, "okay Slim, I guess I'll call these other boys." We had built it up into a number one spot, so that any band could come in behind us and play. Somebody got shot there, after we left; I think the place closed down.

There I Was Standing Behind Muddy

Playing With Muddy Waters and Johnny Johnson at the Moonlight Bar, Working With Jimmy Reed at Lorraines

I remember Pinetop Perkins and Muddy Waters. We had been playing at a place called the 'Moonlight Bar' on Good and Eastern Street. There used to be a lady named Miss Helen that used to own that. She was a sweet lady, and she really loved musicians. She really loved musicians, and she would treat them good . . . and musicians loved her. 'Cause she kept a place for them to play, you know.

I remember that I had been playing there with Johnny Johnson in 1965 or somewhere in there. 'Cause that's when Albert ' Blues Boy' King had disbanded his band. Because the guys all had jobs, and Albert King wanted to take them out on the road, and didn't have no guarantee for them. They quit him, the whole band . . . Johnny Johnson, Harold, Philip, Freddie and Lee Otis . . . the whole group. All they needed was a guitar player.

Johnny Johnson, he lived right 'side of me, you know. He seen me going out with my guitar one day. He said, "can you play that thing?" "I do pretty good, I'm going down now to play." He said, "I need a guitar player. Are you playing with anybody right now?" "I'm playing off and on with Little Walter, and Johnny Floyd Smith band, here and there, whoever calls me, you know. Right now I'm going over to St. Louis to play with some white boys at Gaslight Square." He said, "we're going to be practicing tomorrow night, why don't you come on over." So I went over early, me and Johnny had been jamming he on the piano, I'm on the guitar. Then the other boys showed up, and they got into playing their songs and stuff.

They had a job booked over at the Moonlight Bar, so Johnny took me in there. A couple of the other boys, they thought they should've had a better guitar player. But

Johnny seen in me what he seen in Chuck Berry, you know. "This guy's got talent." The other guys was saying, "let's get so-and-so, he's a better guitar player." Because I didn't know how to play a lot of them numbers, I didn't know how to play with no horns. We had four horns, with harmony and all that stuff. I was doing 'chuckachuckachuck,' I didn't even know how to make it an A flat-ninth, or a B flat-tenth or nothing. I was just playing my little chords, what I had learned, you know. I was self-taught.

So we got over there and played this Moonlight Bar. They was playing there for two weeks. After the first week, they was getting ready to get fired, until I started playing in the band. Johnny went over, after we went there and played and took a break. Johnny went over, after we went there and played and took a break, and Miss Helen said, "who is this guitar player you got there?" "Oh, that's Eagle Park Slim."

You know, I was tall, and wearing the 'process' and everything, Tony Curtis-style with the little curl in front. I kept myself clean and well-dressed. She was kind of interested in me. She said, "tell him to come over here and have a drink." So I went over to the bar, and she said, "how are you doing? I like to watch you." "Oh, you do. . . ." She said, "yeah, I'm Miss Helen, I own this crazy bar. I don't know why I'm doing this." I said, "my moms got a club over Eagle Park." "Oh yeah, I've been over there, to your mamas place, many times." "Oh yeah?" "Yeah, I didn't see you." I had a little band at the time, we was doing Teentowns and my mom's club every Sunday. She would call us to play on Sunday. Helen said, "I know I never seen you. Are you going to stay with the band?" I said, "Yeah, I guess so."

She said, "I was thinking about letting these guys go, but if you stay I think it will draw interest, more people. They was all excited about you . . . who is this guy? I would love for you to stay around for a while. We got Muddy Waters coming in next week, and

you guys are supposed to open up for them, play about an hour or so." I said, "Muddy Waters?!" I guess I was about twenty-two, twenty-three somewhere about in that area.

So when Muddy and them come in, they had an accident, half of his band. Only Pinetop Perkins and Muddy made it. His bass player, drummer, and guitar player was all riding together. Johnny come over and told me, I guess you're going to have to sit in on guitar with Muddy. The bass player is going to play, too. I said, "you're kidding!" He said, "go for it, Slim! He's up there!" So, there I was standing behind Muddy Waters. At the time, it didn't seem like it was nothing, just another musician. He was playing his blues, and I could play blues. So we played for an hour or so. Then some other guys came in, and they jammed with Muddy. That was my first experience playing with Muddy Waters, even getting close to Muddy Waters.

I was about the age of eighteen, nineteen, or twenty, and I had heard Jimmy Reed play some of his stuff, I learned his style, but I had never had a chance to play with Jimmy. I got lucky, lucky because another boy didn't want to play, he chickened out at the last minute. The guy called me, he said, "hey Slim, we need a guitar player over here, this other guy chickened out. Jimmy Reed is going to be here at five o'clock." I said, "okay!" It was about three-thirty then. I went on over there, and the band got there. Some guy said, "are you the guitar player?" I said, "yeah, I am." He said, "okay, stay right here in this area, 'cause when it's five o'clock we jump on stage, as soon as this other act is done." I said, "okay, I'm not going no place," and I went and got me something to drink. So when it was time for us to get up onstage, we got tuned up and everything. And the emcee announced over the microphone, "ladies and gentlemen, Mister Jimmy Reed!" So, everybody was cheering and stuff and they started carrying him out there. One guy had him by one arm, and another guy had the other arm, and they

was bringing him out there! So they set him down out there, and when he got in that chair, he kind of rocked a little bit. I thought, "this dude is drunk!" They went and got his guitar and brought it out, and got it placed. They had a hard time getting the strap over his head. He was messed up, I could see that he was drunk, 'cause the guys had to put the guitar on him.

He struck up a couple of tunes, you know, he started playing, and we just fell in behind him. He started singing, "Oh, baby," and blam! He fell over backwards, off the back of the stage! Ha! He said, "Oh, baby," and that was it. Everybody started throwing stuff at the stage and yelling, "give me my money back! I want my money back!" Jimmy was almost stoned that day. They had to pick him up and take him away.

The guy who was putting on the show, he was really pissed. So the guy who brought Jimmy down there told him, "Look . . . it's going to take us about four hours to get him sober, but we're going to do you a show." He said, "we'll move over into your club." See, we was playing out on a picnic ground. Kids were standing all around, everybody seen him. Pretty quick it started to rain, so they moved the show over into the club. So, they sobered up Jimmy, and they told us to come back, round about nine. So we came back and Jimmy came out, and you could see in his face that he was really sorry. He started playing his music, all them songs. He blew some beautiful harmonica, and that was good, too, to see where a guy had failed, but came back out and done a good show. It was good for me, it was good for everybody . . . I got to see the real Jimmy Reed. I've always been glad that I played with him.

I Was Trying to Be a Good Boy

Twelve-Hour Days at the Charles Todd Laundry

But I want to go back to some of the vintage years, when I was twenty-one or twenty-two years old. I had been through a lot already with my first band. I was living in East St. Louis, and I got a job at the Charles Todd laundry. I remember some of the guys like Big Bob and Wash Man, Harry and John-boy, little Albert, the Zeke was there. I remember all those guys. As soon as I walked in the door, they carried me back to the laundry. I needed a job real bad at that time, 'cause I wasn't playing no music. We was loading clothes, I became a loader.

You'd be loading washers, you had to stop, get you a little bite, and put your hands on these moldy clothes. I didn't like all that. I remember I was over there eating a pork-chop sandwich. The boss came over and said, "come on Mac, you got to keep working!" "Man, I got to eat, too." He said, "you got plenty of time, the lunch truck will be by in about five minutes. Come on, come on, let's go!" He was a pushy guy, a Tennessee guy, from Tennessee. At that time, there wasn't no rights or nothing. I said, "this guy here, I seen right now, he's going to be hard on me." We worked twelve hours a day.

I came to find out that I was the only somebody there who had a car, and there was six guys coming back and forth to East St. Louis. So I started picking these guys up, 'cause they told me, "you got a car? You got a car?" So they started paying me to ride, I charged them five bucks or so. Gas wasn't that much, back at that time, either. So we made it pretty good. Everybody come up, at the end, when they got their checks, gave me twenty-five bucks or so. It would have cost them less on the bus, but they had to wait out there in the cold, in the snow and shit. They didn't want to be doing that. So, I

agreed to pick them up. It was great, I liked the job I had 'cause I used to leave there with ten or fifteen dollars in my pocket, that I found.

I was a pull-man, and sometimes you open them washers, there'd be all kinds of the money in there. A lot of times the dollars would be washed, and the dryers would take the wash dollars. A lot of times you could trade that to the dryer guys for dried dollars. The dryers would find money in the pockets, too. They had a place where they could take it and trade it in. Man, I used to find me fifteen, twenty, thirty-five dollars a night. And you would find wrenches and pliers, and all kinds of tools that guys had left in their pockets and stuff. I worked there three days and I had almost a toolbox. You could have found more, but the foreman used to push you so hard. Sometimes you would be out there sorting clothes out, you'd reach down there. One time I picked up sixteen bucks. You'd keep on sorting and pretty soon, here is some change . . . twenty cents. I used to find a lot of money in there.

That job wasn't paying that much; you would find more than that job was paying you! The job wasn't paying you but a dollar and a quarter an hour. This is 1963, '64. Man, we worked, we worked, and we drinked. And it was a party every night when we'd get off. We'd put in, and everybody would buy three or four half-pints. We'd joke and tell lies coming home. Everybody would go in and go to sleep, they'd be so tired. I would sleep clean until twelve or one o'clock the next day.

I only got up to go to work. Man, those were some bad years. I would sleep until twelve o'clock, get up around twelve-thirty or so. I started fixing me a lunch, a woman I had at that time, I think Irene, she would fix me something. And I would go over there and work; worked twelve hours, and come back. I mean, we done that for six days a week! On Saturdays we had to go in for four hours; I hated that. Couldn't do nothing, you had to get up to be there at six o'clock in the morning, work four hours. You had to

do that. You couldn't take off, you couldn't say, "I was sick," missing in action. If you didn't be there, you would lose your job.

It was 1963, and I was still at that Charles Todd laundry. I think I worked there for a long time. I remember when I first went in there. I was wearing a 'process' at the time, Tony Curtis-style, and all the boys at the Charles Todd laundry called me 'beauty.' "Hey, beauty, where you going?" When I walked through the plant, there was girls all over! We was in the middle; there was girls all over, wearing some different uniforms, they was blue. When you went past that, there was always some girls in the basement. Man, when I started working over there, I began to get in some real big trouble. It seemed like everywhere I turned, somebody was trying to cut me off, ask me my phone number, ask me what I'm doing. I was trying to be a good boy; I was . . . just trying to stay out of the way.

I Almost Froze in There

Slim Meets Lavonda and Her Family

I caused a friend of mine named Lavonda Foxworth to get a job over there. Me and her was kind of seeing each other off and on. When I first met her and her family they was a lot of poor people. I was driving down Burns Avenue, and there was a couple of girls flagging me down. "Hey, hey, I know you! You're so-and-so!" They was just kind of picking at me, to start a conversation. So I stopped . . . I said, "hey, how are you doing?" I acted like I knew them, but I didn't really know them. She stuck her head in the car and said, "hey, this smells good in here! *And it's warm*!" I said, "yeah, get in, do you want to take a ride?"

Her and her sister got in the car, and I drove them around town, out 15th Street by the bridge and around, and came back. "Where do you girls live? Are you ready to go home?" One of the girls said, "I ain't going back to that cold house!" I looked at them both. Lavonda dropped her head. She said, "that's all right. . . . " "what's wrong?" "It's just that somebody forgot to pay the bills around the house." "You guys got no heat or nothing?" She said, "there is a lot of things we ain't got." And I said, "what kind of heat you got? Coal? Oil?" She said, "I've done burned every piece of wood I could find around this place. I started taking it off the house when we ran out; we've been out of wood and coal for a couple of days!" "I can take you up here and get you some coal." She said, "I ain't got no money." "Well, I'll pay for it, and I'll haul it back here in my car." "Wait a minute, let me go over here and tell mama. No, ain't no sense in telling them, let's go do it."

And they rode up there with me; I got a couple of bushels of coal, put it in my car and took it back to them. Boy, I *never* seen such happy people. 'Cause, when I went in, I almost froze. I almost froze when I went in there! I don't blame Lavonda for not wanting to go in there. Man, it was *cold* in there! We got a little fire warmed up and, man, you should have seen the smiles come back on people's faces. I had about twenty or thirty dollars worth of food stamps, and I gave that to them. So, they had food and they had coal. I said, "well, I got to be going. . . ." Her mom said, "really, thank you, the Lord is going to bless you!" "I think he will, I think he already blessed me," I said. Lavonda walked me back out to the car. She said, "can I go with you?" "No, I can't take you with me; I'm staying with somebody." "You're not even going to give me a hug or nothing?" So I grabbed her, and right quick, we started kissing.

Man, she started kissing me, and I went like, "whoa!" And she ran in the house, but she said, "I probably won't never see you no more . . . you got no need to come back

here." Man . . . I found myself over there the next couple of days. When I pulled up in the yard, everybody ran out, "there he is, there he is!" Lavonda came out, and she said, "you got any gas?" "Yeah, why?" I never seen a girl who wanted so much to get away; she was so bored and tired, everybody crowding on top of her. At the present time, my hands was tied. I would have been wrong if I would have left with her, you know. I was just trying to help them out. That day there, when I went there, she cried and cried and cried. "You got to stop crying." She said, "I can help it, I don't want to live no more. I feel like killing myself." "Don't feel like that, come on!" I knowed right then and there that I had to do something. I took her, and bought her some food and stuff. We went and had a little drink.

That was the first night that we ever touched each other. She wanted to touch me, and I wanted to touch her. We kind of spent a little time together. It started from then on. I couldn't see her that much, but every once in a while I would go by and carry something or do something. I was working over there, at Charles Todd, and I got her a job. I got it all fixed up for her, and she started working, doing pretty good. I was so glad. But she still wanted me, and I couldn't leave the woman that I was with. I wouldn't have done it . . . and I'm glad I didn't.

They kind of thought of me as family, her mama and all of them. I got to be kind of a regular over there; I'd go over there every once in a while. She started calling me her son . . . I don't know, it was just kind of a scary situation.

Eight Main Sauces

All About Kitchen Work

I wasn't playing no music at that time, 'cause I was working twelve hours a day. I was too tired to even think about playing any kind of music. I left Charles Todd and got me a job up in Edwardsville, at the Holiday Inn. I walked in, and there was a chef there, Ford was his name. He said, "can I help you, Mister?" "Yeah, I'm looking for a job." "What kind of job are you looking for?" "Man, I'm looking for a cook job." "Where did you cook at before?" "All around different little places, here and there." "'Here and there' don't tell me nothing." He wanted me to tell him places like the Ramada Inn, Holiday Inn, places like that.

All I had cooked at was at my mama's place, around the house, or at my sister's place. He was one of these little old smartasses. He asked me, he said, "name the eight main sauces . . . there's eight main sauces, name them. . . ." I said, "hey man, I can't name no sauces right now! I just came in out of the weather, my hands are cold. But, I'll get around to it." He said, "name the eight sauces, and I'll give you a job." He was kind of picking at me, in a way.

The boss walked in; his name was Van Clark. He said, "what's going on?" "This guy here, he wants a cook job. I asked him to name the eight sauces, and he ain't named one!" Van said, "don't be asking nobody to name no eight sauces! Man, what's your name?" "Slim." "Slim, I ain't got no cook jobs." As soon as I was talking to him, someone named Hattie Sue come over and said she was quitting. He looked up at me, and said, "come here a minute . . . I really don't need no cook right now; what I need is somebody to run this operation right here. If you take this job, I'll pay you the same

wages as a fry-cook. Right now, I need a dishwasher." He started grabbing stuff and talking, he was mad, boy!

Right quick, I was in there helping him. He said, "get you an apron, if you're going to work . . . I'll put you on the payroll right now." All at once the cook boss started telling me, "do this, do that!" Van come back over, he said, "what's wrong?" "He's telling me to do this stuff, but I got all this work to do." "Don't pay him no mind. *He* don't run this back here; *I* run this back here! Keep doing what you're doing; you're doing a good job." When the cook-boss came back in, I said, "Van!" Van come back and he said, "*get* out of my kitchen!" Ha! He walked out of there, red-faced. They was rushing me, telling me to wash all these baskets, and my dishes were piling up, plates and all kinds of stuff!

When I took that job up there, I didn't know what I was getting into. See, all them sauces he was asking me about, I didn't know about that stuff . . . I was just trying to get me a job. I didn't know about no eight sauces; I knew how to make gravy, or maybe tomato sauce and shit like that. But I know a lot about different sauces now, see, 'cause I learned all this stuff after I had a chance to. Man, when I first started working up there up, we was mopping the floor three times a day. After breakfast, mop time. After lunch, mop time. And we had to mop again before we left, to make sure it was clean in the morning. Man, we use to sling that mop . . . they'd be busy, but when it was time to mop, they stopped! That's one thing, Van made sure that mop went through there. They'd be busy; he'd say, "let them through with that mop, goddammit!"

I learned how to cut meat. They would bring in them big old beef shoulders, pork shoulders. Van said, "come here!" I told him, "I got a few pots I'm working on here." He said, "come on out of that water! Stand here and watch me for a minute. You know them steaks back here? Watch this here. . . ." He cut them steaks out of there, and laid

them out. "You think you could do that?" "Yeah, I think I could probably do that." "Come here and do it!" Right quick he said, "no, no! Turn your knife like this, let the knife do the work. . . . " He used to tell me all kinds of shit, but I learned how to do it. Them big old shoulders used to come in, and he'd say, "Slim, cut up that shoulder for me willya?" He had us cutting meat, making pancakes, making potato pancakes, onion rings, everything. Ain't nothing that we didn't know about, the cooks around there, me included.

One night we was playing in St. Louis, and Jesse Mae, the lady who worked the pantry, and Van came by the club. Right after then, I started playing around, two or three nights a week, with Walter Westbrook. We had double gigs on the weekends, sometimes triple. We would play from four to eight, then go back and play from nine to one. Then we had another gig over in East St. Louis. We played from two to six in the morning. We played till early in the morning; we played all night long. I used to be so sleepy, so tired. And I ain't made thirty dollars! Ain't made thirty dollars, man! Stayed up all night long, I'll tell you! But, we was gigging! We gigged all over.

We done that on the weekends, especially Friday and Saturdays at Kelly's. I hated that place. I hated that place with a passion. You'd walk in there, and it smelled *bad*, you know. They had us playing on a bandstand that was like a hog pen. The people that was going there, there wasn't no blacks around at all. It was mostly a red-neck place, in some ways, but the people loved our music.

I played there many times with Little Walter, and it was always different people all the time. I remember I played with a bass player named Ernest Loweson, and his wife was the singer at the time, a drummer named Tippy . . . Amos Sanford, I played with him a couple of times. 'Plunk' played bass, and a lot of different players. 'Cause Walter had all kinds of people playing with him. Like I said, I wasn't doing nothing steady at the

time, I was just playing here and there. We was going to Cape Gerarado, different places in Missouri, way down in Metropolis. 1963 to 1964 I played with him.

I Seen How Things Work

Slim's Car Burns Up, and He Learns How to Deal With Insurance Companies

I remember one time, Walter was playing at Kelly's and I had just got off work, and I said, "I'm going by there." I was turning off the highway and I was driving a 1954 Ford. Some guy was drunk, coming up behind me doing a hundred miles an hour. He didn't see my hand signals or nothing. I could see the headlights jumping, and boom, he hit me! My car spinned around and went up in flames. I remember my doors jammed up and I couldn't get out. Lucky I had my window down, so I climbed out the window, and that's how I saved myself. People seen the car burning up and said, "who was in that car? There's the guy, over there!" I was over there by the side of the highway. I wasn't hurt, but I was scared. I was scared to death, man! My car burnt up and my brand new amplifier and guitar was in it . . . and I had about eighty bucks in the trunk.

Oh man, everything went down to the drain. I had just got that guitar and stuff down at the music store in East St. Louis. It wasn't even paid for. So the very next day, I went down to the music store. One of the salesman said, "man, don't you worry . . . you're going to get paid for that." "I ain't got no insurance; they ain't going to pay me nothing." He said, "they don't know you don't got insurance. Right now, they're worried about you 'cause you're hurt. Don't worry, you'll get something for it. Don't tell them you ain't got no insurance. When they call you, tell them to talk to your lawyer." I said, "Man . . . I ain't *got* no lawyer."

That's when I learned about different things, and how to do stuff. He told me to go in there and pick out another guitar. So I went in there and got me a Gibson and a Gibson amp. That was a thousand dollars, right there. The salesman said, "when they call you up, act like you're hurting. I'll tell you why, 'cause they'll settle with you real fast. 'Cause if your back is knocked out, they'll settle with you right fast! The guy is going to come and try to settle with you." And he was right.

I got a knock at the door, and the guy came in, and he said, "I came to check with you about the settlement." "Come on in," and I kind of hobbled around. He said, "what's wrong?" " Oh, my legs is sort of bothering me." The guitar salesman had told me to kind of jive with him. I said, "this morning my back was hurting." He said, "Oh, your back is hurting? Is it serious or something? Maybe you should go see a doctor." I told him," I ain't got no money." "I'm here to settle with you, Mr. McNeace. I can settle with you if you want to. If not, it's going to take three or four weeks."

So I got up and said, "I don't know . . . I'm going to a doctor this evening." He said, "I can call up my company right now, I have an estimate of the total that we owe you. That comes to a thousand and fifty-nine dollars. If you want to sign for that, we can pay that off right now. But if not, you're going to have to wait a month." Then he started talking big words, stuff I couldn't understand. So I went in the bathroom and sat in there for about three minutes. I jumped up, right quick, and went on back out. "Since its going to take all that time, I need some money right now. If you can give me that check today, I'll sign right now." "Let me use your phone for a minute, to call my boss and tell him everything's okay." He told his boss, and then he gave me a thousand and fifty-nine dollars!

I mean, that's the first time I ever had that kind of money . . . I didn't even know where I could go cash it at! I couldn't believe that . . . now, I know how certain things

work. If I had waited and waited, I wouldn't have got nothing. They would have found out I didn't have no insurance, and they didn't have to pay me nothing. By me faking like I was hurt, they figured they better pay me off, before he comes up with a back problem. Go on and pay him off, so he can go and get him a drink or something!

The guy at the music store had already told me, "whatever they settle for, go ahead and take it." I was going to be smart, so I went to an old pawn shop, and bought an old guitar and an amp. I'm telling you, it was nothing. So I ended up having to go back and get this Gibson; I took the old guitar and sold it to somebody else, thirty dollars cheaper than I'd bought it for. I put half of the money down on this other deal I had going for this other Gibson and amplifier. I carried this stuff in to a gig, and Johnny Floyd Smith said, "what is this stuff you're playing?!"

It Could Have Been Me

Working With Johnny Floyd Smith at Jasper's Bar, and Narrowly Escaping Death

I was playing with Johnny Floyd Smith at that time. He was a horn blower, sax player, tenor sax. He had a guitar player, bass and drums in his band. How I got the job was through Charles; Charles was a singer. The guitar player quit, his name was Chick or something. Charles came down and got me. He brought me out, and I started playing with Johnny. We was playing different places all over East St. Louis. Over in St. Louis we had a couple of different places, but this one particular place, it was called Jasper's bar; on Broadway.

My first time playing there was with Johnny Floyd Smith. Like I said, we had our little table in back of this stage that we had to stay at. Johnny Floyd Smith was a smart character; he was a type of guy. He worked for this airline in St. Louis, and he was a

blueprint-man, real smart. Blowing that horn was kind of a hobby; he didn't need to make no money 'cause he brought a check home every Friday. But he wanted to play music, and he could go out and get jobs. See, a lot of guys that can't play could go out and get jobs. So, I started playing with him.

I remember he always used to get in the mic, get dead in a microphone. He'd blow loud, "be boppa bapa bapa bom!" Then he used to walk away and yell, "Ideas is a bitch! Ideas is a bitch!" And he would dance around yelling that, looking around at the band. Whenever he started drinking, it seemed like he became silly, you know.

He knew what he was doing, things like, he said, "Slim, these people in this place, they don't use common sense. . . ." "what you mean?" "You see this shirt I got on? Did you see anybody in this place this color?" I said, "I don't see nobody." He used to say, "my shirt, this is white! Those people out there are Caucasian, they ain't white!" Ha! I played with him there for two or three weeks.

We practiced through the week, sometimes. And when we practiced, he would never practice. He was the type of guy, like Walter, he would come out and play when he got ready, when he thought that the crowd was getting too heavy into the band. But he was a real nice guy. When we went over to his house, I met his wife and she was a sweet lady. She always give us cookies and lemonade when we would come to his house to practice. She said, "anything you guys need, just holler." So I played with him for a while. Later on I got a chance to play at Jasper's bar again, but this was with Little Walter Westbrook.

They was playing over there at Jasper's Bar. I never will forget that place. I seen a man get killed, right there at that place. It was like a biker's bar in a way. It was a tough place; a lot of loose girls, a lot of loose guys. There was always something

happening there. One girl there cut a guy's convertible top. 'Cause he had three other girls styling inside. He come out, and his car top was flapping in the wind!

I also remember, at that same bar, a lady named Elsie. She got into it with her boyfriend . . . her boyfriend called her something, and they got into a fight. I went to take a break, and some guy told me, "there is a lady crying in your car. You're the guitar player, right?" So I goes out there, and I said, "what's wrong?" She said, "I'm sorry, maybe I shouldn't have come over here." She was crying and crying. "Oh, that fool hit me!" "I'm sorry about that. . . ." "I could just kill him! I started not to come, but I just wanted to see you so bad." She just wanted to be with somebody that was nice, 'cause the man that she was with would beat her and kick her around. I had took her out a couple of times, and I had treated her nice.

I remember another time, this biker girl had been playing after me. She was a beautiful woman, shaped like a co-cola bottle. She called me back there by the bathroom one time, and said, "give me a hug," so she grabbed me and hugged me. The next weekend, the boss told me, "boy, you better be careful! You're going to get killed, some guys going to kill you about that girl!" "I ain't doing nothing, she's messing with me!" "You better leave her alone!" Every chance she got, she was trying to buy me a beer, or buy me a drink. She was a nice looking girl, had real red hair, real shapely. I was wondering why she was with these biker guys. She didn't dress like no biker. She had on a nice dress, all kinds of jewelry, you know. I was wondering why she was with these guys, and I come to find out that she was trying to get out.

I guess she thought I could get her out of that scene. That next weekend, she must have timed it; she must have seen me go into the bathroom. She was there as soon I came out. When I walked out, she said, "give me my hug now!" I looked around, and there wasn't nobody around. So I grabbed her and hugged her. She said, "Oh Lord, that feels

good!" I said, "girl, you're going to get me killed. . . ." She said, "Oh no, he ain't going to bother you, he likes you."

That very next week, we get to the place there, and who do I see? Shiny earrings, shiny beads, you know. I goes back to the bathroom, and I look around, and she was behind me. So I went in the bathroom, and I knew she was out there when I got out. She said, "give me my hug now; they'll be coming down soon." So I grabbed her, and hugged her, and kissed her. It was the first time I ever kissed her. I told her, "I got to stay away from you! I got to stay away from you 'cause you're going to get me killed!" She said, "he ain't going to hurt you; he don't know nothing! I'm trying to get *away* from them, if I can."

So, we started playing our set. She was sitting at a table by herself. And, you know, if you see a girl sitting by herself, you're going to go over and try and get her to dance or something; it's ordinary. This guy, he's from New Jersey, he is in town, he wasn't too bad a looking guy himself. Kind of a John Travolta-type guy. He said, "can I buy you a drink?" She said, "no." That's one thing about her, she had money. I mean, she would buy *you* a drink.

So one of the biker guys was on his way to the pad where all the other guys was at, over on the other side of town. He seen this dude over there, talking to Danny's girl. He ran back and told the other guys, "hey, there is some hip dude down there from New Jersey talking trash to Danny's girl!" All the bikers, they'd been drinking anyways. They rushed down there, boom, boom, boom!

When they ran into the place, she stood up and said, "you better go!" When he ran out, there was a couple of guys; they tripped him up, right in front of the door. The club owner was hollering to us, "keep playing! keep playing!" Two or three of them bikers got the man down, and was kicking and knifing him right on the sidewalk. The

club owner was yelling, "don't go out there! Don't go out there! Get yourself a drink!" 'Cause he was used to trouble, they had all kinds of trouble there. They was trying to shut him down 'cause of it.

From the window we could see the guy laying on the ground. He was tossing and turning, and nobody would help him. Finally some guy seen him laying on the ground there, and he ran and called the ambulance. The police came, and they found he was dead, so they called the dead-wagon. The dead-wagon came and got him. I was so nervous that night, I remember after work I stopped at the liquor store and bought a couple bottles of V.O. and I went home and I drank that stuff until I got real sick. I was so scared because that could have been me. Me, somewhere in an alley. I had already kissed her! He lost his life, and saved mine. I feel sorry for the guy; he was just being a gentleman.

That guy laid out there on that sidewalk for a long time, bleeding to death. He bled like a dog. Wouldn't nobody help him. I couldn't barely play after that. That could have been me, you see what I'm saying?

Those is the Ones You Want to See Again

Slim Recounts One-Time Loves, and Philosophizes About Them

Talking about Jasper's bar, so many things went down over there. It seemed like there was always something happening. One night, we got through playing with Johnny Floyd Smith. We had a vocalist named Charles, and he was going with a girl, her name was Sweety-Cake, or something like that. She had a friend that was with her that night.

So I had asked Charles to give me a ride home, 'cause my car had broke down on me. I had rode over with Johnny Floyd Smith.

A funny thing happened . . . we took off, and I noticed he wasn't going towards the bridge. I didn't have no idea, I guess they had it figured out . . . putting me and this girl together. I hadn't talked to her all night, but we all left together. They ended up at the hotel. Charles looked back and said, "Y'all going in?" I said, "yeah . . . I guess so." I'm thinking, wait a minute . . . I am ending up in this hotel with this woman I don't even know, you know! It was all right there, all I had to do was just go in.

So we get into the room, and she went and pulled all her clothes off, and I was sitting there on the bed thinking, how did I get here? She got up to go to the bathroom, and I seen her body. I said, "oh boy. . . ." She had a body on her, a big body! I said, "ain't no time to cry now! You got to shit, or either get off the pot!" She went over there and got her clothes off, and we ain't even talked about it! After she come back and climbed up under the covers, I turned around and looked at her . . . and she just looked at me. So, I pulled my clothes off. I jumped into the bed, and as soon as I jumped in the bed we started making love. I mean, we made love for like, two hours. And she never said nothing to me, and I never said nothing to her. All she did was, every once in a while, "ooh! ooh!" We never talked about nothing!

When Charles and them got through, they knocked on our door, bang, bang. He said, "are y'all ready?" So we got up and put our clothes on, and Charles took me home and dropped me off. And that was it! It just goes to show you how things come across. But I really enjoyed it. I didn't ever see her no more.

I moved on and started playing with another band, with Walter. I remember one time we went to Cape Gerardo. We got through playing, and some lady invited me over to her house. She said, "do you want to come over and hang out for a little bit?" We

weren't supposed to play until nine that night, and we got there around four. She took me home with her, and we ate dinner and made love. We listened to music, and it was a happy moment. It was just a one-time affair, you know. We went down there to play again, and the next time we went there, I didn't see her. I looked for her, and I didn't see her. Somebody said she had married and moved away.

It came through just like this other deal did, you know. One time in a lifetime. It seems like those is the ones that you want to see again. The ones that they done left and gone, and won't be back no more. Those are the ones that you fall in love with the most. I've been looking at things through my life. It seems like all the women that I can't have no more, or that I just had one time, is the ones I end up loving.

1966, and 1967 . . . that's when I started my band. 'Cause I played with Walter and Londale, and Charles. That's when I went into Pepper's Lounge. I never will forget it. It was me and Londale, and Tommy was on bass. Smokey was singing. And I had me a valet named DumDum. I wasn't making a lot of money, but I had me a valet setting up my stuff, I had me a chauffeur, and all combined. He used to go pick up stuff for me, running errands around the corner. All of it. He would take my stuff out of the car and take it in the house.

See, I lived right down the street . . . and I found out he was living away over there on the hill! I was living way out on Bond Avenue. He used to ride home with me to take my stuff out, and then go home. And he had to go from Bond Avenue all the way over to the Hill. I guess that's why they called him DumDum. I couldn't figure that out; and I told him that, "I see why they call you DumDum. Man, I didn't know that's where you stayed." He said, "that's all right!" Ha! He lived five or six miles away, and I could have took him home first, dropped him off, and then went home. But no, he wanted to

chaffeur me home! Like I say, we wasn't making no money, forty bucks a night . . . ten bucks a piece, four nights a week.

One Monkey Don't Stop no Show

Lessons Learned Playing with Little Willie John, and Percy Mayfield

Another guy that I played with, his name was Little Willie John, the guy who first did 'Fever.' I guess I was between the ages of twenty-three and twenty-six. I was playing with the Frank Ezel band, the River Rockers, up in Alton, Illinois. The guy at the union called us. He called me up, he said, "hey, are you guys playing?" I said, "no, we're not playing this weekend." He said, "we need somebody at the Club Riviera," one of the biggest clubs in St. Louis. I always wanted to play there. He said, "we need somebody to back up Little Willie John, he's in town." I said, "well, I don't know; I'll call up everybody." So I called up Lawrence and I said, "Lawrence, they want us to play with Little Willie John up at the Riviera." "Well, I can do it, but I don't think Frank is free. He's doing a double header tonight at the job." He worked at the city. I said, "I know Dan can probably be there after he gets off work. I just talked to him, he ain't doing nothing." So, I said, "I'll call this guy back."

So, anyways, we got over there, and there was a couple of bands playing, but we were supposed to be the big act, you know, Little Willie John! People paid eight, ten bucks to come in, to get seats and stuff. We got up there and started playing; we played a couple of tunes. Then the announcer said, "ladies and gentlemen, Little Willie John!" And man, he came out there, and when he came out he was holding onto the curtains and taking a step about every other second. He was messed up on dope or something. So, a couple of guys run and grabbed him and they said, "Willie, this way!" 'Cause he was

going the wrong way; he was going back behind the amplifiers, tripping on cords and everything. He tripped over my amp and broke my cord. He said, "I'm sorry!"

People was booing him, and wanting their money back. Some people was throwing stuff, and it was really a bad, bad scene. 'Cause we had played, and really done a good job; and he came out, and he was too messed up. I think they ended up giving people their money back, or they scheduled another show. We got our little money; all we got was union scale, fifty bucks, I think it was, back at that time. I had always admired Little Willie John, but I found out a lot of things about him. He was a pretty bad dude, pretty wild. The last I heard of him, he was in the Walla Walla prison. I guess the last somebody to see him alive was James Brown. James Brown went out to see him. The inmates had beat him to a pulp. I was told that Willie had stabbed a guy up in Seattle, and that's how he got into prison. After he got imprisoned, the inmates beat him up.

One of the guys I really learned something from was a guy named Percy Mayfield; I played with him. He made a song that was real famous, that sold two million copies: 'Send Me Someone to Love.' That song put him on the map. He started traveling on the road, and he stopped in St. Louis. I was going out Franklin Boulevard and I turned over by the Moonlight Bar. I went by there to check and see if anybody was around, 'cause the musicians used to hang round there during the daytime drinking and talking . . . a couple of girls would be around. So I dropped in there, and Miss Helen, the lady that owned the place, rushed over to me. "Slim, Slim," she said, "I know you guys are playing, but I need a band for tomorrow night. I got Percy Mayfield coming in." I said, "no, I'm not playing. I'm sure I could round up some guys. I'm playing in a band now, but I don't know if all the guys will want to play tomorrow."

So I started calling them up. It was all the same guys; Lawrence on alto sax and John Douglas on tenor sax, Clyde on drums, a guy named Orange on piano, and me on guitar. Our bass player's name was Jimmy, 'cause I stopped at the Chinese joint and saw Jimmy. I said, "Jimmy are you playing tonight?" He said, "let's go, 'cause I need some money!" So we jumped in the car, and we ran over and picked up everybody, 'cause we had a rehearsal at twelve o'clock, a dress rehearsal with Percy Mayfield. We all had to meet over there at twelve. So we went over there and we played, and we got the songs down. So I brought Jimmy on back home. He told me, "pick me up at home," 'cause I had dropped him off at a little gambling joint where they played cards and stuff. He said, "pick me up tonight at my house, Slim." I had picked him up earlier that day around eleven or so; I seen his wife and everything.

When I went by that night to pick him up, like he said; I sat out there honking and blowing. Finally his wife come out, and said, "Jimmy's not here!" "He's not here?" She said, "I haven't seen Jimmy since y'all left here today. The kids need food, and I ain't got no money. I haven't seen Jimmy. I need five dollars." So I gave her five dollars, and she said, "I'll pay you back." I said, "that's okay. You got any idea where Jimmy's at?" "Slim, all I can tell you is that he's down at one of those little gambling joints on 16th Street out there. Or he's over at Rico's house."

I said, "Okay, let me check around." It was, like, eight-fifteen, and we had to be there at nine, and we had to go all the way across the bridge to St. Louis! So, I go by the little pool hall, there, and when I got there, there was a old man named 'Pops.' I said, "you seen Jimmy and them around here?" Pops said, "I seen them, they was here. They went over to Rico's, and I think from there they was going up on the dump, up to John's house." I said, "Oh, man, you're kidding me!" Pops said, "no, Jimmy said he had to play, but they took him anyway." So I ran the over to Rico's house, then I went up on the

dump, I could have got killed out there, looking all around for this place where they gambled at. I didn't know where it was, and it was dark. I was running around out there, and finally I seen some guy out there. I said, "you know where John's place is? Someplace where they gamble at?" He said, "I don't know nothing about it." I looked at my watch and it was eight-thirty. I thought, I'd better get out of here and get to St. Louis.

So I go all the way over to the gig with no Jimmy. I got to the club, and the saxophone player asked me, "where's Jimmy?" I said, "man, I couldn't find him." "You couldn't find him?!" I said, "I went to his house, but he ain't even been back there." "Son of a bitch!" "yeah, his wife said she needed some food, I gave her five bucks of mine." "Oh Lord, Percy's going to be pissed!" So I goes to the bar, I got nervous, and ordered me a shaky drink. I drinked my drink down and Percy walked over to me. He said, "hey boy, let's get started." I said, "Percy, we ain't got no bass player!" He said, "you had a bass player today. . . ." "I went to pick him up, and he wasn't home." Percy said, "you telling me he wasn't home when you went to pick him up? There is a bass up there on the stage. He left it hanging on the amp. You telling me he left his bass here, and he ain't showing up tonight? What kind of fellow is that? Man, one monkey don't stop no show for me! You guys get on up there; there's still four or five of you guys left. One monkey don't stop no show."

I said, "Percy, I have never played without a bass player before, I don't know. . . ." He said, "well, you was doing pretty good before, today when we was practicing. Just turn up a little bit, and come through a little stronger. Look over there at that amp, and you don't see no bass player!" I said, "I don't know. . . ." Percy said, "if you guys don't do this, I'm going on up there and do my show in twenty minutes. I got to do my show. Because I got to get paid. So you better go on and start." I walked up to

the bandstand, and I told Lawrence, the saxophone player. He asked me, "what did Percy say about the bass player?" "He didn't say nothing about the bass player."

Lawrence said, "well, I guess we better get started here." So we all got out there; we had two horns, drums and everything. We all had been playing together for a few years. I called the tune 'Heavy Juice,' and we started. Clyde was kicking them drums, and people started dancing and jumping around. They didn't even know we didn't have no bass player; they didn't care. They had been waiting for the music. I looked over there at Percy and he just smiled. . . . So we played a couple of more songs, and then the MC came up and announced, "now, ladies and gentlemen, the star of the night: Mister Percy Mayfield!" He came up and started doing 'A Man's Temptation.' Ladies started screaming and hollering, it was like you know, who cares about the bass player? Where's he at, Italy or Spain or somewhere? Sitting in some hotel with some girl, we didn't really care, 'cause we had things going for ourselves!

That man, Percy, really taught me a lot. He come up and told me, he said, "you said you couldn't play without a bass player. You did good, son. Keep it up. Don't let *nobody* stop you." And I've always kept that. Because I had been letting people stop me; they'd say I don't want to do this, and I don't want to do that, and I'd end up not doing nothing. I learned to depend on myself, first.

I Wasn't Realizing Who I Had There

Slim Meets Irene, Reflects on Their Relationship, Recalls the Breakdown of the 'Southern Kitchen,' and Tells Irene How Much She Meant to Him

So I guess that was right around 1960 or '61. Somewhere around in there, I guess, I don't know. So I left, I got to East St. Louis and things started snowing. We couldn't work . . . we couldn't get to the place we was playing at. When I first got to St.

Louis I started playing with the same band that used to hate us when we played at this other place, because we beat the Frank Ezel band. They needed a guitar player at the time, and when I come in, I needed a job. I didn't have no job. So we was making enough money, we was playing out at the place called the Relay club, up at Edwardsville.

During that time, I didn't have no money, I was very poorly. I remember I used to go out to Frank's. And I would go down there, and they had a jam on Monday nights. At that time the lady named Irene Jones had a son named 'Chops,' Leroy Jones or something. I went out to Frank's, I remember, something told me, "go out to Frank's." So I go out there, and they called me up and done a song or so.

As I was coming off the bandstand, somebody said, "can I buy you a beer?" I looked over, I said, "how are you doing?" She said, "I seen you before, out to your mama's place." She knew my mom and everything. I said, "you done see me play?" She said, "yeah, that was good!" I looked around, you know and I sat down there, and she bought me a drink. I finished my drink, and she said, "I guess I'll be getting out of here. Can I give you a lift someplace?" I said, "no, I just live up the street a little ways." She said, "I'm going up that ways." She gave me a ride, and on the way there, we was talking. She said, "you playing any more?" I was feeling good, at the time. "Not right now," I said, "we're going to be playing Friday, Saturday, and Sunday when the weather clears up, at the Relay club. The weather's been bad, we didn't play last week."

She said, "yeah, I know what you mean. My old car's been acting up on me. I'd like to come up there sometimes, but I'm going to have to get a tune-up." I said, "yeah, I know what you mean!" So she told me that she was going to come up sometime. As soon as she let me out, I went away with a good feeling. Who is that lady, I mean she really gave me a good feeling. I knew I was going to see her again. So, one night, in walked five or six ladies in a row. They found them a table back there, not too far from

the band stand. And they kept waving up there, I didn't know who it was. I kept looking, and Frank, the bass player, he knew them. He said, "hey, girl! What are you doing here?" She was waving at him.

I didn't know Irene was out there. Mae was there, and everybody, the whole family. Lawrence knew 'em, 'cause Mae stayed in the same apartment Lawrence did. Lawrence was a horn player. It seems like everybody knew them but me. We took a break; I was standing there. Mae said, "can I get you a drink or something?" "No, thanks." She said, "there's Irene, there." Irene said, "hi!" "I didn't recognize you." Oh man, she looked so good that night. And I didn't recognize her. Maybe I'd seen her several times, I remember that night when she took me home. I went over there, and she gave me a hug. I said, "Oh, you finally made it!" She said, "yeah, I told you I was coming. I just had to get the girls together; I wouldn't come up here by myself." I said, "I'm so glad you made it."

So we was playing, and everybody was partying. Mae come over and she said, "you going to ride back with us? We can squeeze you in." I said, "I don't know . . . it's up to Irene." She said, "I don't think Irene cares, 'cause she done drove all these miles up here to come and see you. She's the one that got us up here. It wasn't my idea, I would never come up here!" I said, "Oh, that's the way is. . . ." "yeah! Please go back with us." I said, "okay. Well, I got to get my stuff out." She gave me her keys and said, "you can put your stuff right in the back there, there's a big trunk."

She was driving a '57 Plymouth, blue and white, I'll never forget it. There was a lot of room in the trunk for my little amp and my guitar. They all went out, and I went in to get my money. When I came out, I was trying to jump in the back, or jump in the side. They said, "get in and drive!" "Oh, no, you all aren't going to put me up to driving." "Yeah, because you know the way back, we had to feel our way up here." Irene said,

"I'll drive, just show me the way back . . . it's kind of dark get here!" So she got up on the wheel; I sat right there beside her. When she would stop or something, I would have my hand on her leg. And she was doing the same thing. Somebody said, "look at these two!" Yeah, we was getting romantic right there!

I just had a good feeling about her. We finally made it down to East St. Louis, and everybody was saying, "come on! You want to go over here and play some cards?" I said, "I'm tired, I'm going home." Everybody said, "I'm going home, too. . . ." "what about you, Irene?" She said, "I've got to take him home, I'll play cards." So, Irene drove me to the house. When we got to the house, I took out my stuff. I said, "are you coming up?" She said, "I guess I'll come up for a little while." She seen my place, I just had a little old room up there.

We got up there and we started to hugging and kissing. Pretty soon, we was laying down. I guess she felt like, well, this is it. So we began to make love. I guess she hadn't made love in so long that I hurt myself, you know, making love to her. But I was falling in love with her.

When she left that morning, she had parked her car way on a back street, back there. When she left, she had gathered up all my clothes . . . she said she worked at a laundry, or cleaners or something. She said, "I'll bring these back clean. Don't these need to go to the cleaners?" I said, "they sure do," but there was so many of them. She said, "don't worry about it. I'll take them all now, but I'll bring them back a little bit at a time." I said, "why are you doing this?" She said, "I work at a cleaners; I can do these pretty cheap for you." I said, "Oh, that's so sweet of you." Man, everything was dirty. I mean everything; she had two or three bags of clothes.

She went out the back door, I seen her as I looked out my back window, 'cause I thought she went out the front. I seen her go to the alley. Later on that day she brought

me some food by; she had told me they she was going to bring the something to eat about three or four o'clock. She had left that morning about eleven. She said, "I'll come back with a plate of food." I said, "okay." So I was looking out the back; I know she had parked her car back there. She was hiding from this one guy. I think his name was Tony Joe or something like that. Anyway, he was part-time going with her. And if he seen her with anybody, he would break it up, right quick.

So I asked her that evening, "why did you go out the back?" She said, "I just don't want no trouble. I know a couple guys that stay around in this building here. They know me; I used to go with a friend of theirs, but we ain't hitting it off so good." She told me who he was, and everything . . . what he had been doing. He mostly just had her scared. She had got scared of him, but she had got a gun. See, he didn't know it. 'Cause that's when she told me, "I got this gun, here . . . next time he messes with me . . . I don't want to use it, but he ain't going to break us up."

She told me some stories about when she had met a couple of sergeants from the army base. They had a dinner planned, and everything. They went to have a drink, and when they came back, he had went there and throwed salt all in the food. I said, "what!" She told me another story, how he throwed a bolt through the window one time, broke her window out. You know, she was being abused at that time. So, when I come in, I was a young buck. I wasn't scared of nobody; I wasn't thinking about nothing.

I just knew, at the present time, that I needed some help, and she was providing the help for me, and giving me love, too. I had went over there, and I met her mother, and her mother gave me some work, after she found out that I painted.

After a while, I went up there on Fifteenth Street, where this guy Tony Joe was hanging out at. He seen me one day, up there. He knew I was messing with her at that time. There was some little hotel down there, I think that's where she'd cut him at. She

told me she cut him, and she ran. Ever since then, she had been scared. She just nicked him; that's why she went and got the gun, 'cause she was getting ready to kill him. 'Cause he kept messing with her, kept messing with her. She would park someplace, and he would come up and say something, or try to block the car. One time he did hit her, and she come to me with a bloody nose. She said, "no, no, I can handle it." I was ready to go get him then.

One day I was hanging around, in front of the corner there, where he was. I was driving the car right by, on the street. People were seeing me, "man, somebody else is driving Irene's car now. It's Eagle Park Slim." And Tony Joe was afraid of me, for some reason. I think he was more afraid of my daddy. 'Cause I seen the same man talking to my daddy, a couple years before that. 'Cause I remember he played drums out there, one time. My dad was showing him all them guns. He said, "see this here? I can get your butt with this gun, even if you're going over that hill over there! Hit you dead in your butt! Pick you off!" That scared him right there, 'cause he felt back for his butt when he heard that! "Now here's a Smith Wesson, here . . . I can get you around the corner with this!" When he found out that I was his son, he went "Whoa! I ain't messing with this dude. . . ."

She told me one day, "I don't think he's going to mess with you, 'cause he's afraid of you for some reason." My daddy was always talking about busting a cap in somebody's butt! He just talked, you know. Ha! That boy was scared of me for that!

So pretty soon I just moved on in to Irene's house. Well, first I'd moved out of there and moved up in Madison. After about two or three months, Irene come to see me. I got a little place up there, right down the street from my sister. My sister lived right up on the corner, in Newport. One time, she came to me, and she had a black eye. I said, "what's wrong?" She said, "Oh, he stopped me down there . . . but I don't think he'll

mess with me no more. 'Cause I could have killed him, right then and there, but I didn't. I told him I'd let you do it." That scared him right then and there! I remember one time else, I was at the Paramount club, she was coming out to get her car. He drove up, and he seen me. He stepped on the gas. She came out, she said, "wasn't that him? He flew, he seen you!" I said, "yeah, he did." I knowed we had him on the run, then. He never did bother us no more.

I moved in with Irene and her family for almost ten years. I stayed with her for at least ten years. We had a good combination together. We had a few ups and downs, here and there. She had a lot of different family problems. Her dad was drinking and stuff, her brother and different people like that. Then her son, she had another son . . . he came out of no place, he popped up, you know. So much was going on, I didn't have time to ask about her family. I knew she had a daughter, Shirley. Then all at once, Brownie came. Gene came. I started meeting all kinds of people, Leroy came.

So, it was time for me to get on down the road, to move on to someplace else. It seemed like that was a family problem right there, in some way. Everything seemed like it counted on her; they was looking for her to pay the bills and pull out everybody when they got broke and down, and can't pay this, and the rent ain't been paid. It was a hard struggle, and I didn't make it no better for her, 'cause I was out doing things that wasn't right. But I didn't know at the time then, I had a sweet, sweet woman that would do anything for me. Everybody was saying that she was too old for me, but I didn't think she was too old. I didn't look at no age at that time. She was jealous, and everyone is jealous to some extent. But she treated me real nice. I gave her a real fair break too.

We went through some hard years together, me and Irene. Irene, I love you for it . . . I just wish I could have been a lot more sweeter, and a lot more determined at that time. Young fool, not experienced with love, not experienced with too much anything.

'Cause I had been a good boy all my life. I had only had one love, and that was my son's mother. That was my first time, you know. From there, I had a few other experiences here and there, but not a hell of a lot. Because, Irene was such a good woman that I didn't cheat that much.

I didn't tell no lies, there could have been somebody every night, if I wanted it. But I would rather be with her. As long as I would stick by her, she was going to stick by me. I didn't know at that time, how to make money like I do now. We could have done a lot of things, if I'd had the mind, but I didn't have the mind. I was spending money, wasting money.

In 1968 I opened up a restaurant in East St. Louis called the 'Southern Kitchen' which sold Chinese food and American food. Me and Irene was kind of partnership in this, and that's when our love for each other and our gift for each other fell apart. She wanted to do it one way, and I wanted to do it another way. And I just couldn't do it her way. Because she was feeling sorry for people, but not feeling sorry for herself. And I didn't want to run it with her, after I seen the way she was running it.

She was trying to make a lot of people happy, and trying to make herself sad. 'Cause when it's time to pay the bills, and time to go buy food, you've ain't got no money. She was giving way meat, double the meat than what I was giving. And I was giving more meat than the Chinese was giving. You see what I'm saying? I just had to get out. I seen that we just parted roads there, in some ways. We kind of broke up, I guess. And I was out there are on the loose. I was still getting together with her, though we wasn't really together no more. But she still wanted to see, and be around a part of me, in some ways. I couldn't deny her of all those rights. I told her, "go ahead, I don't want to be bothered with you." She was willing to accept, "okay, you got another

girlfriend. Slim, still, I love you." She still loved me, even though I had somebody else. Still would do anything for me.

At that time I wasn't realizing who I had, there. And I love you, Irene, for it . . . a lot of foolish things I've done. A lot of things I should have done, like we always should have, and could have. Some things are still here, and you can do them, but I wish I could go back and do those days . . . I closed to up my restaurant in sixty-nine, 'cause I seen it wasn't going no place. The gangs was real tough at that time; we had three or four gangs around the neighborhood. And after six o'clock, you had to close up anyways 'cause they had just killed six or seven people down the street there, in a van. One block from our place . . . anywhere around that place, people didn't hang no more.

So I seen all that coming down. I remember I told the guy, "come get the fixtures, come get everything. I'm getting out of here." I was wearing the same clothes every day; I just wasn't getting no place. Then, I remember, I got me a job. I remember my sister coming down a couple of days before I closed up; she was telling me I could get a job over there are where they worked at. So I went over there, and I instantly got hired. I was staying in East St. Louis, right there on College Street. I had a room, a little room. A bathroom in the hall, no shower or nothing. Eleventh and College. I remember I was working in St. Louis, going back and forth. I was working at Rold Gold Foods. I started working there late in '69, through '73.

I Was Hooked

Pinball Machines and Racehorses Sweep Slim Away

I wasn't seeing nobody at that time. I think me and Irene was still together at that time. Yeah, 'cause me and Irene started a restaurant together in 1969. Yeah, I was so busy

trying to find a drummer that I didn't have time to check out no ladies. I had too many things going for me at that time, that I didn't want to mess up. So I didn't try to mess around or nothing. I got my little money and I went home.

At the time, I really had got into playing pinball machines. I was working at that time at a place called Rold Gold Foods. There was a place down there called Pete's Cafe, next to the thirty-five minute cleaners. That was about the time I met a guy named Mose, a policeman. He used to play down there. He's the one who taught me how to play the machines. I had been going in there, eating food.

One day I was in there, and some guy hit the machine for five dollars. He said, "I got five dollars!" I asked him, "hey, do those machines pay off?" "One guy just hit twenty-five a while ago!" I started playing. I remember one day I was in there and Mose came in. He said, "you got any money? You going to play the machine?" "I was thinking about it. . . ." "All you need is five nickels; you probably can get extra balls . . . if you make that 'one,' you get yourself ten bucks!" "Oh yeah?" "Well, I'll give you five nickels . . . I don't know how to play." "If the ball comes up, I can make that 'one." "Okay." So I gave him five nickels, and the extra ball came up. So he was fighting; he was kicking the machines, I thought he was going to tilt it. But he didn't, he pushed that thing over in the 'one.' He said, "that's ten bucks! I'll give you five!" I gave him five, and he started playing. I was playing there right 'side of him. Finally, I got it lined up. He said, "hold it! Hold it! 'One' is easy to make, you got a set-up there to make five bucks!" And we made it again! Five bucks, and I was hooked . . . I was *hooked.*

I knew I couldn't get away from there. I was down there all day. The next day, I took off from work and started playing it. I was hooked on the machine; I was putting all my money in it. My check and everything, I would go into work, and put it all into the machine. Man, I'm telling you . . . at that time, if it wasn't for Irene. . . . 'Cause she

kept me going. She came down there and caught me. She said, "so, this is what you do with all your money. Boy, you ought to be ashamed of your self. Look at all them wrappers down there!" I said, "just get out of here! You don't tell me what to do!" "Okay. . . ." I ended up going home and sitting around broke for a few days. And she'd say, "here's five dollars, go get yourself something . . . I'm tired of you looking sad, you put all your money in a pinball machine."

Irene, I really thank you for that . . . if I had known then what I know now . . . I really thank you for stepping in there, when I didn't have no place to turn. Yeah man, I used to mess up my money between there and the racetrack, too.

One time I went out to the racetrack, I had my forty dollars already, I carried out there, see. I had my check, too, and it was about eighty dollars. In the first three races, I didn't hit nothing. I seen this old guy that I worked with. I said, "hey man, let me have twenty bucks until I get my check cashed." He said, "you can get your check cashed right there behind those windows; they'll cash it for you." I thought, if I can get this check cashed, I can probably bet some more! I ain't going to lose no eighty dollars, no . . . I wasn't thinking of it. I got to playing, played ten dollars in the third and fourth race, nothing didn't come in. I played ten dollars here, fifteen dollars there, and I looked around and I was down to . . . Oh shit, I ain't got but twenty-five dollars left. I said, "Irene is going to be *mad at me*!" I won't have no money; I didn't put no gas in my car, nothing!

So I thought, I got to play this here, and try to win. I wish I would have got out of there with that twenty-five dollars! I left there with two dollars and fifty cents, just enough money to get some gas the next day! Yeah! I lost forty dollars, plus the eighty. When that fever hits you, you'll do a lot of things you wouldn't think you would do. I was messing up a lot of money. And Irene would always pull me out; she would share

what she had. If she had two dollars, she would give me a dollar. It was like that. But, there were sometimes when I hit some money and I gave her a hundred dollars. It wasn't like she was taking care of me, like a grown-up or so, though she was twenty-some years older than me at the time.

I think we had a pretty good life together. We could have had a better life, but there was always family around. She had a house, and so much family confusion, we couldn't breathe. There was always somebody up on top of us, taking up more room and eating up more food. But if I had knew what I know now, we could have made some money and overcame all of that.

I didn't know how to make no money; all I knew was how to waste it. I didn't know how to make none back then. I gambled it up right quick, horses or pinball machines, whatever. Whether I had five dollars or a dollar, I would run down and put it in a machine. I hit the machines big a couple of times, big, you know, twenty-five dollars or so, but it cost me fifty! After you go on so far, you just keep going. I wasn't the only one. Even the people that worked there, playing pinball machines, policy, horses and everything. Mose would go pawn his pistol, and get him ten dollars to go play the machines. Then he would wait until his check come to go get his pistol. He used to try to police down there, and he ain't got no pistol! I heard a man tell him one time, "Mose, I'm going to whup your ass, you ain't got no pistol!" He would pawn his pistol all the time, to play the machines. I think that's how he lost his job. After a while, he was hanging around down there like he was a policeman, but he wasn't no policeman. He was a cab driver, anything to get some money. As soon as they paid him, he'd head right back down to those machines.

One time, a boy told me a story about him. He said one time Mose fell down or something, and they had him in the hospital. Mose woke up, and he turned over and he

said, "give me a role of nickels!" Ha! He told the doctor, "give me a role of nickels." He was getting ready to play the machines! And it was a true story.

CHAPTER IV

DENVER, LOS ANGELES, LAS VEGAS: 1973-80

They Was Pouring Her Pink Kool-Aid

Slim Makes it to Denver, Gets Conned, and Starts the Mile-High Blues and Boogie Band

I left East St. Louis, I guess in March or April, first time I ever drove that far. From East St. Louis to Denver, Colorado. I was so tired from the bus; I had been riding for a day and a half. I remember, I wanted a drink so bad. I said, "man, I'm going to get me a drink." That bus had wore me out. So I walked in the first place right down there on Broadway.

There was a little cocktail joint right there. I remember walking in, and it was so dark, I couldn't hardly see. Then, I remember some nice looking lady coming up saying, "hey, sweetheart how're you doing? Come on. Let me show you over to the bar. . . ." She grabbed me by my arm, and took me over. Oh, that was a lift, there! Just to be close to a lady or anything. Right quick, I didn't think about it, I was getting ready to be ripped off. So, I had plenty of money there. The bartender said "buy the lady a drink?" I said, "yeah, yeah, buy the lady a drink." I didn't know they was pouring her pink Kool-Aid!

But . . . it was costing me four dollars each time he poured her a glass, you know. I got me a cocktail, and a glass of beer on the side. I wanted a cocktail, but he said "cocktail, glass of beer on the side?" I'm not knowing what I'm doing . . . I'm watching this girl. She said, "did you see me dance? I just danced a while ago, see there's another

girl coming out now." So right quick, the bartender said, "buy the lady a drink?" "Yeah, yeah." That's eight bucks, and I ain't even drinked my drink yet! Old Eagle Park Slim, being ripped off here!

She said, "are you just coming into town?" "No," I said, "I don't know exactly where I'm going to be staying, probably get a room down at the 'Y'." She said, "Oh, you're not going to be staying in a hotel tonight?" I said "no." She was just worrying about me staying at a hotel; I guess she was thinking about coming over. I wasn't thinking about that; I didn't know where I was going, I had just got into Denver. We talked for a little while, and I drank my drink. "Another one for you and the lady?" Then I turned around, she said, "it's time for me to go back and dance." So I told the guy, I said, "just forget it!" She walked away, and I walked out of there. I wasn't even there about ten, fifteen minutes. It was fifteen dollars! Oh, man! I couldn't believe it! And that was the first place. . . .

Then, I went on down to the YMCA, checked in down there. Yeah, come to think of it, I did come on the bus; I didn't have my car. I stayed at the YMCA for about a week or so. I walked around, here and there, trying to find me a job. I couldn't find nothing. I was walking down the street one day and I seen Pinetop Perkins, of the Muddy Waters blues band. "Hey, Junior, Junior!" He said, "hey, Slim, is that you?" I met those guys years ago in St. Louis, and many different places. When I was very young. He said, "we're playing down at Emmett's Field." I had been seeing the 'Muddy Waters at Emmett's Field,' and I hadn't been paying much attention. I got no business going to no shows or nothing, but I had to go to that show because old friends of mine were in town. They was going in Wedgies, and I was going in Bobbie's, right across the street from Bobbie's music.

So I goes in Bobbie's, and I walks in there. A gentleman named Nick walks up and says, "can I help you?" "Yeah, I'd like to see a guitar." "What do you want, it seems like you may be a Gibson, like a Lucille or something. . . ." I said, "I'll take a Strat." So, he said, "come on back here." He hooked up me a Strat, tuned it up and handed it to me. I started playing, and people started running back in to the store; everybody was running into the store. " Who is this guy?!" Nick said, "I don't know, just trying to sell him a guitar. . . ." So I played around there and everybody looked at me, they watched me, they looked at me like, "he is *somebody*! He's too good to be nobody." I would find somebody looking at me, I would kind of look at at them and they would turn their head. "That guy, where have I been seeing him before?"

Finally Jim Ebersold walked over, he said, "are you playing with the Muddy Waters blues band in town?" He said, "they're playing at Emmett's Field." He said, "you sound like it." "My name is Eagle Park Slim," I said. " I just got to town here. And I was just looking around at some guitars 'cause I'm getting ready to start a band." And he said, "did you get your players yet? There is a blues guitar player right there; he can play it all, Nick. He's from Chicago." He said, "we can have a little jam tonight, out to the house, if you want to go out . . . we went to the show last night." I said "okay." I told him I'm staying at the YMCA. He said, "I'll come by and pick you up, after work . We get out of here about six-thirty." I said, "be ready at six-thirty." He came by and picked me up; we went out to his house. We jammed, and jammed. Finally what's-his-name said, "all we need is a bass." Jim Ebersold said, "I wish I could play bass. . . ." I said, "I can show you how to play bass." He said, "Oh, man, could you?" We practiced all that night; that next day he went to the store, got him a bass.

I called the store the next day, "where's Jim?" "He ain't come in here today; you got him glued to that bass, he got that bass, he got up this morning with that bass. See, I

knew right then and there that he wasn't coming to work. I'm alone in the store." I said, "Sorry about that. . . ." " no man," he said, "I'm happy! He's really into it; I think we got a bass player!" He said, "I know a drummer. We jammed one night, and he can sing, too. His name is Don something." We got Don, and brought him out to the house. Started playing, the Eagle Park Slim and the Mile-High Blues and Boogie Band was born.

Eagle Park Slim and the Mile-High Blues and Boogie Band. What a long name, but that's what I wanted to call it. I wanted to let Denver know that they had a band, named after them. Mile-High Blues, 'cause I had to become a part of Denver. And I became a big part of Denver. People use to come out and see me play, and these songs that I had been writing and saving came into focus.

We was practicing one night and Jim said, "use some of your songs, those songs I've heard you play. Those songs are great, they're out of sight! Especially that one called 'inflation,' 'ghetto,' and that 'chitlin-circuit blues.' So I found myself playing these tunes, plus singing them. I started putting in words; I'd just throw in some words, 'cause I was kind of 'shame-faced of singing. After I'd thrown in some words and sang a few verses, everybody started smiling and stuff.

At the time, I was still looking for a singer. But in Denver I couldn't find no singers. Nick said, "I know a drummer, and this guy can drum, and he can sing, Slim." So Nick got hold to him, and brought him out that night to practice at the house. He had a beautiful voice. He could really get down. But they still wanted me to sing. I knew it was my time, but I was pushed into it. So I started bringing out more numbers; finally we got lucky and got a job.

Illustration 3. 'Free Agent,' Eagle Park Slim and the Mile-High Blues and Boogie Band.

It Was Just Like I Was Talking

Slim Figures Out How to Sing

So, we played a party up in the mountains first, I think. We had them hanging out of the rafters up there in the mountains. I was walking down this street one day, and I knew about this place down the street called the Green Hog. It was a "rock" place, 'cause I'd passed there several times, going down to the liquor store on the corner. I asked there and I heard those guitars wailing. This was a "rock" place . . . I was just messing around; I was going to get me a little drink. I walked in . . . somebody said, "another blues player!" He said, "I can tell!" I started talking, he said, "you've got it in the voice. . . ."

The owner of the club was there; his name was John Lee. And John Lee was back there messing around with the money and stuff. He said, "Oh, you play blues, huh?" "I'm here in town from St. Louis, putting a band together." He said, "I was thinking about putting a little blues thing here, if I could find somebody to do it. . . ." He said, "would you guys be willing to come in here Sundays? I can't pay you a hell of a lot of money, but I can throw in, right now, a hundred-fifty to a hundred-seventy-five, you know." I said, "that's cool." "If we can get it going to a big night," he said, "we can make it into, I'm going to make it 'Blues Sunday." So, we showed up there; I went and told the guys, I said, "man, I got a gig!"

When I told them where it was, I said the 'Green Hog.' " Oh, man . . . the Green Hog . . . man, we ain't got the equipment to play down there!" "Man, we playing *blues*!" "I guess you're right." He said, "I don't know if we can take that crowd or not. . . ." I said, " man, don't worry about it." He said, "Slim, we'd better practice a couple times." "No, we got enough songs right now." "You think so?" "Don't worry about it." You

got to take a chance sometime . . . you can't stay in the woodshed all your life. You got to see if you get any place, this was it, a good chance. Nick was glad, he said, "it gives me a chance to stretch out my chops." Let's see, who else did we have . . . was Gary playing with us ?

Yeah, that's how I met Gary Forrest, harp player. He was great. He played up at Shannon's, up in Boulder; that was a rock and roll place. But I want to go back to the Green Hog, 'cause that's where it all started. We had been playing; we went in on that Sunday, played that Sunday. I finished a song, John come up and said, "Slim, can you play Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday?" I said, "yeah, yeah I guess I can." Jim, the guitar player heard him say that. He said, "whoa, man!" Those guys had jobs and stuff, but they wanted to play.

We made out good that night. I had the crowd screaming and stuff. "I got his other band, they just canceled out on me, they ain't going to be able to make it. How would you like to have this band here three more nights?" I said, "yeah! yeah!" Everybody said, "yeah!" They was screaming and hollering and stuff. John said to the crowd, "the Mile-High Blues and Boogie Band, Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday night!" Man, he made me big that week!

So when we took a break, you know, Jim said, "we won't have time to practice. . . ." I said, "no, man we're practicing right here!" It got long about Wednesday, there. John came back out, he said, "Slim, I just had another band called in sick on me! You think you can finish out the rest of the week?" He said to the crowd, "I had a disappointment, we were supposed to have a band this weekend, and they canceled out . . . but, we're going to let Slim play the rest of the week. How about it?" Everybody started hollering and yelling, "yeah! Yeah!" We was rolling then, *rolling*!

So the next night, I started playing around, doing some breaks, getting the crowd rubbed up, you know. Right there, at that particular minute, I started writing more stuff, arranging more. I would go home through the daytime, practicing on my guitar. Stuff that I'd been holding back for years was coming to the surface. Finally, it was me; I had to call the shots, they was depending on me. I was Eagle Park Slim, like Muddy Waters is Muddy Waters. His backup band is just a band behind him.

So I had to sing more songs, and still, I didn't feel right singing. Because I was singing in the wrong keys. I was singing in 'D' and 'C,' I should have been singing in the keys that Muddy sings in . . . 'E,' 'A.' So we was up there one night, playing in a different bar called Shannon's. I remember we had a different harp player, Gary Forrest. I called, 'Stormy Monday.' Gary said, "ain't that 'G'?" I said, "no, it's 'C." The guitar player said, "Slim, I've heard you sing it in 'G. I think you can do it, Man." So we played a solo, twelve bars, and Gary blowed on the harmonica, and I came in. "They call it stormy Monday, but Tuesday's just as bad. . . ." I knew right then and there; I looked around at Nick and Gary, and everybody was happy. They went like, "Whoa! What a nice job!" They all congratulated me after the song. They said, "you got a beautiful voice, Slim, if you sing in the keys that Muddy sings in."

See, Muddy sings in 'G,' and 'F.' A lot of those tunes, like 'Every I day have the blues,' you should sing them in 'G.' A lot of that Jimmy Reed stuff you do in 'E.' So I called 'Every Day I Have the Blues,' and we played a few solos. I got to singing along with it, and I said, "yeah, yeah, yeah!" It felt so good; it just felt so good. I came in singing, "everyday I have the blues," it was just like I was talking. I had been singing way up high, or way too low before. I had been hollering in the mic and stuff. But this was just like I was talking. I learned, right then and there, and I started singing more and more.

And I started doing my songs 'cause I was writing more and more songs. I'd go to places and people would say, "can you play this, can you play that?" "Yeah, I can play that, but . . . I used to do it, but I don't do that song no more." I started cleaning up my songs, and stopped talking about the girls. I just started writing, 'cause I had talked with this old man. He had told me, "your music is great, just change the lyrics." He said, "there is a lot of bands that are going to be hurt in the future, singing them dirty songs and stuff." I didn't know what the man was talking about, till I faced it myself. I've had a great music experience. I played with a bunch of people and I learned something from everybody.

But She Ain't Made it Out Here Yet

Happy Times with Mary

I had a lady friend back in East St. Louis that was supposed to be coming out here; she was supposed to come, but something happened in her family and she couldn't make it. Every time she would delay, it would make me feel real lonely and uncomfortable . . . bad, you know. It seemed like my music life was going good, and my love life was going to hell. It got to the place where I started wondering if she was even coming at all; I started thinking all kinds of things. She was supposed to be out in four months, it stretched into a year, almost. Well, she came out for the fourth of July, for a couple of days, and went back. And then, she was supposed to've been coming back out, and that stretched into almost a year. She kept putting off, and putting off.

During this same time when we was playing down at the Green Hog, I came home one evening I was tired and lonely, you know. There was another lady staying upstairs there . . . I'm trying to think of her name . . . it's been so long . . . she's going to kill me, I

can't do think of her name . . . Mary! Anyways, Mary was on the porch and she was drinking out of one of them tall Schlitz, one of them tall bottles that come out. I guess she had drunk one already; I came in with my guitar. She said, "can you play that thing?" "Yeah, I been playing for twenty years or so. . . ." "Play me a song, some blues; I ain't heard no good blues," she said. "I'll put this bag away, then I'll be right down."

I had bought this acoustic guitar, and I never played it much. I went in, got it, and I came back down. She said, "do you drink beer?" She said, "hold on, I'm going to get you a beer, and I'm going to get myself another one." She got us a couple of tall boys and brought 'em down. I said, "thanks." She said, "I'll do anything for a song."

So, I started singing and playing a tune with the guitar. I said, "so long, oh I hate to see you go. . . ." She said, "that's right, that's the blues. . . ." and I played the Hootchie Kootchie Man, and a couple more songs. I looked at her; she looked at me. She said, "I'm going to get another beer for you." I said, "go and get yourself one, I still got some of this one here." She said, "drink it up! It ain't no party if we ain't drinking!" I said, "bring another one, then." She went up and got another couple of them tall boys. So we got to talking, and going on, and we set there on the porch. She'd tell me about her life, and her breakup with her husband. And I was telling her about how I came out here. I said, "I got an old lady back in St. Louis, and she ain't made it out here yet." She said, "well, you got someone. . . ." I said, "I wonder if she's even coming or not. I'm looking around, right now."

She said, "you got a band?" "Yeah, I got a band. I'm playing tonight down here at the Green Hog. I just come home to get me a little couple hours of sleep." She said, "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to keep you up." I said, "no, I won't go to bed now; I'll just take me a shower and get ready to go to work." She said, "I got to go to work myself." She said, "yeah, I work at the hospital, St. Joseph's, not too far from here, about four or

five blocks." She said, "I work the night shift, get off in the morning." I said, "why don't you come by sometime, dig the band." She said, "I'd sure like to do that. What time do y'all start?" "Round about nine o'clock." She said, "I got to be at work at eleven; I'll come about nine-thirty, and hear a few songs." "OK, yeah."

So, we got to playing that night; there was a lot of people out there, so dark you couldn't see. But you could see white in the dark, you know. The bass player said, "there is some woman out there in a white dress, waving at you." And she waved. So, we took a break, and I went out. She said, "Oh, you guys sound good! I hate to go to work! I want to stay here and dance; no, I got to go to work. I got to leave at least by ten-thirty." So, I rushed up there on the stand and sang a couple of more tunes. I saw her walking out when she left, waving at me. I said, "all right!"

So, the next night we played again, she came back; she didn't stay long that night, 'cause she came in about ten o'clock. And she waved. I thought about her all that night; I couldn't go to sleep. I looked around, it was five-thirty . . . Lord have mercy, I ain't went to sleep yet! 'Cause we left the club about two, you know. I said, "I'm going to pick her up in the morning; I know where she worked at. So I goes around there, and I waits. Seven o'clock, she comes walking out with a couple of other girls. And the other girl's rides drived up, and picked them up. "See you, see you!" I said, "Mary!" One of the girls said, "I think there is somebody waiting for you; you might have a ride. . . ." She said, "yeah, I got me a ride! Thank you!"

I was glad, she was glad. It just seemed like a happy, happy thing. I could feel myself getting closer and closer to her. I brought her home, and she had a niece staying with her. She said, "get up! Fix some breakfast, I got a guest!" So, she got up, washed up, and started fixing breakfast. So, I went on down to my room, 'cause I lived right down the hall, and she lived at the end. So, I went back up there, and while her niece was

cooking she said, "y'all sounded good last night. I started to call in sick, I wanted to." I told her, "Something told me to pick you up. I couldn't go to sleep, and I was thinking about you, I said "you get off early in the morning; I'm going to go pick you up."

I said, "I'm sorry, I didn't know whether you have an old man or not." She said, "I ain't got nobody." She said, "I've been thinking about you, too." "I wish I could do what you do, I've always wanted to play music. Because you really know what you're doing. I see how you handle your band up there; you stop and you start those songs. I always wanted to be around somebody like that." I said, "I sure like to be around you, you're very warm, too. Since I met you, I've been feeling warm about you. Seems like I'm falling in love with you." She said, "Oh, don't say that. . . ." "why?" "'Cause I'm falling in love with you!" And I grabbed her, and kissed her, and that's when it all started, right there. So, I went and played that night, and she didn't come that night. But I was there that morning, to pick her up. She came out, with the girls, they was all talking; she looked up and said, "there he is!" She come running to the car like a little kid of ten, coming to a piece of candy or something. She got in the car and gave me a hug . . . Oh, Lord have mercy!

'Cause I didn't have no place to go

Slim Goes to L.A. to be on the 'Gong' Show, Misses the Boat, and Winds up Staying With Various Relatives

I took a trip out to L.A., at the time I was out there, it was 1977. It was a hard year. I was going out there to L.A. to get on this 'Gong' show, which several people had told me about it. They was taking a trip to London. I didn't know that I was going out there and things were going to turn rotten for me.

I got out there a couple of days late, on account of I had car trouble, and had to stop at motels. There wasn't too many places along the highway where a man could stop and actually get a room. Out there in Needles California, and places like that. Places where black people just pass on by, you know. They don't even stop and try to get a motel. I got stranded in there, and I *had* to get a motel. Which, everything was cool, you know. Some parts of Arizona, like Flagstaff, where I got snowed in up in the mountains, that put me back a day late. When I got out there, the 'Gong' show had gone. So I didn't have no place to stay, no place to go.

I ended up out to my son's house; when I was out there, things was . . . well, several different things going on out there that I didn't want to become involved in. His Mama and him, all of them was having *such* of a fight. Her old man at the time, a nice guy, was drinking a lot, you know. The reason Herbert was drinking, 'cause he told me one day, we was in San Bernardino at the liquor store. I met him first when I got to San Bernardino California; he was at the liquor store to get himself a drink. When I got around to the house, I met him again. I said, "yeah, I seen him round to the liquor store, drinking." 'Cause he was trying to get his daughter back from another marriage. And he was drinking, and didn't know how to do it . . . and he was about to crack up in some ways, this guy.

So, Herbert was drinking a hell of a lot. My son's mother had called back to St. Louis somewhere and told my sister that this man was going crazy 'cause Autry come out here. You know, and it wasn't that; he was worried about his daughter, 'cause he had told me. The man took me all up in Hollywood and showed me every little joint, every little thing. You know, she just at the time, was trying to make like I was after her or something, and he was jealous. I wasn't after her; I mean, it was over with. I came out to see my son, and the man was drinking; he told me why he was drinking. He said, "man,

I'm going to get my daughter back-- I got a chance to get her back." I said "are you sure?" I'm going to go to court for her, fight for her." He wasn't worried about what Julia was doing, or what I was doing. In some ways he's saying, "I want my daughter, if you want *her*, you can have her." That's what he was saying, some kind of way.

She called back there and told my sister all kinds of stuff. "He is drinking every day since he come out here," that was a lie! The man was worried about his daughter . . . he took me everywhere. So my sister wanted me to get out of there. She didn't want me to get hurt or nothing.

So the man took me over to the other place where I was going to stay, 'cause she had set something up over there. They told me, "you can come on over." After I'd gone over there, I found out that they were fighting! Oh man, *they* was fighting! That left me right there between all that; here I got to listen to *them* fight. When it got to the place that you had to choose sides, I chose his side. He'd take me around, try to get me a little work to do. I didn't even know the man. He was a real nice man. That was her sister's husband. She didn't try to give me nothing to do, but a drink, period. She didn't try to get me no work. He gave me work; he gave me some painting. I went down there and painted some stuff and he gave me a little money.

I knew that I had to find a job, and my car started running on four cylinders . . . had eight cylinders, but wasn't but four that were running. It was right at the time they had the All-Star game. Denver had Dan Issel and Kareem had been there for the last five years—and Dan Issel was picked to start right at that time . . . when the white boy had come in there and kicked out Kareem. Driving around L.A. with them Denver plates, man. Every place I go they say, "Denver? Isn't that that place where they kicked Kareem out for that white boy?" "Yeah, yeah. . . ." They started torturing me, every place I'd go. I said, "I'm out of here!" And then I went to a place to try and get a job,

and I had put 'Denver' on there, you know? You know, like, "why did you come out here?"

A couple places said, "call me back, call me back. This guy showed up, so I don't need nobody right now." Man, I was going down, put out about ten applications. All kinds of places. "We don't need nobody right now. Check back next week." One place I went to, they put me through changes; I sat out there about three hours waiting. And the guy came out and told me, "I'm sorry, we don't need nobody. We've hired all the hire-ons that we're going to hire right now." I said, "*man*! I can't find no job!"

Each time I would go back to my sister's house it was more trouble. She was drinking a lot, and he was sneaking around. There was more hell out there than there was any place. But I had to stick with it, 'cause I didn't have no place to go. Finally, one day I came home; she said, "how was you intending on a living when you come out here?" I said, "I was intending to go on that show, but I got here two or three days late. I was intending to go to London, so I'm stuck here." I said, "I'm trying to get back home." "Well, I'm just saying, it's hard out here. People ain't got jobs. I don't see why you come out here." I said, "well, if you want me to get out, I'll get out now." "no, I don't want you to get out. I want you to put your guitar and stuff out in the garage." I said, "No, if you put my guitar out in the garage, you put *me* out in the garage." I said, "I go wherever my guitar goes!" "Well, we got to make some room in there." I said, "I'm sorry, if you want me to go, I'll go."

Finally, the Lord let me got ahold of a brother-in-law of mine, and I got ahold of him. "Yeah, we got a room over here." He came over and got me, took me over there. I got over there. *They* was fighting! Him and his old lady! I said, "Oh Lord, I'm going from one thing to another!" See . . . it's *hard* to be between something like that, you know, when you're trying to make yourself a home. You know, they're running around.

He brought me over there and left me, and I didn't even quite introduce myself to the woman. He went out and stayed a couple of nights!

Finally, I was laying in there sleeping one-day, and she'd had a couple of beers. She said to me, "where's he at? Did he tell you where he gone?" I said, "I guess he's gone wherever he goes every Friday and Saturday." She said, "he come here, and left you here, and nobody's seen him since!" She said, "go over to the store and get some beer!" She gave me some money, and I got some beer. After one beer, she had a couple . . . after I'd had one beer she'd drunk three! She said, "you don't drink beer much?" I said, "I'm not no beer drinker; I drink a little bourbon every once in awhile." She said, "I don't fool with that stuff!" I'm *glad* she didn't. She started drinking them beers; she started talking about me. "Who is *he*, he came out here, he's married to your sister?" I said, "m'am, if you want me to leave I'll leave. . . ."

So, I helped her around there, vacuumed the floor and stuff, pushed chairs around and mopped and stuff. Pretty soon I seen that she was real tore up. So I go back over to this store, and one of the clerks over at the store, he said, "old Ruby must be getting pretty tough." "Yeah, she is!" He said "man, when she doesn't have a couple of six packs, she's hard to handle! She must be talking up a storm." I said, "yeah, she's talking about everything; she's bringing everything out!" Oh, boy. Finally she'd drunk so many beers she just fell asleep, I guess. 'Cause I had left and took a walk down towards the Venice Beach, which wasn't too far away from there. When I come back she'd fell asleep in the chair with the vacuum cleaner in her hand. And I came in, I left her asleep; I just went on into my room.

Finally he came in, Sunday evening. So when he came in the door, she started, "where you been?! Autry here, blah blah blah. . . ." He said, "don't bother me, woman! I'm tired, don't you bother me." And the next day, Monday morning, they was up eating

breakfast talking and smiling, she was laughing like ain't nothing happened. I said, "oh *shit*!"

And I seen what's going on. And so, I walked out. He said, "what's going on?" I said, "well, my car, man it's down. I don't know, it's missing, and going down." He said, "I'll see what I can do in a minute, I'll help you." He said, "bring your car up here." So we looked at the plugs and stuff, and tried to clean them. And I didn't have no money, and I don't think he had no money or nothing. 'Cause he said, "when I get my check I'll take you and buy you some new plugs." He never did buy me no new plugs or nothing. But, he cleaned those so they'll work, and I was still poofing around town trying to get jobs with those Denver plates on there. Man! It got so that every place I stop they said "Denver, Colorado! That's that place where they knocked Kareem out of there! Out of the NBA All-Star game!" I started leaving that old ragged car home, 'cause it wasn't running but three miles an hour! It wasn't fast enough to get out of their way if they did get after me! It was something else.

See That String of Lights?

A Wild Side-Trip to Las Vegas

I remember, one Friday night, he jumped up, he said, "you want to go to Vegas?" "Yeah," I said, "I've been wanting to go to Vegas." When you're way back from St. Louis, Vegas is like someplace way off somewhere that you may get to every once in a while. "Going to Vegas!" I said, "okay!"

Herbert told her he was taking me over here to introduce me to some musicians, but I got over there—I didn't meet nobody but his girlfriend! And her brother, and some friends and stuff. They were drinking some real black-label Scotch, high-priced stuff. So

we sat there, and they drank a couple half-pints. They said, "we're going to Vegas! We'll be at Vegas at one in the morning." We left there, I guess about ten-thirty or something like that. We hit the highway, man, we had a B.B. King tape, man, and B.B. was singing the blues, and Herbert was driving like eighty-five or ninety miles an hour. I was scared.

Everybody was drinking and *drinking*. We stopped someplace in got some hot dogs, and we ate. Struck back out, on the highway again. He said, "I'm going to have to push it up some!" He pushed it up ninety-five and a hundred miles an hour into Vegas. Man, I'm sure about to piss in the car! Oh man, I quit drinking. I was scared to death. We came over a hill, he said, "there it is, Autry!" I looked over; he said, "see that string of lights? That's Vegas. We only got fifty-five more miles to go. . . ." He revved down on it again! Took a drink on his black-label Johnnie Walker Scotch. We drove and drove and drove, and B.B. King got louder and louder. It was a party all the way to Vegas.

Round about one-fifteen a.m. we found a parking place, man, and we went in the first gambling joint we could find. Started playing poker or something. His girlfriend, or his friend—whoever she was—started playing the slot machines, and her brother was playing slot machines. I didn't have nothing but about three or four bucks.

I went and played me a slot machine; I didn't win nothing. So I went over there by Herbert. Herbert said, "hold on, boy, I'll give you some money." So, they were playing cards and stuff. He said, "here, here's five dollars." This girl's brother came up; he said, "give me five dollars, I'll pay you back when I get my check." Herbert said, "I just gave you five dollars, just five minutes ago." He said "I know it, it's gone!" Herbert was the only somebody had money, nobody had no money. 'Cause he had a whole check; he hadn't paid no bills or nothing, he just took the whole check, going to Vegas, trying to win some money. I'm sure he was trying to win, but, but you don't be gambling

with your last, trying to win nothing. So, he gave me five dollars. I played a little slot machine. Herbert's still gambling; he had a little money left.

Finally, he's getting down to nothing. He said, "I guess we'd better get out of here." Actually, he said "anybody got no money?" I had about fifty cents in my pocket. He said, "give me that fifty cents." Man, we barely had enough money to get back to L.A. ! That was the hurting part about it, see; he went out there and lost all that money, and he didn't even fill his tank up or nothing, to get back! I mean, about ten, twelve bucks we got together. We made it back to the ladies house, waiting till she'd go out and cashed some food stamps. Then we had to get some money to get back home. I had to wait over there until we could get some money. Got back from Vegas at one in the daytime, and it was three in the morning before I could go home. Then, we finally got enough gas to get back where we lived.

When we got there, his woman was standing on the porch with her hands on her hips, madder than a coon's hen. She was ready to jump him, and jumped me too, 'cause I was with him! When he pulled in the driveway, she eyed him all the way in. I said, "hey, man she looks *real mad*!" He said, "don't worry about nothing, don't say nothing, just go into your room." I came up the steps first. He said, "talk to me later." She said, "I'll talk to you *right now*!" "You want to talk to me, you talk to me later! It ain't no business of yours; I'll talk to you later!" The next day, they was up in the kitchen eating bacon and eggs, *again*! They been doing this all the time! By having me over there, I guess he's saying, "I got somebody to stay with her when I'm gone. . . ."

Long about Thursday, he told her that the meat man was bringing a bunch of meat by there, to put it in the freezer. He didn't tell her that she had to pay for this meat; she thought he had paid for it, 'cause, you know, he ain't brought no money home, she thought that's what he'd done. That money he went out in Vegas and lost! And that man

come bringing the meat in, he brought about three or four sacks. She said, "is that all?" He said, "no, I got a lot more out there." He said, "but, I want to get my money before I bring anymore. . . ." She said, "didn't he pay you!?" He said, "no, he told me that you was going to take care of the bill." He said, "Lady, I got to have my money." "He should have paid you!" "He told me that you was going to pay me; did he give you the money?" "That lying dog!" And the guy said, "do you want the meat, or not?" "Well . . . I guess so . . . how much is it?" He said, "a hundred and six dollars." "Oh Lord, I ain't got no hundred and six dollars!" He said, "ma'am, do you want me to take it back?" "Don't take it back! If you take get back, he'll get mad. Let me go over here and look around." She knew she had the money. She went right in there and got the money. Boy, she was hot!

And when he came home that evening, she jumped all over him. He said, "no, I ain't got time, I got to get out of here, I got a meeting across town." "I got to talk to you about it!" "You talk to me when I get back!" He was gone for three days, man, *shit*! And I never did meet no musicians or nothing.

That's What it Comes Down to

Slim Gives Up on California, and Heads Back to Denver

It just got to the place where I just had to get out of there, because I was in between something. She started looking at me like, "what are you doing here . . . I don't know you, I ain't no kin to you." She was getting pissed; I can't blame the lady. I don't know her! And I'm standing there, and I know as long as he's doing that stuff, she was going to jump me. I said, "I need to get out of here." So, I called my sister in St. Louis. I said, "baby, if you got any money, send it to me . . . I will pay you back. I got to get my

car fixed and get out of here." And I called several people back there, trying to get help. My sister sent me enough money. I got me a tune-up, and I drove that old raggedy car back into Denver. It made it all the way into Denver, just drove straight on through. Boy, I was scared . . . I drove back in here, it was snowing coming across the mountains. But, come on, I got through it. I got back into Denver.

I hit Denver, and I went straight to my partner's house, John Clarkston's, there, and I went over there for a while, with him. Then I went to this lady's house, that I was staying with before I left. That was a hell of a trip. I seen everything out there! And that day that I was leaving, my food stamps come. I had about six or seven dollars; I gave it to her. She said, "oh no, you take them, you need them." I said, "no, I got to go. You been pushing me out of here everyday . . . now, I'm ready to go." She said, "are you coming back sometimes?" I said, "I'll probably be back sometime."

I'll never go back there no more. Never going there, never going to my sister's house. I seen the way people treated me, you know. Them that's got shall get, and them that's not shall lose. God bless the child who's got his own; boy, that's so true. That's what it come down to, don't it?

I found me a job. I started working at the Marriott hotel. It was way out, on Hampton. But it was a sweet job, and on the second day I became the lead man. 'Cause the lead man, he got in trouble; he was doing drugs and stuff around the place. And the company fired him. Right quick, I became in charge, 'cause I was the next second man. Another guy there was a Mexican, but they couldn't put the Mexican in charge, 'cause he didn't speak no English. So he put me in charge. A black guy named Harry, he was the manager there. I started working back there; I started getting myself together.

I always wanted to go back to L.A., not to play no music, but they have a lot of shows and stuff like that. I always wanted to get back out there. I've been up and down

here, and up and down there. I finally ended up getting out of Denver, after spending several years there. 'Cause I had a long, long stay there. From 1973 to 79. I got there in 1973.

CHAPTER V

EUGENE, OREGON: 1980-1998

It's a Lot That People Go Through

The Struggle Still Goes On

May 14th is when I got to town, 1980. Four days before the Mount St. Helen's volcano was about to blow. When I hit town I felt something was in the air, like "hey man, you better watch out, 'cause you're really not safe here." And I got a good experience of that, 'cause when I got to Eugene, a friend of mind, Jon Norberg came to pick me up. When I got there, the bus was fifteen minutes late, but he was still there. I seen him; he said, "hey, Slim, Slim! You made it, you made it!" I said, "yeah, I made it, but I went through a lot of rough country there."

And I did, 'cause, even when we stopped in Bend up there, I felt the racial tension. 'Cause when I was there, one of the guys on the bus, he said, "I'm going to get me a drink." We had about half an hour before the bus could get loaded. So he walked down to this bar, and when me and him walked in, you could hear a pin drop. I mean, everybody got quiet; they was looking and watching at us. This guy walked up to the bar and said, "give me a shot of V.O.!" I said, "I'll take the same thing too." So we was drinking our shots of whiskey, and he went banging out the door. He left me; he downed his whiskey real fast. I said, "hey man, wait on me!" I looked around and I thought, I better get out of here. We got to the bus station, and he said, "man, I feel much better now that I got a shot . . . I don't feel right in this part of the country." I said, "yeah, it's

kind of an uptight feeling, ain't it." I had been through a lot of the prejudiced states, back in my hometown. I knew all about it. I was going to Portland; I heard that they was a blues town, that they was looking for blues . . . and I needed a new start. I was getting ready to leave Denver, Colorado . . . that's all I knew.

When I got to Eugene and Jon picked me up, I said, "hey man, I'm hungry. Is there any place we can get something to eat?" I *was* hungry, 'cause we didn't stop at no place to get something to eat. We could have went in, but there could have been trouble. So I thought, I'm going to wait until I get to Eugene to get me something to eat. Jon said, "man, there ain't too many places open this late. But there's a place over here called Hoot's. I'll go over there; I'll go in and get it for you. It's kind of a redneck place." I said, "Oh yeah? I don't care, let's go." So we went on over there. I got out, you know, and I followed him in, 'cause he didn't ask me what I wanted. He walked in, and I walked in behind him. I walked in the door, and you could hear a pin drop *again*. Everybody got quiet. I mean, *this was in 1980*. 1980, just think of it! Ha! In Eugene, Oregon! So I went over to the counter, and the lady came over to me, and she said, "yeah, can I help you?" "Yeah, I want to get a couple of hamburgers to go, and some french fries." She said, "I'm kind of busy right now, but I'll try to get you out as soon as I can."

After she looked around, and she seen the way things was looking, getting all uptight because I was in there, she hurried me up. She gave me somebody else's burgers. I told her, "I wanted some french fries, too." She said, "I have some french fries over here, I'll just give them to you, 'cause they've been cooked a while. It'll take a while to cook some more french fries." I said, "okay, ma'am." So I paid her off, and we bagged out of the joint, like they was after us. When we got out to the car, Jon said, "I didn't know that place was like that. No wonder I never go in there. I'll never go in there again." I said, "me either!" Those french fries were so greasy and stuff, I just throwed

them away. I couldn't even eat them. That's my first experience of racism, when I first got to town.

I came into town, and I got a break. I got a chance to play guitar with the Party King band; their guitar player was out of town, so they needed a guitar player. I fit right into their mold, so Bill Rhodes hired me. He was a good friend of Jon Norberg. So I played guitar, and sung a couple of songs. The more songs I sung, the more songs they wanted me to sing. But it was Bill's show, and I was letting him do it. I was just trying to back him up. I guess all the boys got on him that night. "Hey man, why are you letting this guy come in here?" Something like that must have happened, because I never did get a chance to play with Bill again. When I would go to sit in, I would have to sit around all night and wait till everybody else could do their thing. Then they may call me up. I said, "the hell with this!" I'm not going to sit around here all night. So I stopped going around the Party Kings. I seen what was happening. And the Bluetones, too. 'Cause they would let me come in and sing one song or so. Then, they would say, "we got requests." They had no damn requests before I come into the place, and after I come in and sung one, all of a sudden they got all kinds of requests! That was wrong. They were letting me know, "hey, you're taking over our show. . . ." If I come in and sing one song, mister, let me tell you something . . . if I sing one song and I take over your show, you didn't have no show! If I'd have sung two songs, I'd have been taking over the band! They would give me a song here, and a song there.

And Curtis Salgado, when he was in the Robert Cray band, he tried to keep me away from Robert. He didn't want Robert Cray to know me. And I never did get to know Robert, on account of that. He pushed everything, you know. I remember one night we walked into the place down there; they was just getting off work. The dude I was with was named Greg Black. He said, "there's Robert right now; let's go over and

talk to the brother." I said, "okay man, yeah, okay." So we went over there, and when Robert turned around, he was so friendly, and smiled. He said, "hey brothers, how you doing?" He was glad to see some brothers. Curtis rushed up right quick, "hey Robert, we got to go." Robert said, "okay, I'm just talking to some brothers, now." "Right now, Robert, we got to go! The guy is getting ready to pull off; come on! Come on!" Curtis started pulling on his arm. I thought, ain't *this* some shit! Greg said, "you see that? He didn't want us to meet Cray!"

Because when I first come to town, they was having a blues jam at the Black Forest. I got up and sung a song; I sung 'Stand by Me.' It set the whole crowd on fire, especially Curtis's girlfriend. She was about to fall out over me. He had to tell her, "you better sit down!" You know, like, "don't be hollering over him, you be hollering over *me*." I didn't know what was going on. From that night on, he hasn't let me done nothing! I went out to his house one day, because Jon Norberg told me that they was going to the studio and they needed some songs. So I went out, Curtis didn't know that Jon was bringing me out there. I got out there and walked in, and I said, "hey, what's up, Curtis?" I could tell right away, I wasn't welcome. Jon told Curtis, "I brought Slim out 'cause I know you guys was looking for songs." Curtis said, "no, we got enough songs." I went to the bathroom or something, and I heard them talking. Curtis said, "I don't know where you got the idea that we needed more songs." I know Jon Norberg was a very honest man, he didn't know what was going on. He didn't know that Curtis didn't want me around.

I don't know what it is, jealousy, or what. But it's stupid, it's really stupid. The same thing happened with Lloyd Jones, you know. He seen me one day, playing across the street there, when he was playing at Taylor's. In the daytime, I was playing a set out there. He came over and looked in my guitar case, and I had about fifty or sixty bucks in

there. I asked him, "are you playing tonight?" He said, "yeah, we're going to be over here Friday and Saturday night at Taylor's." I said, "hey, I may drop by." "Okay, man, that's cool. . . ." So I did go by there that night. You know, the guy gave me a buck; I'll go by and see what his band sounds like. I didn't go by there to sing. I didn't go by there to sit in. I just went by there to hear his band. You see what I'm saying?

As soon as I walked in, I heard the bass player kind of nudging him. "There's Eagle Park Slim, there's Eagle Park Slim." Lloyd was turning his back against the bass player like, "I see him, I see him. Be cool, be cool." The bass player wanted to get me up there. He's saying, "hey, let's get this guy up here. You just sung all night long, Lloyd; let's get this guy up here." See, but that wasn't on Lloyd's mind. Lloyd wouldn't *think* about getting me up there. I seen what was going on, so I was ready to go anyways. When they come off the bandstand, Lloyd came up to me and said, "I'd love to be able to slip you in tonight, but we got a lot of requests." I said, "no, man, I didn't come by to sit in, I just came by to check out your band. I'm leaving in a couple of minutes." "Oh yeah, you leaving?" He was glad I said I was leaving. I seen what was happening. He wasn't going to let me sing. 'Cause if he would have let me sing, his voice would have died that night. You see? I don't know why he's like that. I don't know why Curtis is like that.

Man, I learned something a long time ago. If you are doing something good, I don't care who walks in the door---B.B. King, Albert King, Elvis Presley, anybody, I don't care who he is. If you was pleasing the crowd before he came in, you go back to doing the same thing you was doing. Don't worry about Eagle Park Slim coming in. Yeah! It's good to have somebody coming in that the crowd likes, 'cause it makes it better for *your* thing. Most of the bands around town are glad to see me coming in, 'cause it raises the level of what they're already doing. They know I ain't going to hurt them. Now, if you let somebody come in the house who can't do nothing, that's different. If

they're bringing you down, and the crowd down, that's different. But when you're going to bring a crowd-booster like Eagle Park Slim, I mean, why not? Get him up there, fast as you can! I never wait around all night when a band don't get me right on up there, 'cause people want me to get right on up there. They should get me up there. I know I would. I may have five guys in line, but if B. B. King walks in the house, I'm getting B.B. up there, 'cause he ain't going to be around long. I'm grabbing him while he come in! He ain't going to wait until John Doe, and Jim Dandy gets through playing! He ain't going to hang around here, he's gone!

I had to fight my away into the blues scene here; they wouldn't even book me at Taylor's. Then I finally begged on my knees to get a job, and we was rehearsing for two or three weeks, and we was going to kick some butt. Right two days before the date, the guy called me and said, "hey Slim, something happened, we got to re-book you. We got double-booked . . . I booked you, but my partner didn't tell me that he had booked the Party Kings. I got to let the Party Kings play, 'cause they're the crowd's favorite. . . ." He told me, "I can book you for a Tuesday or a Wednesday night." I said, "keep 'em! You just keep that, I don't want that. If you can't book me on a night where I can help you, and I can help myself too, don't book me at all. I don't want no Tuesday night; I need a Friday or a Saturday night, 'cause that's when people go out. They ain't going to come out to hear Eagle Park Slim on no Monday or Tuesday night!" After I seen what was happening, I quit even trying to apply for a job.

I went out to the Black Forest at that time, started playing out of there. I was working out of there, at least one night a week. The guy liked me out there. During that time, it was a hard time; they had the 'gut' then. The streets were crowded with kids. The customers who were trying to get out to the Black Forest, they couldn't get out there,

so everybody just hung around on the campus down there. We was out there playing, I had a six-piece band, and we was barely making seventy-five dollars a night. I think the highest we made out there was a hundred and fifty. That was a hard gig, because the people couldn't get through the crowd. People would say, "man, I was coming out to see you, Slim, but I couldn't get through that crowd. I was about to run out of gas, so I cut through the alley and got out of there." It was hard to get people out there 'cause of that 'gut' going on. We was playing to the four walls sometimes, there'd be about two or three people in there. But the people that was there, they enjoyed it. That's the one thing I was glad about it.

So finally, after going through that for a couple of years, I ended up out of a job. I had to go out and take a dishwashing job. I worked at the good Samaritan old folks home down there, for a while. At the time, the band guys called me every day, but there wasn't no job for us. Finally, I looked to over at the corner there, 'cause a guy had told me, "go over to the Mama's Truck Stop, there. They're hiring acoustic down there." I said, "acoustic! You're kidding me!" He wasn't; I went down there one day. The guy who was supposed to be there didn't show up, so I talked to the owner. He said, "we pay ten dollars; if you make over ten dollars, then we don't owe you nothing." I said, "OK, I'm going for it." I started playing, and right quick, when I took a break he said, "you almost got twenty dollars already. So we don't owe you nothing." So I got back up there, and I played another set. When I got done, the man handed me my money, and he said, "it looks like about thirty dollars." I said, "thirty dollars! I done made thirty dollars in a couple of hours here! And I wasn't making thirty dollars with the band!" What's wrong with this, what is this?

The Truck Stop guy said, "I got a cancellation for next Thursday, you want to play?" "I'll take it!" I played again there, at the Home Fried Truck Stop, got another

thirty dollars. Then I played another night, and I made another forty in tips and stuff. I realized, "hey man, this is a way of making money!" I was in the wrong business. I started reaching out, going to places like Zu Zu's. I played there, it had some of the same crowd. I started making money, twenty-five, thirty dollars a day. I had something going here, with this acoustic thing. Then one day I went down to the Saturday market and played, and took in sixty or seventy bucks. I said, "Oh man! Yeah! Look out! Ain't nobody out there doing this!"

Then the blues guys started getting more jealous of me . . . you know, this guys going out there are on the street, picking up sixty, out there on the street! They're too proud to go out there. They got to have amplifiers. Ha! They think if they didn't have no amp, they couldn't play! There wasn't no amps allowed out there. When I first come here, people used to tell me all the time, "you're too big for Eugene. I'm surprised that you're even staying around here." People used to tell me that all the time.

I stay around here because I really like it. It's not because I really want to stay here, I just really like Eugene. I'm going to hang out here for a while. But I'll be leaving, back and forth. Eugene reminds me of my hometown, Eagle Park, what it should have been, what it should have developed into if it had growed. But Eagle Park stopped growing in 1960; it started going down. So, I hung here in Eugene because people were begging me to stay. "Don't leave Eugene, please don't leave." And they would put their last buck in my guitar case to show me that they didn't want me to leave. But they all know that I got to live off more than a dollar!

You know, that's why I ain't got nothing now. Because I've been staying around here, playing for tips when I should be playing for four hundred or five hundred dollars a night someplace. But it's just been me; it's my own fault, I don't blame nobody. I could have left here a long time ago, I could have not even come here. The people of Eugene,

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Illustration 4. Gig flyer: Slim works the town, and cyberspace.

they wouldn't have never knowed me, you understand? But I think they're glad I came. They're glad to know a fellow like me.

They voted last year about the best musician in town, and they gave me second place. My doctor come and showed me. He said, "you seen the paper? You got voted most popular musician around town, you got second place, some guy named Curtis Salgado got first." I said, "Oh yeah? You got the paper?" He gave it to me, 'cause I had missed that. My doctor said, "I think you should have been voted first place." I said, "Curtis don't even live here in Eugene; they voted him first over me . . . that ain't right!" I should have won first place. I devoted a lot of time here to Eugene, he ain't devoted nothing ! He's too big for Eugene! This is where he got started at. The only reason he ain't in Eugene, is because I'm here! If I leave here, he'll probably come back, you see? He shouldn't even have been voted at all! I should have been number one; somebody else should have been number two, not him, 'cause he don't even live here. But he always been able to get his hand in on everything.

Like a lot of people came into town that I should have opened up for; no, they got Curtis to open up. It's that clique. I'm not in that clique. You know, I got to sit down and drink a pint of whiskey with these guys in order to open up for somebody that comes into town. I don't have to do that, all I need to do is get on the bandstand and do what I do best. That's all I need to do. I don't need to sit down and drink booze with somebody and get drunk or get drugged out with somebody, to be honored in this town. I know I should have been opening up for the whole lot of people, because people tell me so. "You should be opening up for Taj Mahal, for Norton Buffalo, all these people around town." But they always get somebody who is in the clique. If you the ain't in that clique, you don't get nothing. Like, I could open up for people at the Wild Duck. You think

they call me? No. They call way up to Portland, and try to find Curtis to come down here.

How can local people get a chance? Same thing about the Hult Center. How can local people ever get a chance for some big people to see them? We got a lot of good bands in this town. We could be opening up for these groups coming into the Hult center. You think the people at the Hult center would do that? No, they send off to Los Angeles to get somebody. How can Eugene's local talent be showcased if they won't let us in? You see what I'm saying? Back in St. Louis, the local showcase was the Keel opera house. I got a chance to play there for a talent show, and from the talent show I got a chance to play a dance. I got in there. People out there are now are still trying to get into the Keel opera house. I've been all over there, walked in the rooms and stuff. Because they gave me a chance.

I've played in some fine places, Rodeway Inns, after they seen what I could do. "Hey, this guy can do anything." I can handle any situation. Since I've been here in Oregon, I've had two heart attacks, two open-heart surgeries. The first was in 1982. Things was going bad, when I first come here. I think that's what made me have a heart attack, 'cause I was broke all of the time. No jobs, 'cause they wouldn't give me nothing. Everything was given to the other boys. Then I crawled back on my feet, when I started going into places like Zu Zu's, Aunt Lucy Divine's, the Truck Stop, the Beanery, Saturday Market, and the downtown mall. I started playing everywhere, and my life started coming back together, because I was making some money every day. I started playing on the campus up there.

A lot of times, I didn't want to be out there. But I had to be out there. Because I didn't have nothing. See, people didn't understand . . . they think I got a home up on the hill, a Cadillac, a dog, cat, wife and the whole bit. What else could I want? With a voice

like mine, what else could a man like me want? What can we give *him*? Why is he down here playing for tips? I'm down here playing for tips 'cause I ain't got a damn thing! I ain't got that house on the hill that you're telling me about. Maybe you think I should have it. But I've been through trials and tribulations in my life. I've been cheated, I've been beat, blackmailed and everything. That's why.

Nobody has really been honest with me. It's been a hard fight; I'm lucky to even be here. If I wasn't a smart man, I would have been dead a long time ago. But I learned a long time ago to let some things pass. Because if you don't let them pass, they might not let you pass. I've learned to stay out of trouble that way. It's a lot that people go through. I'm hoping that a lot of these things that come out in my book is going to end, here in Eugene, in a great fashion. I think so. I think it's going to turn out to really be something good for all of us, especially the people in Eugene who all knew me. I hope they find out something that they didn't know. 'Cause it wasn't no free ride. It's still ain't no free ride. I'm still having it hard. But I'm going to hang in there, and try to make it to the top, if I can. It's only just a matter of time. I just got my first CD here, and it's beginning to sell real good. I'm going to get back on the road in the next month or so and start getting back to Denver, and Seattle, and hitting places. You work hard, it's true; you'll get rewards. I've got my rewards, and I don't worry about that. I'm here, myself, to help people.

In 1994 I died. I went to heaven, I seen my mother and my father . . . he had just got there. And my mother was waving for me, "go back, son, go back! Your dad just got here." That's when I came back, but I was legally dead for six minutes. An old friend of mine, who used to come up and borrow a quarter every once in a while, he ran out of his apartment and he screamed out, "code eight! code nine on this man!" The paramedics were saying, "he's dead." He told me this story. He said, "no, code eight! I used to work

on the medic truck. Code eight, code eight on him!" So the paramedics looked at each other and said, "well, I guess we can try it again. . . ." So they put the jumper cables back on me, and started jumping me around. I came up with a puff, and they got me down to the hospital in time enough to save my life.

It was a close call. But the good Lord was guiding me all the way through it. 'Cause I didn't know nothing; I woke up the next day in the hospital with a lot of people around me. I wondered what they were doing there. What happened? Because I didn't feel no pain. That was the best part about it. The Lord gave me a chance to go back into my heart, the same place where they cut before; they wired it back up and put it back together again. And this time when they put it back together again, I knew the purpose that he wanted me to do. I knew the service that he wanted me to do. I stopped thinking about trying to make this, and make that, I had already made it. Because what I had asked from the Lord, he had gave me. He gave me a voice.

I asked the Lord when I was very young, when I heard those guys singing, like Johnny Foster, Bobby Foster, Smoky, and Calvin and all those guys . . . they used to come in and sing and take all the girls . . . I was praying while the guys was singing . . . I want to be able to sing like these guys. I want a voice. And the Lord gave me that voice. And I've had it ever since, and I brought it here to Eugene. I didn't know that my voice was that powerful until I got here. I'd done a good stint in Denver; I knew things was happening, but I was just learning in Denver.

See, I've been playing for forty-five, forty-six years, but I only been singing for twenty years now. So, I'm a young singer, in some ways, just breaking into the business. But I've been playing for other singers for over thirty years. It just amazes me that all these other singers are afraid of me, you know . . . they won't let me sit in. What went on in 1980, it's going on again. There's a lot of blues bands out there. Some, when they see

me, they call me right up and ask me, do I want to sing. Some just brush me off, and don't even look toward my way. It's their loss, and my gain. 'Cause I can't do nothing but help them. I can't hurt them.

And I want to help them, all the people I can. That's why I got my own singing course going. I got four or five people interested in it. I got some people in Denver, and some people in Seattle that really believe in the things I say. And someday, these people, if they really do the things I tell them, they're going to be great singers, guitar players, and saxophone players. See, I know all phases of music. I know the trick to learning. I remember one guy told me, "I don't want no quick fix." I said, "man, ain't going to be no quick trip! You going to have to be going through a lot, Buddy!" So, he never did get back in touch with me. He thought I was trying to give him a quick fix or something. Some people think you're trying to beat 'em when you're trying to tell them something, you know. I'm trying to tell him how to get better on his saxophone, or how to get better on his guitar. Because a lot of people right now is at a standstill, and they don't know which way to turn.

I'm hearing it all over town. People are coming to me and telling me, "Slim, man, I'm glad that you are reaching out trying to help somebody. If nobody won't listen to you, they must be crazy! You've got it down; you're the man, you're the man!" I appreciate that, but I'm not going to push nothing on nobody. I just want to help them if they come to me, call me, or something. I can get them started, get them going. 'Cause it don't take no fifteen years, no ten years. The course that I got, that I give you, only takes six months or a year, if you're really into it. Some people may take longer; it all depends on what they do. But, if you do what I tell you, like I tell you, you can see the dream. I've been meeting a lot of people who say, "how do you do this, how do you do that?" I tell them, you know . . . "if you want me to help you, got you got to pay me." I'm not going

to tell you how to do it for free. That's my problem now; I ain't got no money. I tell them, "I can help you. If you play guitar, if you play bass. . . ."

I see a lot of opportunities . . . the world is opening up for music again. I mean, there will be no more Tina Turners, no more Aretha Franklins, or Elvis Presleys. The world is coming up on the Rapper thing. I mean, where's the singers at? That's why people are going back to the old music of the '50s and '60s right now. You go out to all these places, they're trying to look like they're in the '50s. A lot of these clubs, if they don't go nonsmoking, they're going to go out of business. It's even up in Corvallis, clubs you can't smoke in, and in California too. And that's a big state, man. So why can you smoke in Eugene, Oregon? There's some people here that have already did it. You can't even smoke in the bathroom! At Pegasus pizza you can't even smoke on the balcony! They're letting you know, right quick, no smoking. There's a lot of clubs that are going to have to do that; and the quicker they do it, the better their business is going to start picking up. If you don't change with the world, you're going to be left behind.

That's the reason a lot of people are losing jobs, and they don't know why. A lot of people wonder why they can't get booked in no clubs. They don't go in there right; they go in there wrong. People got to start shaving and cleaning up, because that's what the future is. That's what you see on TV. People have got into too many different things, putting rings in their nose, their ears . . . man, I wouldn't be caught like that. My Mama would slap me all the way to hell! That's something she just didn't allow her kids, to get into all the different fads. She'd say, "You belong to the Lord, you're God's children, and you're going to stay that way." After my heart attack and open heart surgery, the Lord had opened up many other avenues for me, showing me things that I could do.

I've been even thinking about coaching again. I always wanted to, and I can mostly do anything. People told me, "you could run for Congress, you could run for

mayor." But I just want to keep doing what I'm doing right now. 'Cause I feel like what I'm doing is something for the Lord, you know. I'm still a broke man. But right now I know that money don't mean nothing. There's a lot of people that's got thousands and thousands of dollars, but they're sick. Their health and strength are gone. Here I am, I've had two heart attacks, and I'm walking around out there. I could have been paralyzed, came out in a wheelchair . . . praise the Lord's name. A lady told me a long time ago, "you're going to live a long time." When I died that second time and I lived, I thought about her. People have told me, "you're going to get what's due to you, Slim. You're going to live to be an old man, but you're going to have it made." And I believe that; I believe that 'cause I see right now, if I could ever get things together like I want to, things is going to be happening. By me helping people, people are going to be helping me. So, I've got a lot of stuff planned that's coming up for the future. If it don't happen here, then I'm going to be moving on.

I might go back home, you know, 'cause I haven't been back home in thirty years. They haven't heard me back there. The Lord is telling me a lot of things . . . he's telling me to go back home and play my music there. Because he knows my music is needed all over the world. Go to New York, go to L.A., everywhere and play your music. Right now, I know I'm going to be doing a lot of traveling. I'm just hoping that I can get something to travel with, you know. Besides my music, I want to be able to have my book to take along with me.

People will buy anything from me. I just got my CD here, and it's selling like hot cakes. People are just buying them because they know me, and they want the music. They've been waiting for this. I don't know what the stores are doing, but I can walk down the street and sell two or three of them. I just tell people, "hey, I got my CD now." "Oh yeah? You got one on you now?" I had three or four of them in my overcoat the

other day, and I sold them before I got out of town. I just told people about them. That's how good that's going. Ha! So I know what I'm going to do; I'm getting ready to go back into the studio. This time I'm going to be making some electric stuff, a chance to do *my* thing. And the Lord is going to give me a chance to do it. I've been wanting to take a bass player and a drummer and just me as the guitar player and go and display my skills, because people like my guitar playing. I want to really go in and do it, to really show them that I can play guitar just as good as Jimmy Hendrix or any of these guys. Because they can almost tell by me playing acoustic. "Man, you play acoustic better than a lot of these guys play electric!" A guitar is a guitar to me. Electric has just got it hooked up to some kind of amplifier. Acoustic, you got to *make it* come out. Most acoustic guys, they play too soft; they can't make it. But man, I beat my sound out. It comes out perfect, because I know it so well.

I think I'm going to hang out here for a while in Eugene, but I'm going to be traveling around, hitting places like New Orleans. I want to go to New York, Washington D.C. and to London and Amsterdam. I'm hoping that I get a chance to do that. I think if I can afford to pay rent in Eugene, I'll always be in Eugene, or around here close. Seattle, or Eugene, I like either place. Seattle is a good place, too. I always liked Seattle. Like I said, I'm going back home to check out some things back there. I think I can make some money back home right now, go back there and put a band together. There is a lot of clubs opening up, and there's no music around. People are going to be hurting. The ones that are going to be having a good band is going to be making the money. Especially with all the smoke out of the places.

Right now, we've got a shortage of bands. There is a lot of bands around, but they're playing the wrong stuff--that rap thing. Rap scares people; a lot of black people, they're frightened of rap, and most of the white people are frightened. It's just something

that money is keeping going. Ain't nothing else keeping it going, just money. As soon as they run out of money, it's gone. All the radio stations are playing oldies but goodies; Sam Cooke, Otis Redding, Aretha Franklin all night long. Even the country-western stars are singing blues. Everybody's singing the blues. I know a doctor who is sixty-three years old. He told me on Fridays when he gets off, he goes home, gets him a six-pack; his buddy comes over and they listen to T-Bone Walker. You see what I'm saying? People is into blues. At first they thought that blues was a bad thing. But after they heard that rap, they went like, "whoa!" Blues ain't bad! They could hang with the blues, they couldn't hang with that other stuff.

It's all going back to the '50s. That's the reason the bands need to start dressing up again, 'cause in the '50s the bands all dressed. My band, we all had red shirts, brown shirts, and we had suits; we had everything when we stepped out onstage. And that's where it's at now. Some of these people are holding their own selves back by not going and cutting their hair and straightening up. Some of them wants to do it, but they're scared. They don't know how to do it. You just do it. You can go out and get you a job now. The hippie movement is over. I used to wear my own hair long, a big natural and stuff. Time moves on.

The ones that's still here in 1999 and 2000, it's going to be good for musicians. And I'm going to try to put me something together here, and keep making music. Someday I want to get me a studio, so I can record anytime I get ready. I know that I've been through a lot in life, to make it this far. It's been a thrill, because I didn't come out on the losing end. I came out on the winning end. My music got better and better. The people that I started off with, none of those people are playing. Most of them is dead, or they couldn't kick the drug habit. They got someways messed up.

But here I am, I'm still playing. I'm fifty-six years old right now, and I'm looking like I'm thirty-six. That's what people tell me. I appreciate that, 'cause of what all I've been through. And I'd like people to know that the struggle ain't over with. You know, I still ain't got nothing. But I've got something greater than money, though. I got the faith in the Lord, and he keeps guiding me, and helping me get through trials and tribulations. I've already seen the light in the tunnel up ahead. He let me see it already. And he already told me what I need to do to get there. So, I'm on my way, in some ways. This has been a great life for me. And it's going to be greater, because I see greater things ahead.

I'd like to thank everybody who gave me a chance. If it wasn't for the people, I couldn't have lasted this long. Because the musicians didn't help me as much as the people . . . letting me know that they wanted to hear me. They let me know in many ways. I really appreciate that. I play my music for the people here, because the media in this town don't know nothing about me. They don't know how much good I've done for this town. If they did, they would give me an award, or a medal or something. But the people . . . that's who I've been playing for. That's what kept me around.

CHAPTER VI.

RACISM, VIOLENCE, URBAN RENEWAL, AND GETTING BY

You Couldn't Mingle With The People

Slim Describes Dealing With Racism in His Hometown,
at Work in St. Louis, and on the Road

I'd like to mention a few things about how hard it was being racial, living in a racial world, to try and keep your goals. I've done a pretty good job at that. I faced a bunch of racism when I was small, when we was building our home in Eagle Park. I was seven or eight years old, I guess, when we started building it.

My mom used to send us uptown, which was Madison Illinois, right out of Eagle Park. It was the closest place around that you could get a hamburger, to eat for lunch or something. We had a house over upon a lake-side of Eagle Park, and we was building a new home, a new club, and everything out there. So Mommy used to send us uptown to this tavern and cafe to get hamburgers. 'Cause they had hamburgers up there, six for a dollar. So she used to give me a dollar, and she'd say, "son, go up there, y'all go up together and get you some hamburgers, so you can last till we get home. We might be getting back a little late for supper." "Okay Mom," I would go up there.

We couldn't go in the front of the place; we had to go around in the back. And going around the back, there wasn't no telling, you could get splashed with a bucket of water, or whatever. They would just throw things out the door . . . wham! A bucket of

water, slops, whatever. One day we come down, and we was walking up, and this lady throwed a bucket of water, wham, and we just got soaking wet. She said, "Oh, I'm sorry . . . what you want?" "We want six hamburgers." She said, "Gimme the money! Gimme the money!" She would grab the money right out of our hands; sometimes she would tear it, she was grabbing so fast!

So she'd go in, and fix the hamburgers. She would come out the door and just throw the whole bag out there! Hamburgers just rolling all over the ground, pickles fall out, and the onions falling out. We'd gather them up and take them home. I told Mama, "Mama, they just throwed them out the door!" "That's all right, son. That's all right; it's just a little dirt on them, I'll take a rag and brush some of it off. . . ." I couldn't understand it at that time, but Mama knew what was going on, you know. But, she couldn't tell us . . . we was little kids at the time. But she knew that we knew something was wrong at the time, that we wasn't supposed to be treated that way. But, wasn't nothing she could do.

I remember when I used to go uptown; when I got to be around twelve or thirteen, I had my own car. So I started going uptown to Madison, and Granite City. Granite City was more racist than Madison was, and the further you go up there, the more racist you'd get. Pontoon Beach and all those places up there, black people wasn't even allowed to go through there. If you went through one of those towns, you had to go through there at night. If you went through there in the daytime, somebody would shoot at you, and call you racial names. Like, "get out of town, nigger!"

There used to be a lot of stories, people talking about that. As I growed up, around the ages of thirteen and fourteen we played in a Teentown. We put a little band together, in Austin Illinois, I think it was. I'd met a white kid named Danny . . . and he liked me; he just hung out with me, he treated me like a god or something. He was trying

to prove something, 'cause his folks hated black people. They told him to stay away from around us. But he was a young man; he was determined to make his folks wrong.

We played up there for a couple of weeks at this place. He asked me, "can I go home with you, would your folks care?" "Come on, if you want to go." I knew my folks weren't going to be that way. He didn't want to go home that night; he had begun to stay away from his folks more and more. At the Teentown he had met a few black people, and he became buddy-buddy with them. He didn't look at nobody that way, you know.

He came out to our house, and he stayed around a day or so. I thought he was going to leave, you know. When I got up that morning, mama said, "come here . . . who is this boy?" "That's Danny." "He's out there raking the yard! Who's his folks?" "I don't know, but they don't like us, Mom." "Well, he can't stay here because his folks are going to come looking for him." "Well, I told him that, but he's not going back to his folks. He said he wants to hang out here a couple more days." Mama said, "yeah, okay. Let him hang out here another day or so, then you try to help him get back to his folks. 'Cause I don't want no trouble, son." We played again at the Teentown, and I took him up with me. I told Danny, "I can't take you home with me tonight. My mom gave me a little trouble, you know." He said, "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to get you in no trouble. Well, I'll just go down behind the feed store; there is a little shelter there. I'll stay there." I said, "Okay, man, I'm sorry I can't take you home."

Right then and there, I knew there was something going on there . . . racism. And it was happening all over town; you couldn't do this or that. We had a street car that come through there, going to St. Louis . . . if you was black, you had to get way back in the back of the street car; you couldn't sit in front. Same thing with buses. Now, everybody rides in the back. Back in those days, back was completely separate from

front. There wasn't nothing about no senior citizens, or nothing like that. Now senior citizens sit up front, and everybody rides in the back.

Nowadays, you can sit any place on the bus. Because most of the whites run to the back. It used to be, the back was a separate thing. If you were sitting up front, you had to give up your seat. They'd tell you, "go back to the back!" If there were seats in the front, and no seats in the back, you had to sit on somebody's lap or stand up.

Another thing, I was working at a furniture store. Right behind the furniture store, there on the corner was a bakery shop. My boss used to send me down there all the time to get coffee and doughnuts. He used to say, "Autry, go down there and get a couple of doughnuts and coffees . . . Mose and Andy are all coming in today." The company was called Friedman Brothers Furniture Store; it was five or six brothers. I used to go in there and get five or six coffees and rolls or doughnuts. And I'd done that for the first couple months when I started working for them.

This was during the time when Martin Luther King was parading and marching all over the place. It was on a Friday; I walked in this coffee house. You could hear a pin drop when I walked in. As I had walked in the door, I'd heard a man saying, "I wonder where King and his marchers are heading now." Then when I walked in the door you could hear a pin drop, like "oh-oh, here they come, here now!" The lady in the bakery shop, she knew me because I came all the time to get coffee and stuff.

But that particular morning, there was a whole lot of racist people in there. And everybody was reading the paper, "he'll be coming here next," you know. People were saying, "I hope they kill the son of a bitch," and stuff like that. "He'll have a hard time going through Dallas; he'll get hit hard." So the lady, she seen what was happening; she said, "What you want? What do you want?" "Six cups, and some rolls and stuff." "Okay, I'll go get you that . . . I got a lot of orders, but I'll get you out of here, you

know." I said, "I really appreciate that." 'Cause she seen what was going on, what was getting ready to happen. 'Cause everybody was looking at me like they was ready to kill me.

And I had just come in to get some coffee for my boss! She rushed and got coffee, and put it in a big box with a bunch of rolls. She said, "I didn't know which kind you wanted; I just put a bunch in there." I said, "okay," and I took them back to my boss. My boss said, "why didn't you'd get the cinnamon rolls? Is this all they got? Ain't no cinnamon rolls?" I said, "she gave me what she had; that's what she said." So they went on and ate their rolls and drunk their coffee. I thought, "wow! I ain't going down there no more!"

I was scared to go down to that place. This guy, Art, used to try to get me to go get him some coffee, "Autry, I'll give you a dollar if you go in get me a cup of coffee, and a couple of those rolls." "No Art, I got stuff to do." But sometimes I would go get him a cup. He liked his coffee black with lots and lots of sugar; he was kind of heavy-set. He didn't ever show no prejudice, none of the Friedman Brothers didn't never show no prejudice.

One day, they needed another salesman, and they got another guy in the store and he was prejudiced, when he come. He smoked a cigar, and the juice would be running out on the floor. He would tell me to wipe it up, you know. At that time, I had grown up a little bit. I was eighteen years old. He used to follow me around, because I had a good time at that furniture store until he come. 'Cause I could do my work, and then go upstairs and lay down on one of them couches and sleep. 'Cause the Friedman Brothers never did come up there much unless they had some big buyer coming in. Then, they would take over for the salesman.

This new guy, Sagan come in and started turning the lights on and watching me. He told me one time, "why you got those lights off, leave the lights on! How can you work in the dark?" I wasn't working; I was laying down, asleep. If he seen me sitting down, he would say, "take this, and do that there. . . ." I told him, "hey man, I'm not no delivery man! I'm just here to clean." "Aw, you do whatever I tell you!" "No I don't!" I just didn't like him. He stinked, he smelled, and he wore the same old brownblue suit everyday. He was one of them slouchy furniture men.

One day he came upstairs to show some people some furniture. I had been sitting up there eating my lunch, and I kind of fell asleep. He come up there and seen me. I hopped up and started doing things, and he didn't say anything. After he got through with the customer, he went downstairs and told Mr. Friedman. When I went down Mr. Friedman told me, "come here, come here. Stop going up there sleeping. This damn Sagan guy was just down here telling me about you sleeping. You got to stop that. I've seen you sleeping up there a couple of times, but I don't care. But this guy, he's going to watch you!" But, like I say, it was an all-white racial place; it was more racial up there are in Granite City than it was in Madison. They both was the same, in some ways.

I think this was right at the time, 'cause they had called me at work. My mom was in the hospital, having heart trouble, and they was looking for her to die. That same day somebody called the store to tell me my mom was dead. So I jumped in my car and I ran home. My heart was beating all the way. After then, I stopped working at the store, and found me another little job.

I was getting ready to move down to East St. Louis. I had been to East St. Louis playing gigs and stuff. There was a lot of racist stuff going on right downtown. Broadway, right downtown, all up and down there, used to be all kinds of stores there. I remember when we used to go down there to deal with pawn shops, buying guitars and

harmonicas. This one guy used to be all over me, "yeah, what you want!" "I'm just looking right now. . . ." "you're supposed to know what you want when you come in here!" He was real pushy, real pushy. So finally I said, "okay man, I'll be back, though." "When you come back, know what you want; I ain't got time, I got things to sell."

He was real pushy, and he wouldn't give you nothing for your stuff. Like, if a white man would take in a watch, he would give him twenty dollars pawn on it. But if you would take in a watch, he would give you five. And I think he was a Jew, but he treated you worse than he did the whites. I caught onto that, 'cause a friend of mind told me there's only one way to deal with a Jew; go in with some money in your hand, buy something. Go in there with some money in your hand, he'll treat you nice.

So I was going to buy a bass guitar, and he said, "what you want?" I said, "I don't know, I got a bunch of money here. . . ." "How much you got? How much? Put it on this table, let's count it." I said, "man, I don't know what I want yet! I'm looking at this bass over here." He followed me all around, "nice bass, isn't it?" He was showing me all kinds of stuff. Like my friend said, you walk in there was that money in your hand . . . you know, he's all over you.

Right there, I seen the racism thing, right there. I learned from my daddy how to fight it. You can't do nothing about it; you can only get yourself hurt if you speak up. Because back in those days, you couldn't talk back to a white man. Like I said, my dad would always tell us and tell other people, if they come by and call you a name and keep going, let them go. And it works. People have called me a bunch of names, I could have jumped up and said, "I'll kill you! I'll get you!" I mean, they could have killed me. Because there would always be about five or six of them in a car, and one of you.

That's the way a lot of black people got killed in those days. 'Cause like I said, you weren't supposed to talk back to a white man. He could say whatever he wanted to

you, but you couldn't say things back. Blacks, they'd holler back, "I ain't scared of you!" They would end up dead; a lot of strange deaths came through. They said they didn't know why, but they knew why. 'Cause if you was bold, you would get killed right quick, because they wasn't going to have it. They got rid of them, right quick.

But I always had been very popular with the whites, even the policemen. When I used to go up in Granite City, places like that, they knew me. Because I had my name, Eagle Park Slim, wrote on my car. And I could park my car any place. A couple times I got a ticket, they was just messing with me. 'Cause I was going to a place called Johnson's music to buy strings and harmonicas. Color didn't make no difference to Johnson. The color he liked was green, you know.

One day, I walked in there, and he said, "hey, Slim! What all you doing?" The policeman, he was in there. When I started coming up there, in Granite City policemen started saying, "hey, Slim, how are you doing?" He would wave at me and stuff. He used to tell me, "anybody give you any trouble, let me know." I used to go to in them stores, and he would make sure that nobody didn't give me no trouble. He would come through those stores. I'd walk in the dime store, and he would hang around there to make sure. 'Cause he knew himself that it was a racist town. He just didn't want nothing to happen, trying to keep it down.

There was one day that a bunch of my friends stopped me on the corner, and asked where I was going. I said "I'm going uptown." "Can we go with you?" "Okay, I guess so; come on,you guys." Five or six of them jumped in the car. I went in the music store, and these guys went to go buy some candy. You could get candy for a nickel a bar, ten cents a bar back then. The dime store had a lot of candy, 'cause the only time you would get a chance to go to the dime store was when your parents would take you uptown. It was a chance for them to go up without their parents.

Man, they went in that store, and everybody got upset. They was scared; them kids was all over the place, but they wasn't doing nothing. But the store people couldn't take their eyes off them. Five or six of them were looking at stuff, and the manager came running out of the back to see what was happening. They called for the policeman, and the policeman came. Finally they left out of that store and went into another one, looking in there, a toy shop and different little shops.

When I come out of the music store, the policeman said, "hey, I don't want nothing to happen, get your boys out of town!" "What did they do?" "They went through the dime store, and they claim that they took a lot of candy." I said, "they had money to buy stuff. . . ." He said, "I just want you to get them out of town, because they threatened to call this in to the Captain, downtown." "They ain't doing nothing, man!" He said, "I'm just telling you . . . 'cause they want me to arrest them." "Arrest them for what?" So I went and got them, I said, "come on guys, let's go!" So we got back in the car and I said, "man, you can't be coming up here with me and going into those stores and stealing!" "Man, I ain't stole nothing! I brought a dollar, and I bought some candy and some cookies . . . we was just looking at the shit." I said, "I know, but it caused confusion."

After then I stopped carrying them up there with me. I used to go up there by myself, to them stores and stuff because I was paying bills for my mom. I had to go to different places, so a lot of people got a chance to know me. They'd say, "you're a good boy, you're all right. Anytime you want to come into my store, you can come in." So I just became real popular up there; I started shining shoes on Friday and Saturday. I had me a little shoe shining job up there. A lot of people used to come and leave their shoes for me to shine them, I mean these were *rich* people. They would come pick their shoes up, and give me a tip, a two-dollar or five-dollar tip. So I became an all-mighty guy, you

know, "he's all right." I didn't like that feeling, but I was trying to understand all this prejudice stuff myself.

I played with a guy named Little Walter Westbrook. He was a guy that would get you all the work you wanted. But he wanted you to *act* right and *do* right; those was his words. 'Cause he used to tell me, "if I can just get some guys to act right and do right . . . I know how to get jobs. I got people calling me all the time." And he wasn't lying; he had jobs, he could get jobs.

I was downtown there, by this spaghetti house. You could go in there and get any kind of spaghetti you wanted, down by the stadium there. He was unloading some equipment there, one evening. I said, "hey, Walter, you playing here?" 'Cause I knew him, he played at my mama's place a long time ago when I was growing up. I was around sixteen and stuff like that, just starting a band and getting ready. So I walked up the street for about half of a block, and he came running. "Are you playing tonight?" "No, I'm not playing tonight." "My guitar player is sick or something; he just called me and told me he couldn't play. I was going to call a few people after I got home. I was just bringing this stuff down here to get it all set up. You can play tonight if you want to."

I asked him who he had on bass. He said, "I got Junior on bass, you know the guy used to play with Ike." "Oh, Junior . . . bass player." He said, "I have to keep him in line sometimes. Now, somebody done whupped his butt! He's got a busted lip, but he'll be here to play." I went down there, 'cause I hadn't ever played with Junior, I'd seen him on the bandstands with Ike and Tina. He was clean cut, and doing steps. That night I went down there, he had some shades on; he was all messed up. 'Cause Walter was laughing all night! I couldn't laugh because I didn't know him.

Junior looked at me right off the bat, when we took a break. He said, "I like the way you play guitar. I got tired of the other boy. I hope Walter keeps you." I said, "no, I'm just playing for tonight." He said, "we got to play here two more nights." "At the present time, I got a band, but we ain't working yet." He said, "well, you play with us!" Then Walter came up, and I talked to him for a little while. I said, "yeah, I'll play with you."

This was an all-white place. People used to get out there and dance to your music. There was always a corner somewhere in the dark or some place, behind the bandstand that we had to stay. And we was committed. We couldn't go to the bar to get a drink. We had to call a waitress over or something. I remember, one time I went to the bathroom, and some guy in the bathroom said, "you niggers play here a lot now, don't you?" I said, "yes, Sir!" You see, right then and there . . . he didn't have to say that. He could have said, "you guys play here a lot now," but he said, "you niggers. . . ."

Ha! See, I faced racism all over, yeah, I've been held back. That's the reason I appreciate Martin Luther King. You know, he walked all over the world so we could have a chance. He risked his life out there, many years on the street, walking. And racism is still around. It will always be here as long as there is a different color, like I was saying, dark skinned people was here before white folks was.

You see what I'm saying? Dark-skinned people owned everything, and dark-skinned people made everything, and everything that they made, the white man took away from them. If you go back in history, you'll see. All the different things that was made in the world, a black man made it first. See, I didn't know a lot of these things until I went to school, and learned who so-and-so was, and that it was a black man's idea. You know, the white man took it from him. He would be working for him on a farm or something, and come up with some idea, and the white man would take it, and make

billions of dollars off it. What I'm proud of, a bunch of things that we use everyday, it was a black man's idea, see? He just got his ideas stolen away.

That's still happening in some towns, you know. People ask me sometimes, "do you think racism will ever go away?" No, it will never go away. But you got to learn how to live with it, how to face it. That's one thing I've learned. I always go back to what my daddy said. He said, "if you can walk away, or if they walk away, let them go . . . 'cause if they don't, they may jump out of their car with a bunch of jacks and baseball bats and beat the hell out of you. Or you may kill one of those in the process . . . if you kill one of those, you're in big trouble." I mean, it wasn't nothing to kill a black person; it's just another dead black guy. But if you kill a white person, that was headlines. So, that's how I've been able to fight it.

When I played with Walter, we went to a lot of racist places. Like this place we used to play at called Kelly's, it was it an all-night joint. We didn't start until two o'clock in the morning. There was so much racism in there; there wasn't no black people at all. We was the only black people, and we had to play on the bandstand and stay on the bandstand. The only place we could go was to the bathroom. And when you go into the bathroom, you didn't know who was in there. A lot of times I would go in the bathroom, and people would leave and turn the lights off. Just to let you know, "hey, you're not supposed to really be in here."

It was tough. This guy we worked for, he was really racist. Around four o'clock, everybody would be gone. But he would make us play until six clock. He would sit there with a big cigar. I would go up to him and say, "you think we should stop now?" He'd say, "no, I just got a couple more people come in." He'd sit there with that cigar, smoking that cigar and looking up at the bandstand. I really despised that man; I hated him. 'Cause a lot of times we would walk in saying, " hi, how are you doing?" and he

wouldn't even answer. I mean, he was a hard man. And he made you work, every hour. He made us work for every penny he paid to us.

Walter used to go to a place called Poplar Bluff, way up in Missouri or someplace a long ways from St. Louis. And they used to love us up there . . . but there was always the old back room where you'd sit around the stage. You couldn't mingle with the people. I mean, we could go out to our car or something. It was like, "you guys just come in to play music, and then get out of here." I've been through a lot of things.

Gangs and Violence

Slim Recalls Violence in Eagle Park, How Violence Has Changed, and How He Learned To Read People

In my neighborhood, we used to wake up every Saturday morning and Sunday morning, and somebody would've been got killed in a car, or shot. It wasn't nothing related to our neighborhood; it was gangsters that was doing this, gangs and stuff. I remember one night I heard my daddy telling my mom, "we're liable to wake up in the morning and find a dead body in a car somewhere out here on the street." She said, "what?!" "Yeah, they're looking for old Jack Brown." "Jack Brown?" "Yeah, they are looking for him." My dad, I used to hear him say, 'they," he never did call them by their names. I never did know why, but I know why now. He couldn't. He couldn't even tell mama who they was. You understand?

I mean, he wasn't in the gang or nothing, but they would come by. "You seen old Jack Brown? We are looking for him, he's gone!" See, we had a place of business and he knew those guys. They would come by and have a drink, and they used to slam the shot-glass down on the bar after they drinked their shot down. 'Cause I was in there a

couple of times when they came in. These guys would have their guns; they would have their guns *in their hands*! You see what I'm saying? Like I say, my daddy, he didn't mess around. He didn't get into what they was doing, but they would come by and say, "so-and-so, so-and-so. . . ."

And my daddy, he knew that eventually they would catch up with old Jack. You'd hear somebody screaming and running down there, "Oh, there's a man dead in the car! He looks like he's been shot to death!" It was old Jack, see . . . you see what I'm saying? A lot of times they used to kill them in an old car out there. They smothered one guy in the back of a car. 'Cause, the car'd set there for a couple of days, then finally somebody was messing around with it and smelled something. They called the police, and the police came out. They found him suffocated in the back of the car.

That was "they" again, like I said, I don't know who "they" was, but this same thing is going on now. People getting shot, and people getting pushed over cliffs, getting cut and stabbed. It's just like it was back in those days. One thing about it, back in those days, you knew who was who. Now, you don't know who's who. 'Cause you got about twenty different gangs out there. They all got their own little name, their own little everything. See, back in those days it was either Al Capone, or Sam Nitty, or whoever was the king. Ha! Everybody else was just paying off. Yeah, 'cause I knew about a lot of payoffs.

Clubs used to pay off just to stay open late at night. I mean, it ain't no big secret. You know, they would let you stay open, and then all at once, boom! They would come down on them and say, "you're closing up tonight at twelve o'clock!" Then, the next week you're wide open until three o' clock again. They'd tell you, "the commissioner is going to come by tonight." See, all this was just to keep the record straight. But the

Commissioner, he knew what was going on, 'cause he could walk on out there on any Friday night and find the clubs wide open, people dancing and having a good time. Ha!

See, this is back in those days, and there was gangs happening then. But you knew who was who, you knew what you was up against. If you got in a gang, you knew what you was up against. You knew your life was in jeopardy, you knew you were taking a chance.

Because if people knew you were in a gang, they wasn't going to fool around with you, 'cause they knew you were going to fool around with them. You know, it's going to be, "shoot first, and ask questions later." See, that's what's happening now. These kids, I hear them say, "I'm going to shoot that homey, man, I'm going to shoot that homey! Man, I'm going to put a bullet right through his chest!" I mean, they get theirselves excited over that, instead of, "I'm going over and talk to the homey," or try and reason with the guy. The first thing they think of is violence, and they call it pride . . . that ain't no pride! Ha! Because the people that's not in the gang, they look at you like, "who are you?" I mean, you're the one that we got to watch out for. Is that pride?

Man, pride is going out there and getting something honest, and letting people see it, and putting your name on it. Letting people see there is something that you've done got. That's pride. Pride ain't going out shooting somebody. Hey man, you're losing your pride when you're going out doing something like that. What kind of pride is that? I wouldn't call that no pride. You think I would go out and shoot somebody and then say, "man, I'm proud!" Uh-uh, no! You don't think of it like that, in a violent way. Like I said, from the ages of nine to fourteen I can remember the gangs. . . .

You could be in the barber shop . . . I learned a lot in the barber shop. There was always about ten guys hanging around, talking politics talking this, talking jobs, talking all kinds of talk. About people in the neighborhood, who was sick, and who's the new

marshall, who's the new chief of police, who drives the best cab, and who's got the prettiest woman, and who's the baddest dude in town, you know. I learned a lot in the barber shop. In the barber shop you could learn a lot by listening. That's the reason I know different people.

I know, 'cause I used to hear people saying, "man, they're trying to find old Sam. . . . ." "Oh, are they after Sam? What did he do?" "I don't know what he did, but the man came by today and he was waving his pistol, and asking everybody, did they see Sam . . . ." "Man, I knew they were going to get him. He keeps on messing around, and messing people out of money, and jiving and swindling people here. Man, if you live that kind of life, you're going to die." "Now they're after him; he must have done something." Then you hear another guy say, "yeah, I know what he done. He wrote some checks out in that man's name." "Oh, you're kidding, man!" "No man, he ain't kidding. He wrote a check for ten thousand dollars!" "Sam ain't around here if he wrote that kind of check out . . . he's gone, man!" "The man passed me today, waving his pistol; I thought he was going to shoot me!" "That's the end of Sam, man." Sam, be done took off, he's gone. See, the man's after him.

People done all kinds of things, then you hear somebody in there say, "man, did you hear what happened down here at the church?" "Church? What do you mean? What happened at church?" "The Reverend got drunk." "Reverend Byles? You're kidding!" "Yeah, down there, old Byles, he was drinking early that morning; he must have been. He staggered up, trying to preach and stuff, smelling like whiskey. And the sisters rushed him off right quick, and Reverend Sanderly had to come and take his place for that day."

"Oh man, you're kidding me!" "He done that one time before! That isn't the first time he's been drunk; that's the first time they caught him!" Ha! "You remember that

time down on East Street, when he used to preach down there. . . ." "Yeah, that's right! He had some Rosie O' Grady! Yeah, he's been drunk a lots of times; this is the first time they caught him, he must have drunk a little too much!"

You would hear all kinds of stuff in there. These were the days when I was young, and I would go to the barber shop. You would learn a lot. There used to be another place too, it used to be called the 'We Three Cafe,' and man, you could go in there after two o'clock in the morning. You'd find the three sisters Minamins, preachers, barber shop people, all kinds of people. I used to get off from my band about one, and we would always go someplace to eat. We used to go down to the 'We Three Cafe,' all the time. There would be people in there talking, all the time! I mean, you'd be enjoying it! They'd be really getting down!

You would hear one guy, "hey man, they caught the mayor!" "They caught the mayor?" "Where'd they catch him at?" "They got him right in his backyard, man! Him and the woman next door, kissing! His wife was looking right out at him, you know. She went to get the gun, and. . . ." "Oh man, did she kill him?" "No, she didn't kill him, but she *really wanted to*." "Oh man, he done that one time before, you remember about a year ago . . . he had this woman coming by like she was cleaning and stuff, you know."

"His wife was outa town at the particular time, and when she got back, the house was filthy and dirty. Bottles all over the house, and all kinds of cigarette cartons. She had been gone for almost two months, down to New Orleans somewhere to visit her sick sister. She left, and he knew she was going to be gone for a long time, over thirty days, at least. I mean, they would call each other. When she got back, that house was so filthy she had to hire somebody to help her clean up! He was supposed to have hired a maid to come in and do that! Now you know what she felt like doing then!" "I don't know, man,

that dude keeps messing up, she's going to kill him!" That's *exactly* what she did, she killed him.

A Citizen Thing

How People Push Others Into Violent Acts

You see, people talk about violence, but back in those days, you knew that they were going to kill somebody; you almost knew it . . . they keep on messing up, messing up. And keep pushing people, keep pushing people.

Another incident that came up, I knew this guy. He used to go by this filling station all the time, you know, and fill up his tank with gas, see. He would go in there and say, "hey man, I left my money at home, I'll be back tomorrow and pay you." "Oh, no, man!" "I told you, I'll be back tomorrow and pay you; I left my money at home!" And the man said, "okay, you be back in here tomorrow!"

And tomorrow never came, until he went back there, to get him some more gas. And he'd go, and do the same thing. The gas station guy would look out and see him coming and say, "Ahh, I guess the guy's coming to pay me today." No, he came to give him some more bullshit. Ha! He would go in there and fill his tank up. He'd say, "I ain't got my check yet. Put that down, I'll pay you." The man said, "man, you owe me for three times you filled up your tank here." "Hey man, I told you I didn't have no money; don't be pushing me, I'll pay you, I'll pay you!" See, the man wasn't pushing him, he was pushing the man!

See, he was pushing the man to kill him. The man got flusterated, he got flusterated 'cause he would come in and fill up his tank, and then give him a lot of shit. You see? If the man could have cut his tank off before he seen him, he would have done it. But the guy would fill his tank up, and one time he even wanted some cigarettes. The

station man said, "I got some over here in a carton . . . ." The guy said, "I'll take the whole carton. I'll pay you when I get my check." "No, I got to collect for these cigarettes, 'cause they don't belong to me." "Man, I ain't got no money. You're going to sell them, ain't you? I want the whole carton." I seen him do that. He was pushing the man to kill him.

Finally one day, that man pushed him too far. He had owed him for four or five times, and the man had been up to here! I mean, he couldn't go to the police, he had to do something hisself. A citizen thing. You see what I'm saying? Ha! The man went and got his sawed-off shotgun in the back. See, back in those days, you could have a gun. You could have guns, and you could let people see them. This guy kept on pushing this man. He pushed him and pushed him, and finally the man decided, "I got to kill him." The man didn't want to; he wanted his money.

Finally, like I say, he went and got his gun and set it behind him. The guy drove up in there. He started putting gas in his tank, and the man had up in his mind to blow his brains out if he didn't have any money. So he walked into the filling station, off-guard, like ain't nothing ever happened. "Hey man, I'll be back to pay you, I get my check this evening." "You pay me right now!" He said, "man . . . ." Boom! The gas-man blowed the boy's head off. It was a sad thing; it was all in the papers and everything. See, but like I say, you live by the gun, you die by the gun. There is a lot of things that done happened.

A lot of these things is happening now, people getting shot for talking to someone's girlfriend or something. Or if they'd be sneaking out on a lady. A lot of these girls right now'll blow you away. Back in those days . . . it wasn't happening too much, but right now you can get blowed away by a man or a woman. A woman wouldn't shoot you back in those days, I mean, not too many of them. But a man would pull a trigger on

you, see. Like I say, all this was gang-related, people pushing their luck, and pushing people.

He Portrayed it Like That

Slim Recounts the Story of a Woman Who Would Take No More, and Recalls His Father's Advice

One little fellow that I growed up with, in my hometown, he was a couple of years younger than me, I guess. He kept going out on his wife, and stuff. And then he'd beat her up, like *she* had done gone out on *him*! To get her off of asking him about, "hey, where have you been for the last two days?" See, he used to come home and whup her. He didn't want her to say anything about where he'd been. He'd come home and jump on her. Now, he done that for five or six years, since the day they married. He had his wife, and then he'd go out and stay with somebody all night or all day. Then he started staying two days, three days. You know, "I ain't got to go home, I'll go home and whup her butt! I'll kick her butt, right now!"

Finally, after five years, she got tired of it. And when he did come back, she was ready for him. She was going to take a whupping, or she was going to have to shoot him. And she wasn't going to take no more whuppings, 'cause that's the reason she went and got the gun, ain't it?

She didn't want no more whuppings; she was ready to shoot. When you go get a gun, you got it for a reason. You don't pull no gun if you ain't going to shoot it, you see what I'm saying? 'Cause you might get shot. I learned this here, a long time ago. So finally, after five years of him coming home and whupping her, she decided and said, "I'm going to end this thing tonight. The next time he do that. . . ." She'd been planning, but she always let him do it again. Finally, she just got tired of it. When you keep

getting away with a thing, you think you can get away with it anytime you get ready to. You start thinking, "I've been taking two days, I'm going to stay over here three days; I'll go over home and whip her butt, kick her ass."

He portrayed it like that. He thought he could go home and kick her ass, and everything's okay. She was waiting on him this time. He came in a door, this time, with a bottle in his hand. As soon as he hit the door and started jiving . . . Boom! Boom! Boom! She blowed him right back out the door! Ha! It ain't funny, but . . . he pushed it too far. People back in those days, there's a reason why they got killed.

'Cause people now, innocent people, kids are getting killed. Because they missed the one they was supposed to have shot. I mean, if you had it coming, you was going to get it, they was going to make sure. They wasn't going to shoot in no crowd; they were going to shoot you in your front door. You see what I'm saying? No drive-by-this and drive-by-that, gang-bang-this and gang-bang-that. It's a lot to keep up with.

Those police got a hell of a job out there, 'cause you'd be over here, and there's a call, "go over on 42nd Street," back and forth. Back in those days, police used to park right on the side of the highway, or someplace like that, and that was it. Now, if you're a policeman, you have to drive someplace; you can't park no place. There's so much going on, so many calls coming in. Because there's so much happening, drug arrests, gang-this, gang-that. It's crazy. Back in the old days, you kind of knew; if you done something, you was going to get killed.

Nowadays you get killed for sitting on the bus, or coming out of a theater. People drive by and they just spray a bunch of people. Boom! The guy they wanted to kill might not even be in there. That's crazy; even the gangsters in the old days, they made sure that when they sprayed a building they got the right guy. I learned a lot in barber shops and cafes, late at night, listening to them old people. And I know the talk . . . every

town I go into, they talk; they say things. And I can tell whether they're going to do something or not. You got to be real strong-hearted, and know what you want to do. It's easy to get in a gang. I wasn't ever in no gang. There was little gangs in my neighborhood, but it wasn't nothing heavy. Little boys running around, doing this and that. But they would beat up people.

I wasn't ever in no gang, but there would always come a time when these gangs didn't know what to do, and that's where I came in at. They'd see me going down the street and say, "Autry, what do you think about this?" I used to tell them, "if you beat up on somebody, somebody's going to beat up on you. If you run in a gang and do bad things, people are going to try to get back at you." I learned that from my daddy. My daddy told me, "if you do something, if you beat up on somebody, they going to come back on you." Ha! He used to say, "if they don't come back on you, you're lucky!"

I know what he meant by that. 'Cause some people would come back and kill you. You might have got the best of them, then, but they'll come back. It's just the same as anything else. You can be walking down the street, and somebody can call you a racial name. If they call you a racial name and keep going, it's okay. When they call you a racial name, and they stop . . . you see what I'm saying? Most people be wanting to fight, but I remember what my daddy told me. "If they keep going, let them go." It works; let them go! A lot of times, I'd be walking down the streets at night and people would come by and call me "coon," call me all kinds of things. But, I smile, when they keep going . . . 'cause of what my daddy told me, a long time ago.

Now I see why a lot of people done got killed and hurt. It's 'cause people stopped. And don't you do nothing to make them stop! I didn't give them no reason to stop, 'cause I didn't call them nothing. I didn't holler back at them. I used a little common sense, too. That's the reason people got killed, too. They didn't use no

common sense. I learned a lot in barbershops and cafes, late at night, listening to the people talk.

Violent Things That Came Through

Murder in a Bar

There was another place, a little old bar that we played at in St. Louis, Missouri. The guy was going to give us a couple of nights. At that time we was looking for jobs. And we went right in the place and, as soon as we started, there was a fight broke out. So the bass player, he grabbed one of the guys. So when he done that, the other guy ran out of the place. When the bass player turned him loose, the guy said, "I'm going after him!" "No, man, don't go out there. He done ran, so leave him alone. Get yourself a drink, I'll buy you a drink." "I'm going to get his ass, I'm going to get him!" The bass player was trying to tell him, "don't go out there, it's dark out there, you know." He ran out there, and the guy knifed him to death. Man, we couldn't hardly play that night. After getting a look at the guy, standing right 'side of you . . . and the next five minutes he's *dead.* We heard the ambulance, "Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhh!" A couple of guys came in the place and said, "that's the same guy who ran out of here."

Big Percy's Back in Town!

A Gangster Pimp Takes Over the Bar While Slim's Band is Playing

When I was fifteen, I guess I was the youngest member in my band. My boys was older than me. There used to be a place that we used to go to, and I used to walk right in. Then, when one of my boys walked in, they'd say, "Oh, you can't come in,

you're too young." The boys would say, "I'm older than he is!" "Oh, you ain't older than him; you're just a kid." And I was . . . like I said, I was the youngest one in my band. All my boys was sixteen, seventeen, nineteen.

Like I said, I used to walk right in, 'cause I always carried myself like a man. And I always had some mustache or something here, and I was six feet tall. And I never did go in no club eating a bag of potato chips, or sucking on no lolly-pop, no, uh-uh! I walked in with a piece of paper in my hand, like I was a businessman, or a book. And people didn't say nothing. They'd look at me, and I always had that smile. "This guy, with the smile, you can let him come in," you know. So one particular night, we was playing in this club; I had my band down there, trying to get known.

We was getting ready to close one night, we was getting through. In walked this pimp, big-shot gangster. Him and a couple of his boys, and a bunch of girls. We were playing the last number when he walked in. So I announced, "ladies and gentlemen, you just got here, but we've been playing all night, and we've got to go." But they said, "one more!" The guy was standing right 'side of me. I looked over, and the owner was nodding his head, like "yeah, play one more!" The saxophone player said, "who said that?" They said, "Big Percy!" The owner said, "I'll buy you guys a drink, if you play one more song." So I said, "okay."

We played another song, and the guy came over with whiskey, five shots of whiskey. "Now," he said, "we'll drink a toast to Big Percy!" So everybody held up their glass, he made us drink it. A lot of those guys didn't drink whiskey, but they drinked it that night! He said, "bottoms up! Big Percy's back in town!" And that's when the party began. "Give the band another drink!" "Oh no, Sir, we got to go. . . ." "I said, give the band another drink!" And he walked over to the bar. The bartender came over and he said, "Slim, when y'all finish packing up your stuff, I'm going to call last call. That way,

I can try to get these guys out of here. I know Big Percy, he's going to stay around. This joint is going to be jumping until six a.m. in the morning! I hate it when he comes, but I can't do nothing about it. But he wants to have his fucking way all but time. I'm going to try to get out of here, if I can."

So after we packed up, and was getting ready to go, he said, "give the band another drink!" The bartender said, "this is last call! " We was half out the door by then. So a friend of mine was there, we gave him the drinks. He said, "I'm going to party on; I'll take the whiskey!" So we left there. I talked to my friend the next day. I said, "hey man, what happened down there?" He said, "they was shooting and everything, man, girls was dancing and pulling off their tops. Oh man, I got blasted! Percy kept buying drinks, man, they locked up the door, and the jukebox was rolling on! When I went out of there," he said, "the bread man was bringing in the bread. It must have been around five-thirty or six in the morning. When I left, they were still partying. I staggered on down the Street, I made it home. I couldn't even get a cab."

I said, "Oh yeah? Somebody said they was shooting down there." "yeah, Big Percy said he shot some rat. A big rat ran across the floor, and Percy shot at him. I think he missed him, but he was looking for him, he was going to shoot again." See, if we didn't act natural, we could have gotten hurt. The guy had guns, and all of his men had guns . . . the guy wanted to hear one more song, we played it. So what. We could have said, "hey, I don't want this shit! Who do you think you are? You can't make me drink this, man! " He could have showed me who he was, could have snapped my neck, boom!

See, a lot of people don't use common sense. I hope this will help you. As long as nobody ain't got you down, ain't got you tied up, if you can walk away, why get violent? Back in the old days, people used to say, "why did he do that, why did she do that? If she just would have kept her mouth closed, she'd be here today." That's what

I'm talking about. So many of my friends and neighbors have lost their life by being too aggressive. They build their lives on violence, trying to get back at people. A lot of times, you don't ever get back. They keep their mind on that too long, rather than how to build their future, how to stay alive.

My own sister had to go and get her a gun. 'Cause she had this one guy that used to break into her house all the time. She'd go home, and he'd done break in. After he done broke in, he wouldn't let her call the police. He'd take the phone wire out and everything. See, 'cause he knew how to fix it back. He knew how to do all those things. And she'd put up with that for a long time. She got all kinds of restrictions and liens on him, but she'd come home any time of night, two o'clock in the morning, sometimes, and he'd done got in through the basement or some kind of way.

So she had to go out and get a gun. She had papers and stuff served against him, and all that did was make him keep doing it. He didn't care about that. He just thought, "if I can get in this house, I got it made." Finally she had to get a gun and a piece of paper that said, if he comes in your window, you can shoot him. I'm glad it didn't ever happen. Finally somebody else shot him, or something. That goes to show, he was not only doing her like that, he was doing somebody else like that. You see what I'm saying? I think he went in somebody else's house, and they shot him.

Once a person can get away with that, they'll go and try another place, too. If you go and robbed this place here, and get away . . . you think about robbing this other place. And then if you get away with that, you keep going. Same thing; people do that. These are violent things that came through in my life.

Fighting Every Night

Slim Describes the Most Violent Bar in Which He Has Played

There was some old bass player that had come over; he was going to steal my bass player's job. He was one of them fancy bass players out of St. Louis. And we had that little thing *going* on Sundays! Like I say, any place I've played, I've always been able to draw a crowd, and draw a lot of musicians, you see. This little Sunday thing was catching on, and bringing out some decent people. People were afraid to come in this place, and I see why, now. There was a fight every night in that place, or somewhere around the place.

So this old bass player, he had come up there, was going to steal him a job. My bass player, he knew this St. Louis bass-player. 'Cause he said, "there old George is, is he going to play tonight?" I said, "who is George?" I didn't even know him. "He played over there in St. Louis with a little band; I've seen him a couple times, if you want to hire him." He said, "I know what he come over here for." I didn't know the guy, but I'd let a bass player sit in, if he could play. But after I knew he was coming over there for the job, I decided not to let him play.

So, I held him off; I was going to let him play on the last set. He wanted to jump up there on the first set. I said, "no, stick around, and I'll let you play, 'cause I got some other guys that are going to sit in." I was thinking, I'm not going to let this guy sit in . . . that other guy be scared he's going to lose his job. So this St. Louis guy was popular with the girls, too, a pretty boy. He was dancing around out there, man. He had brought some woman over there with him, but he was out there having a good time.

This woman was thinking, "I thought he came over here to play bass." After I wouldn't let him play, he started having a good time with the girls. Pretty soon him and

his old lady got to fighting. I mean, they fought, and pretty soon her sister came in. So, I went to the bathroom, and the boss-man was back there. I was talking to him. He said, "don't let that old guy play! 'Cause I heard some talk. . . ." "what did you hear?" He said, "I hear he's trying to steal this boy's job. If I were you, I wouldn't let him play. 'Cause this boy's doing a good job for you." I said, "yeah, he sure is." "Don't even let him play; if he wants to know why, I'll put this forty-four in his nose. You tell him I said it! You tell him the boss said it! I'll chain-whip him!"

That boss, he was bad, boy! "I'll chain-whip his ass." After I knew what he'd come over there for, and after the boss done heard him, then after he had got to fighting, I couldn't let him play! It would have been an embarrassment to him to even get up there.

But he hung around. I said, "man, I can't let you play. There's too many other people sitting in, I got a lot of requests to do." "Oh man, I can beat that jive-time bass player. I can run circles around him." I said, "I ain't looking for it nobody to run circles around, I'm looking for somebody to do just what I tell them." He looked at me like, "Oh . . . ." I don't want you playing what you want to play, you'd be playing 'bobooboo bapaboobooo' and all that old stuff. You know, in blues, what I wanted, this boy was just playing 'doo de doo de doo. . .' That's all I needed. The St. Louis guy would have been trying to play too many figures. See, he was one of those fancy bass players. But I'm glad the boss, he spoke up, "you tell him I said it . . . I'll put this forty-four under his nose!" Ha! It's funny now.

Everybody, they knew what that place stood for; everybody knew about that place, fighting every night. One night, I thought we was actually going to make it through without a fight. We had made it to the third set. And I'd just talked to the boss back in the kitchen. He said, "all the bad folks have gone home! You only got about thirty-five more minutes to go; you can do twenty of that and we can be out of here. I

don't care; I'm going down in the hole tonight and do some drinking." I said, "Oh, okay," he was being nice about it.

As soon as we got up there and played one song, the bartender and the waitress got to fighting. Oh boy! "You bitch, you! You whore!" Mama and daughter, they was *mama* and *daughter*! Mama was bartender, and daughter was waitress. And they was arguing over some man. She accused her daughter of flirting with her old man. They started fighting and the boss broke out of the kitchen back there; he said, "Oh Lord! Slim, I thought we was going to make it. My own help here is fighting!" He went down there and pulled them off each other, and stopped them from fighting. He said, "I thought we was going to make it through the night; I'm sorry Slim." I said, "that's all right." He said, "don't *y'all* get to fighting before you leave."

He paid me off; he gave me the money. I said, "Lord have mercy!" I must have used three or four different drummers in this place. 'Cause at that particular time, I was using some young boys. And their mamas were afraid for them to play down at this place because we'd be playing, and jamming, and all at once a fight would break out. I mean, I used four different drummers down there. Each one of them said really good things about me; they said, "I really like playing with you, if you play any place else, Slim, I'd be glad to play with you. But I can't play down here no more. I'm risking my life." "I think about it every time . . . sometimes I think were going to make it through, and then a fight breaks out."

One guy had played there on three or four different occasions, and there was always a fight there. There was a fight in there every night. Even at the tables. Somebody would say, "you sonnofa," and boom, slap somebody. "You don't slap me!" Then it would quiet down. "You low-down son of a gun!" The boss would walk over

there, "y'all *cut that shit out* in here!" He was bad, man. He wore his pistol right on him. And he was ready to pull it.

When we first got the job, he shot two rats out in front of the place there. Some guys was going by, and he said, "I'll just shoot them niggers!" Ha! He scared me, man. We hadn't even played a note there. Like I say, every night there was a fight. Every night. A fight in the back, a fight in the front, a fight outside. But, it was really a fun place, as long as there wasn't no trouble. Four nights, he gave me four nights. First, I started out with two nights. We played Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday. I drew crowds. I had people coming there. He liked that. I had people coming in and spending money. A lot of the bands that played there, they brought a lot of bad folks. The boss man said, "that's the reason I got a lot of these bad folks, 'cause I've been having these bad bands. That's the reason I got you, Slim, you got a good name around town. They respect you; you got a clean band."

Right after then, we did stop playing there. Our last drummer, his mama wouldn't let him play over there. I mean, they was liking the money, but it was too dangerous for a child. And he was messing around over there in the park, on break time, with the girls. There was too much going on. I quit the job. I left there, I told the man, "I really appreciate that you let me play here." I think that was one of the roughest places that I ever played at. I had more chances of getting shot at, 'cause we played there four nights a week, and every night there was a fight. Somebody getting shot, fighting, cutting up somebody, or throwing a glass. There've been some other places that I've played at, and I always try to stay out of those places.

There was another place, the 'One Way in, and One Way Out,' in East St. Louis; it was down in a basement. We used to play over there on Sunday evening from three to seven; it was a matinee. We started off, it would be easy starting off. Then, long about

four o'clock, four-thirty, it started getting packed. It was just like a little kitchenette or something. The drummer was this close to half a pint of Crown Royal or something. Somebody may set their beer on your amp, because it is the only place around where you could set something.

People were right there, there wasn't no stage or nothing. And every Sunday, we'd be playing, and pretty soon, "Oh, look out, Slim!" Wham! "You fuckin' nigger!" Boom! The boys'd say, "watch your stuff, Slim! Cover your stuff!" I used to have to stand right in front of my stuff. One time I almost got hit, a guy swung at a guy and missed him, and almost hit me. Because it was just like in a little room. Man, they'd get to *fighting* in there! I almost lost my life every Sunday in there. I played in there for four weeks. And I had to tell the guy, I said, "hey man, I got to put this down." He said, " I understand, Slim, I'm sorry, man."

But, like I say, I've been through my world of violence, and I've seen gangs and all kinds of things happen. I hope if you listened to this, you can learn a lot from it. If you listen to it over and over, you really can learn something. It can teach you a lot of things about being wise, and being cool. And stop being a fool. Some people are fools, that's why they get killed. I don't understand why they get into gangs; it's not for pride. It's not no pride at all. I mean, I think you're letting your pride *down* when you get into a gang. 'Cause you can't get out. Pride can't get you out. I very seldom talk about it, but I wanted to tell this to you, and it might be my only chance to do that. This is Eagle Park Slim, signing off right now. Stay out of trouble, please.

Talking to the People of Eagle Park

Slim Tells the History of Eagle Park, Illinois to Its Current Residents, and Tells Them How to Rebuild It

Anyway, I'm sitting here in my hotel room at the Saint Regis Hotel in Seattle, Washington looking over the Puget Sound Ocean, looking mighty blue and clear right now between two buildings. Right above it, Pike Place Market, First Street, First Avenue. There's a bus pulling around the corner there, letting out people, and heading down to Pike Place market. At the present time, this is around twelve noon, when people are going to lunch. This looks real busy, like the street in New York or some place, during the noon hour. People are going back and forth to work, or eating lunch. It's real exciting.

I'd like to talk about my home town, where I got my name from, Eagle Park Slim. I'm really proud of that name because I've held onto it for years. I guess I must have got that name at the age of thirteen or fourteen, when I was first named Eagle Park Slim. The man who named me Eagle Park Slim, his name was Grover Henry. I really appreciate him naming me that because . . . it's just like Chicago Slim, or Memphis Slim, or St. Louis Slim, or whatever.

I didn't think of it then, at that time, you know. Because before I knew, it everybody was calling me that. Anyway, because he made sure that everybody called me Eagle Park Slim. 'Cause he'd say, "one of these days, boy, you're going to be great! Just like B.B. King, and all those guys, Muddy Waters." He used to sit out in front of my mom's cafe and lounge, and tell everybody. "Eagle Park Slim, this guy's going to be great!" I used to sit on my porch, playing over there. 'Cause we had a little house, right 'side of the tavern.

My mom's tavern was named Village Tavern at that time. We had a little house on the side over there. We first had a place in the back; then we moved our living-quarters out to the side, and I got a chance to play on the porch. People use to come out; Grover used to go into the tavern there, and grab him a beer, and he would bring people out, "Come out! Come out here, hear this guy!" He said, "that's Eagle Park Slim, Eagle Park Slim!" So I started going around; 'cause I used to drive my daddy's car, picking up groceries and stuff for the place. Getting all kinds of food and stuff. So, when I was getting out people used to see me someplace . . . and everybody just started calling me that.

So finally, I decided to put it on my car. And I drove my car around; I put 'Eagle Park Slim' on it. And people always said to me, back then, "nice name, nice name; are you Eagle Park Slim?" I said, "yes, I guess I am." Ha! They said, "yes, I guess you is! Just like Memphis Slim and Chicago Slim . . . and you fit the description, you sure can play! I heard you play." Eagle Park Slim was born right there. I started getting a little, well . . . famous as you say, moving on to different spots in my life, trying to carry my life on, trying to carry the name on.

The name wouldn't get away from me, I played in different bands, but the name still stood there. I don't care what band I played in, the name stood right there . . . Eagle Park Slim. People would come up and say, "Eagle Park Slim!" I just kept playing in bands between day years of 1969 and 79. It was some hard years, you know. I got to playing in different places. And if you're working two or three nights a week, there's always a reason why. 'Cause most bands always worked on a Friday and Saturday, back in those days. And the pay was pitiful. But the name kept going on, and I'd like to tell everybody now, that finally the name is getting some appreciation. And I want the town to get some appreciation, too.

I'm going to say something to the people of Eagle Park that a lot of people have never heard, and would have never knowed about Eagle Park, if they hadn't heard it from me. But I want to tell you people right now, you're living in a wonderful place. And you're living in a nice place, which could be a nice place . . . it used to be a nice place. You've had great stars, people who made it big, who were always in Eagle Park. Some of the people you might know, like Albert "Blues Boy" King. He was always in Eagle Park, he loved Eagle Park, you know. Eagle Park was like a hide-away, or get-away from St. Louis. Little Milton, he loved Eagle Park. See, Roosevelt Marks, Ike and Tina Turner, and I can name a lot of people who loved Eagle Park so well. There was another musician who lived in Eagle Park who was just as good as Chuck Berry. Chuck Berry was in Eagle Park; I played with Chuck Berry, at my daddy's place. I was sixteen years old.

See, we had a lot of great people. Sam Cooke, he been to my Mama's place. I remember one night, it was Sam Cook, Bobby Bland, and a bunch of them came. They was looking for a place . . . they had played a show in St. Louis . . . they was looking for a place to eat. Some musicians told them, they had wanted to know, "where can we get us some barbecue, chitlins, and soul-food like that?" He said "No place in St. Louis, but, there's a place across the river, there. That lady, she knows how to cook that food . . . man she cooks some funky chitlins." He said, "where he is this place at?" "In a place called Eagle Park."

This guy said, "Man, I'm going over there, 'cause I got a little girl I'm getting ready to take over there." He said, "a little girl?" "Yeah, there is a little motel right there in the back." "Oh man, this sounds like a great place." He brought them over. And long about in the morning time, I guess they got over there about three-thirty, we got a knock at the door. "Hey, hey! anybody still around?!" So Mama, she got up, 'cause I heard her

tell my daddy, "sounds like some musicians . . . they're trying to get in." He said, "it ain't nobody but Lovey T. trying to get a drink." We used to have a couple of guys that would try to come there after hours to get a drink.

What it was, though, it was Bobby Bland, Sam Cooke, and somebody else that was appearing with them in St. Louis at the same time. This was 1958, or somewhere around there, when things was really going good there, in Eagle Park. You see what I'm saying? Eagle Park at that time was a boom town. I'm going to start back on the front. It seems like a lot of people, kids especially, they wouldn't have thought that there was jobs in Eagle Park. Man, there was all kind of jobs in Eagle Park.

See, Eagle Park didn't start with people just building houses out there. It started off with business places. Something else, the first person that settled there had a business there, which was my aunt Ruby. She had the first business in Eagle Park. She had a husband, which was my uncle, and he worked on the railroad. So they built a little house right there, by the railroad. 'Cause I used to see him, working on the railroad, and she'd be working in her garden. She growed peas, corn, butter beans, tomatoes. And she canned everything.

She had people coming from all over: Madison, Brooklyn, Newport, every place, getting her hot pickle relish cha-cha. Her cha-cha business got so big that she had to hire people to wash jars. That was a job there, and she had more than one person, 'cause I used to get down there on Saturdays and Sundays myself, and wash jars and stuff for her. For every jar you would wash she would give you a dime. Man, I'd get into there and wash me about ten or twelve of them jars, get me a dollar and a half, and I'd be out of there! And there was other kids in the neighborhood doing the same thing.

She always had people down there washing jars. 'Cause you'd go down to her house and say, "Ruby, you got anything to do?" She'd say, "yeah, there's some jars in

there that need to be washed." See, that was a job! She'd tell me sometimes, "I don't know what I'm going to do, people coming out here getting those cha-chas!" I mean, it was hot, I don't know what she put in it, but she was selling it so fast people was buying it almost by the case!

The next person became into Eagle Park started a business, which was my people. James McNeace and Seola McNeace; we opened up to a place called the Village Tavern, which is now called Blakes. The place still stands, and it still can become the place that it was. See, I'm telling you about the boom time.

At first, Eagle Park wasn't nothing but a swamp. There used to be a lot of water standing between Roosevelt Drive and Carver Street. That was a big ditch in there, nothing but water. We had to fill it in by people dumping from Madison, Pontoon Beach, and Granite City. They used to dump all their garbage and trash out there to fill in that hole. We had to have something to fill in the hole with, so they started dumping there. At first they had been dumping over there by Tony Range's, which they was paying him for. Tony had a dump, and I remember he wouldn't let us go through the garbage till after he'd picked out all the good stuff. But after we started moving there, they started dumping in Eagle Park for nothing.

Most of Eagle Park was built up with a lot of dumping. We used to find a lot of stuff there. People used to always throw out nice chairs and couches, watches and rings. We used to be glad to see the people come and dump, 'cause we didn't have nothing, and we was trying to build up. Like I say, Eagle Park started as a business town. The first four or five people that moved there brought their businesses. These businesses started coming; people started saying, "oh, they got *this*, and they got *that*." Pretty soon we had everything out there that a person could want. Barber shop, a place to get liquor, churches, everything that makes the community. And the people that ran these places

were very respectable people. You could go to these people for advice and stuff. And they would welcome you in.

My auntie, Ruby McNeace, had the first store out there. She sold her canned goods and stuff she made. Canned food in jars. She employed four or five people. You could go down there on Saturdays and Sundays and wash jars all day. Like I said, she'd pay five or ten cents a jar. Back in 1948, '49, '50 that was some good money. Sometimes it was more than your mom or daddy was making on their job. Our place, the Village Tavern opened up, and that made four or five more jobs. We had to hire people, 'cause we couldn't run it all by ourselves.

Like I say, my mama's place drawed a lot of different people, big-time people out to Eagle Park. Everybody respected my people, respected what they had. 'Cause there was never too much trouble would come from our place, like trouble come from a lot of these places now. It was like a family thing. See, and that's what we got to get back . . . family atmosphere. When you got family, you got more than one thing going on. A person can take their whole family, and you know they ain't going to do no wrong in front of their kids. That's what people are going back to, the same thing as my mom did. Some people used to come out, and they'd bring their kids with them. The kids would go out in the back and play or something.

There was another place out there, which was my sister's place. It was called Eagle Park motel, in the back of the Village Tavern. When they opened up back there, it was like a vacation spot, a picnic place . . . a getaway. If you wanted to get away with a lady, or with a man, there was a place like Eagle Park. You could go over and have a nice time. Eagle Park was like the vacation spot. Especially in the summertime, people used to come and hang out. My daddy would put a chair and stuff outside and he'd say, "you clean this off because so-and-so, Big Red, is coming in today with a couple of his

ladies and guys. They're going to have a party." I used to set up tables and stuff outside in the yard. They would sit there, and have their drinks, and eat. Somebody would pull up in a big Cadillac or something and pick them up. Everybody was there, and we wasn't looking at no color.

I was smart; I knew about St. Louis. But I seen more St. Louis license plates over to my sister's motel than I'd seen anywhere. A lot of those cab drivers from St. Louis found out about it and started coming over. One cab driver would tell other cab drivers. Nobody was afraid; nobody was even hustled, no trouble. It was just so smooth back in those days. Everybody was doing their own thing. And Eagle Park was steady growing. This was back in 1949,'50. I must have been about eight or nine years old.

My sister employed three or four people at her motel, washing sheets and folding sheets. She said, "me and my husband can't take care of this, so I got to hire some people." She had to have somebody to iron; somebody to stay there to check the place. Her business was steady growing. She employed a lot of the girls in the neighborhood two days a week, or one day a week. See, that was a job, another job.

There was another place started up, Bug Wright's place on the corner. Right below him was another business named Mom's Confectionery. She had a confectionery; she brought four or five more jobs when she come in. She was, back in those days, a Russell Stowell-type candy place. I remember her so well; she would always have the same candy as everybody else, but she would make her candy look so good by putting little doilies around them, little ribbons . . . you walk into her candy place, you would look at it . . . and she had those Russell Stowell prices, too!

You would *have* to buy a piece of candy, before you'd leave out of there. You would go out . . . and then come back in . . . it looked so good, that they would end up taking one. People, they'd count their money, and go back in. 'Cause her candy was a

little higher price than any in the neighborhood. And another thing, she had more, of different kinds . . . other people just had four or five boxes of this, four or five boxes of that. Maybe the candy that they sold to other stores, she didn't sell much of that, but she sold the other stuff that they didn't have. Or a new kind of a piece of candy or something. She knew how to sell candy! She would get candy that other stores didn't get. Like I said, there was jobs there; Eagle Park was a boom town. Boom town!

People was moving into Eagle Park so fast, while these businesses was moving in. "Man, they got this out there." Man, they was moving in so fast; it was selling so cheap they upped the price on it! It started at one price, pretty quick they said, "the land in Eagle Park is going fast!" Because people was buying it out. They wanted to see what's going on here. See, we was building a town! That town is dying, now. I think that town stopped building after 1960. That's when I left, right around 1960. It hadn't growed none, hadn't got no better. I'm talking about the boom years, now.

Since there is nothing in Eagle Park now, Eagle Park has started all back over right now. They need somebody to put a grocery store over here, a confectionery over here, a 7-11 over here. Once you get all them things, people will start coming back. Like I said, the name draws people. They hear that name; it draws people, all kinds of people. 'Cause I've had people come out to hear me play, they seen the name Eagle Park Slim, they come! Like I say, the name 'Eagle Park' is real big, bigger than what you think it is. Eagle Park still can be a boom town. It's never too late. The atmosphere has just died here, and nobody ever picked it back up.

Nowadays, it's time for people to start having a business again and trying to make it. Because its going to be hard to be assured of a job. The only way to be assured of a job is to have some kind of business, you got people working for you. A lot of people are going to lose their jobs because a lot of entrepreneurs are starting off in life having

opened up new businesses, and older businesses are closing up. To be able to compete with the market, you're going to have to have new techniques and machines, data processes and all them kind of computer things.

It's time for Eagle Park to get their thoughts together. In order to make a town grow, you got to put some businesses out there. Open up something, or get something going. Open up a store, open up something that will make people want to come out there, want to live out there. Don't think, "there ain't nothing here, why should I open up a store . . . ." If everybody thinked that way, that's why the place is like it is now.

'Cause if everybody said, "I ain't going to open no store, they're going to rob me . . . " When Eagle Park was a boom town, there wasn't no robbery! People ain't had time to rob; people was making money! When there ain't nothing in a place, people think about robbing the only place that's open. They sit down on the next corner, "hey man, let's try to break into old man Jone's down there tonight, we'll hit him when he come out." 'Cause that's the only place working. But see, if there were four or five places going like old man Jones, they wouldn't be thinking about it; they'd be working down there, at one of them places!

See what I'm saying, when you've done closed everything up, everything be pointing at old man Jones. That's the only place they think has got some money, 'cause that's where everybody is going in and spending some money. But if Sally had a place, and Mrs. Jones had a place, and Mrs. Johnson had a place, you'd be dividing this money up between the neighborhood.

I'm going to get on, because I've got a lot to tell you and I ain't got much time. I need to get this message out there, right away.

Eagle Park had the best of everything. Some of the best scholars and schools. I was about nine years old when I remember most of everything. When I was between five

and eight I remember some things . . . I remember my dad whipping my butt! I remember that! But at nine, that's when my music career started, and I began to get out, and see the community, and be a part of the community myself.

In fact, at that time, people used to get their newspaper on time! I'm going to tell you about an old newspaper boy, which was my nephew Vondee Smith. His daddy was my brother, he is my brother. Now, he was like the pony express. Let me tell you about the people that's needed in a town. He got their mail there on time; this guy got your paper there *on time*! And he had to work, 'cause his daddy had a lot of work around the house. His daddy was a carpenter, and he was building other folk's houses.

You see what I'm saying? All kinds of the excitement going on. You could get jobs building houses at that time, wrecking box cars. And at the same time here, we had a fellow here that was getting your paper to you on time, better than you're probably getting it now! That's one thing that he made sure of, that he'd get your papers out. He'd stay up all night long delivering the papers. The things that he had to go through, it was like the pony express; he had to go through a lot of gangsters and crooks to try and get the mail through on time. He had to go through a lot of dogs, and people at night and stuff, especially dogs, because he would be out very late at night. At night time, the dogs owned the streets, and Vondee would be running from them dogs.

I'm telling you all this, because one time he got sick, and I had to take his paper route. And he was telling me, he said, "be careful of Mrs. Jones's dog down there, sometimes he's loose . . . he's in the fence it's okay, if he's loose, you watch it! That joker will bite you!" I said, "Oh yeah?" See, I knew this dog. He said, "he might not bite you in the daytime, but he'll bite you at night. There is another dog back here, Mrs. Johnson's dog, you've got to watch him. When you go back there, kind of sneak behind

the weeds." I went out there carrying them papers, man, I was scared! I got past the weeds and I heard that dog go, "woof! woof!"

That's when I learned how to run! Man, I became a good runner. I used to have guys from Madison, Newport, all of them, they used to come out and race me with their bikes. I was the 'bike king,' I'd beat everybody. That's one thing about it, they couldn't outrun me, I was a good runner. Like I said, there was all kinds of ways to make money. I used to make money with my bike, they would pay me. "Man, I'll bet you a dollar! I'll bet I'd beat you!" Man, I'd take their money all the time. Nobody didn't beat me! The one guy that I was scared of, that I thought he was going to beat me, he didn't beat me . . . Bobby Dean. He came out one day, and he was trying to race me; he scared me. He was right behind me, and I was sweating, but I still beat him. I think we probably got there at the same time, but I still beat him. But see, there was money . . . they'd race me, I'd outrun them . . . boom town!

Here's another one . . . the grocery store. He came in, Mr. Dean's grocery store. He began to sell stuff up there, and people began to come in 'cause he had a variety of different kinds of meat. A lot of the stores that had come in before didn't keep no meat. When Mr. Dean come in, he brought in meat, like balogna and different kinds of cheese . . . hot dogs mostly, and stuff like that. So people didn't have to go up town to get that, 'cause he always kept plenty there. As his business picked up, him and his wife started out there, sometimes on Saturday and Sunday they would hire somebody, because his wife would stay at the store while he run around gathering up merchandise for the store. He'd go out and take his car and pick up stuff.

At that time, we was also hauling water, 'cause we didn't have no water. We was getting it from different places up there, a place called Sam's, a little grocery store on the corner there. There was another place, a couple of filling stations where we got water.

Because Eagle Park didn't have no water. We had water, but it was rusty water. It wasn't no purified water. But still . . . boom town! People still moving in, and we ain't got no water! We didn't have no water! People, when they'd move in, they brought their jugs with them, yes sir! Jugs and cans, they were prepared to go up town and get water! And the man who was up town selling water, he was happy. 'Cause he had more and more people coming up. Some people had businesses, like us, we had to get more water. Some people got three or four jugs a week; we got six or ten jugs a week. I've already named off four or five business places . . . how many business places you got there now?

The next place that I remember is Jerry's Teentown and Jerry's Confectionery. There was a confectionery across the street which was Miss Taylor's. You see, there was two confectioneries in those grocery stores, right across the street from each other. I don't know which one moved in there first, but I think Miss Taylor's was first, and then Jerry bought that place there. The next place was Mrs. Hurd's Teentown. You see, there was two places for teenagers to go. And we'd play music in these places, because I played music in both of these places. We didn't make a whole lot of money; we were all kids. But it was a place to play. Also, it was another job . . . I'm speaking of jobs now.

That's what it's going to take to build back Eagle Park. See, we had jobs there. Jerry had a couple people working for him watching the place. He'd pay two or three dollars a night. Miss Taylor, she had mostly her family people in there. Especially because they liked to go to church a lot, and they would still have the confectionery open when they went to church. All these places was going on, and I'm not through! There was a place right there on Roosevelt Drive, it used to be called McCain's. When McCain grocery store come in, they brought in things like feed and coal, and fuel oil.

See, because you had to go up town to get all that type stuff. He used to go up town and haul tons of coal back here and dump it in his backyard, and sell coal by the

bushel. Okay now, it's a job . . . he couldn't do it by himself. He tried, but everyone said, after a while he had to hire somebody. He worked hard at it; all these places I'm telling you about, I worked at them. 'Cause I used to work all over the neighborhood. "Will you watch my place tonight?" They knowed that my parents had a place, and they trusted me. A lot of times I used to watch up at McCain's there, because his wife used to be in the back there cutting meat; he'd be back in the back getting coal. She used to say, "why don't you watch up there, till I get through cutting this man some meat?"

You know, the cash register was right up there by the door. But that was a place to work. Finally, she had to put somebody up there. Things started picking up; she had to start cutting more meat, and pretty soon she said, "I got to hire me somebody." See, there is another job. I mean, Eagle Park was growing! I guess, at that time, I was about fifteen or sixteen. These were jobs, right here in Eagle Park, and people was happy!

I'll tell you about some interesting guys that everybody should know, and try to find out about, and really put a flower on their graves. They practically built Eagle Park. They dug a lot of holes, dug a lot of toilets, they dug a lot of fences, everything. These guys worked and sweated their backs off, but they was happy. People would come up town and try to get these guys to work for them. But they loved Eagle Park, they'd dug up Eagle Park; they planted Eagle Park. I never knowed their last name, all I ever knowed them by was Howard and Big Boy. Everybody knew them by that; they was two brothers. They worked together, they fought together, they drank wine together. And they wouldn't work without each other.

One time they got mad at each other, and boy, you think that Eagle Park wasn't hurting? They wouldn't speak to each other for about three weeks . . . nobody got their house dug, nobody got no water, or nothing. They got together one day; Mama called them down to her place. They all knew my Mama, and they respected my Mama. She

talked to them, she said, "people are waiting on you to dig their toilets, to dig their gardens up, and you guys are sitting over here, losing all this money! Why don't you take a drink here, and shake hands, 'cause you're holding up work. I got a hole over there I got to get dug." Big Boy said, "I didn't know you had no hole out there you wanted to get dug." She said, "I want you all to get that hole dug here, and Autry is going to help you." We got out there together and dug that hole, and they got back together. It was just like a strike; nobody was getting their holes dug. Big boy and Howard were mad at each other, but those guys were responsible for hauling a lot of water out there.

And they were dependable guys, and there was other guys in the neighborhood, and they had jobs, there was plenty of jobs. See, I told you that work was backed up three weeks! People was moving in, wanting this and wanting that. Eagle Park was a boom town!

There was another guy out there, Johnny Jones. Johnny Jones became so big, he had a junk yard, grocery store, and barber shop combined in one! And man, Johnny Jones used to have a lot of jobs. Cutting up wood, and cutting up cross-ties. Man, he was selling firewood; he was selling iron and junk, glass. It was jobs! And every Saturday there would be ten or twelve guys racing for them jobs . . . and you could work all day Sunday. He always had something for you to do. You would think that he'd run out of things for you to do, and you could rest for a while, but he would find something else. He always kept a lot of those old cross-ties around.

I used to hate when he got that old saw out, 'cause you knew that we was going to cut cross-ties. But, he kept you busy, and he paid you. You could make yourself five or ten dollars a day. Boom town, Eagle Park! He had a barber shop . . . he had you out there working in the yard, while he cut hair! It was kind of like Mr. Bug Wright, in some

ways: he'd stop cutting your hair, and go out in front to go get something for somebody, a can of beer or something. But he had people employed, out there working at this and that. He kept his place nice and clean; he had the garden going out back there too. We'd be working all over, in the garden, digging toilets, and all kinds of stuff. In those days, he would send you down the street to dig somebody's toilet; they'd be paying him.

And boy, we used to race, 'cause he paid good money. All the iron and stuff, we would take it there. I'll always remember that, 'cause I knew that was a place I could make me ten or twelve dollars. Go out there and work for him all day, you worked, too! Yeah, you'd be tired, Buddy. Now all these things was going on at the same time, I'm talking about. All these places was open at one time. I named ten or twelve places, and there was about twelve more places . . . doing their own thing, selling this and selling that. People used to sew, and quilt and do all kinds of stuff. I know Mama used to make quilts. She used to get good money for them quilts; people would come out and give her a hundred dollars for one, you see what I'm saying? Everybody else, they was getting twenty-five or thirty dollars; she would get fifty or sixty bucks. It's still the same way, you've got to sell! All these people here, they have what people *want*.

And what people want, right now in Eagle Park, is some stores to start opening up. 'Cause it don't make no difference where you're at; if you got what people want, they'll come where you're at. That's why I'm so proud of Eagle Park. There was enough for everybody. Eagle Park had the best barbers, the best basketball players. That's why it was a boom town, the best was moving in. In Eagle Park, someone took over! It was a little old place at first. Folks started coming out, and going through school.

I'll tell you one thing about Eagle Park . . . it had some of the best basketball players, cheerleaders and stuff like that. That's why Eagle Park became a part of the

community of Venice. They didn't want to come to Eagle Park at first, but they had to accept us in. After we started coming in with everything, the best players, the best students, they all come out of Eagle Park. I mean 'A' students. I'm taking you back way before Eagle Park was even in, it was just trying to get in.

Don't Depend on Nothing That Can't Depend on Itself

How to Get What You're Worth, How to Avoid Being Let Down by Others

Hello out there in radio land, wherever you might be. This is your buddy Eagle Park Slim, talking to you, May 10, 1993 to be exact. And I want to talk to you about some things that's been happening, that started in 1982. Between 1982 and 1983, from having triple bypass surgery, I started seeing things clear. It seemed like I had a brand new heart, a brand new life that was getting ready to happen, you know. I started seeing through things, 'cause I used to didn't see things until I'd been gypped, and somebody done took all the money and took a ship . . . and left me! Ha! But I started seeing things more clearly.

I knew this one boy; he was a harmonica player. He was telling me, he said, "hey man, there is a party over here, Charlie's having a party." "Oh yeah?" He said, "yeah, man, there'll be a lot of girls around, lot of things happening." I wasn't playing nowhere; I said "I believe I will go. . . ." I needed some money at that time. You know, I wasn't playing; I had just coming out of the hospital, I hadn't worked, I wasn't getting no money and stuff from the state . . . you run out fast! He said, "you know, Slim, I'm sure that we're going to make something. . . ." Well, I went over there, went into the party.

We got there kind of early, so we got a chance to play an early set. I hadn't even met Charlie yet, and I had played a whole set! Everybody was clapping their hands,

saying, "you're going to be good! Wait till old Jake comes here, wait till old Paul gets here. They'll really like you, man . . . we're going to rock all night long!" There was a lot of money around, gathering around, people coming in. I said, "you've got more musicians coming?" "There's going to be a lot of people coming, man!" "Oh man, this goin' to be a party ain't it!" He said, "I told you, man, I told you!"

I couldn't understand, you know, the money . . . the guy having a party like this, and nobody getting paid, all this free entertainment. See, what I didn't know was that all these guys was coming to score dope. I didn't know what kind of party it was. Finally, I met Charlie. You know, the guy carried me back, he said, "let's go meet Charlie. . . ." First thing I seen it, Charlie had a stack of money big as a brick, he had to hold it with two hands, he had so much money! He said, "come on in, brother, come on in, yeah!" Nice, man, we're going to kick tonight!"

He said, "wait a minute . . . I got to go put this money away." "I see you got some money there . . . " He said, "yeah, business has been pretty good." I said, "everybody ain't got here yet." "Charlie," the harp player said, "this is Eagle Park Slim, the guy I told you about." "Man, I'm so glad you come out to the party; everybody ain't got out here yet, just grab you some brew, some chips and dips, and kick back." I said, "I was just wondering, he didn't know for sure, was anybody getting paid. . . ." He said, "Oh, no. There ain't no pay; I got all kinds of musicians glad to just come and play. No, I'm sorry about that, if you misunderstood." I said, "yeah, I did misunderstand. I didn't know what was happening."

He said, "Oh, I got a lot of friends, they come by, you know. They play all night; I gave them a little package, you know. I'll do the same for you . . . but, not tonight, because I'm kind of low." I said, "That's cool, I don't want no package; I want some money." He said, "I'm sorry you misunderstood . . . Bud, you should have told him. . . ."

"well, I didn't know for sure, I thought by he's being Eagle Park Slim, maybe he could get tips or something." The guy said, "if you want me to, I could put up a tip-jar while you're playing. I'll put the first five in it." I said, "I'm going to be playing another set, then I'm going to be getting out of here."

He said, "I'm glad you came out; enjoy yourself, everything is free, ladies be coming in, you know . . . hanging out, man! We're going to be here till about four in the morning." It was only like, ten, then. It was early. I'd done played there almost two sets. We got there around eight-thirty or so; there was barely anybody there, so few people. They was just bringing out the trays and stuff, you know, drinks and stuff. So I told the guys, "come on man, we'll play about five or six more songs. You can take me home, and you can come on back."

He said, "Okay, Slim, I'm sorry." "It's okay." Man, he's making all kinds of money. He's back there, the money he had in his hands, you know, hundred dollar bills! Twenties, bunch of twenties, he was making all kinds of money! But he wasn't paying nobody nothing! Oh, man, I couldn't see it. You know, I'd been through that. I said, "*uh-uh*!" See, I'd seen that . . . see, I know that at times, I wouldn't have seen that! But, like I say since 1982, I woke up, and I can see through things, see, that's the way I am, you know. And if you don't get it done, I am gonna, see; I ain't going to sit and wait on you! . . . I ain't going to sit and depend on an old car no more, something what'll break down anyway on you!

That's what people do . . . they know a car's going to break down anyway on them, they fix it, and then it breaks down on them again. Like I said, I had a lot of cars, and they wasn't no *good* cars, either. This'd blow out, and this need a valve . . . and the water started leaking, and the bulbs red-lit-up come on, and the transmission's

dropping . . . I've been through all of those stuff! That's why I'm saying, right now, I'm trying to find me a chauffeur. You understand what I'm saying? I'm trying to find someone to drive me; I don't even want to drive. I'd rather pay you to drive one of those cars.

But I knew the time that I wouldn't be without a car. I'd go out on the street and buy me a car, man. Fifty bucks, probably wasn't running, but I'd get it running, work on it, 'cause I had three or four jackalack mechanics living in the neighborhood, and man, they'd get my cars going. Between them, I'd get one to do this, and one to do that.

One time I had a homeboy in the neighborhood; he put in a wheel-kit cylinder, where you put that kit and the fluid and stuff in there. He said, "I ain't going to be able to finish it." I said, "what you mean you ain't going to be able to finish it?!" He said, "Well, I got to do something else for somebody else, and I can work on it and do half of it today, and then I'll come back tomorrow around four o'clock and finish it up for you." "Are you telling me you ain't going to have it fixed until tomorrow?" He said, "I'm sorry, I got to work on somebody else's car." He was that kind of a mechanic. He'd say, "I'll be over at your house at twelve and put your cylinder in, then I got to be over here at Mr. Jones and put a battery in for him."

The people had him doing little things all over the neighborhood. He was a shade-tree mechanic. I had got up that morning, and I had give him the stuff that evening before, the kit and everything. In the morning he was out there working on it. He worked on it until eleven-thirty. He said, "I got to go now; I got to go over here and work on Mr. Sim's radiator. His radiator is leaking. I got to go and see can I patch it up for him . . . I'll be back tomorrow evening." He said, "I got to work all day with my dad in the field, and fix my own car." Boy, that man was busy, I'll tell you, but . . . he would

make it! I'll never forget his name; his name was Old Jonas. And my Mama had asked me, she said, "that boy 'a going to fix your car?"

I said, "yeah, he's supposed to be here at four o'clock." She said, "well, I need for you to go up town, you'll have to take your daddy's car." Well, I hated to take my daddy's car. But, it was either he'd go or I'd go. So, Daddy didn't want to go. When I come back, it was like five o'clock. I went over, I said, "hey, Jonas!" "I almost got it; I almost got it. I need you to pump those brakes for me." "Let me take this package in the house, Jonas, I'll be right back." I went in and took the package to the house. When I went back out there, Jonas had got up under the car. He said, "pump 'em!" So, I pumped them, I pumped them up again, and again. He said, "okay, this is the best I can do."

It was not a full brake, but a half brake, you know. That lasts for about three weeks, you see what I'm saying? I had to get another guy to bleed my brakes, and he said Jonas done it wrong, and so-and-so messed up this. Jonas himself was a jackalack mechanic, but he would talk about the other ones. 'Cause he's mad, 'cause you went and got him to do it! He's tired of hearing it, "everywhere I'd go, I'm catching up what Jonas done wrong, messed up." And Jonas is saying the same thing, "I'm tired of fixing up everything that James done messed up!"

See, they all be talking about each other. They didn't know what the hell they were doing. 'Cause they didn't have no book or nothing. And you might get your car fixed for a little while . . . but they was good old boys. There is a few of them still around. I'm just saying, I'd been through those car breakdowns. And it's a shame. Because I've wasted a lot of time, I could have been gone. I didn't go nowhere 'cause of my car, man, I wanted my car; I didn't want to move without my car. Everybody else jumped on a train or bus and left. I wouldn't go nowhere without that car.

I got so glued to that car, I started riding to the store. Mama would say, "don't take that car!" See, I was about sixteen years old then. The store was one block, and I used to ride my car. But, see, that was then. But see, I'm telling you, don't you do like me. That's wrong, 'cause you'll ain't doing yourself no good. Man, don't you depend on *nothing* that can't depend on itself!

You know, I know this girl, she got this job, and she lost it . . . she said, "my car wouldn't start." "Didn't start? Why didn't you get out and catch a bus?" "Well, it was too late, then. I called the people; they told me; better luck next time." I said, "I don't blame them. Let me tell you something. Next time you get an interview for a job, you catch you a cab or a bus." She said, "yeah, you're right; this makes three times! One time the hose broke on it-- I was on the way to a job."

I said, "Oh Lord, don't never let no car hold you up from no job! Especially when you know they break down anyways." She said, " yeah, it's not a real good car." It's nothing to depend on, nothing to be proud of. Listen, go and spend some money, you get yourself something that's real nice, something that's going to run. These little old junkers, these Datsuns up and down the street, it's going to put you down, too.

The next time you get a call for a job, whether you got a car or not, don't you depend on no friend to come by. She said, "one of my friends let me down; she waited right up until the minute, then she called me and told me she had car trouble." I said, "you get your butt out'a here, get you a bus or something. Them buses are going to be running. One of them breaks down, there is going to be another one. But you ain't got nothing to put in your place when your car breaks down." "I see what you mean." I said, "don't let no friend hang you up! You done took too many chances on things like that; you got to move on!"

See, if you ain't going to have nothing dependable, ain't no sense in having it. It's going to put you down. So many stories like that, so many stories . . . be many more going down like that, too. You let people run you down.

But, back to getting paid, I knew I was worth a hundred dollars, see. My next job I went out on, it was a party. The guy said, "Eagle Park Slim, I got a party, got a party." "Yeah, man. Where's it at?" "It's over here on 17th Street. You free?" He said, "yeah, how much is it going to be?" I said, "one hundred dollars." He said, "you got it!" I went over there and played the party; I got a hundred bucks, I mean he paid me. You see what I'm saying, I got my hundred dollars! I got my hundred dollars; he made a hundred thousand dollars in the back room! I got my hundred, that's the main thing.

I got another job, right there in Eugene; I think it was a Christmas party. They called me up, wondering how much it would be for me to come over and play from six to eight . . . they was going to be exchanging gifts. I told them that would be a hundred and fifty dollars. She said, "okay. You got it." I went over there and played it, maybe about forty-five minutes, and they gave me a hundred and fifty dollars, and I walked out. See what I'm saying? I didn't have no band. They enjoyed it-- the kids enjoyed it . . . see what I'm saying?

It's all about the enjoying it, getting it to the people. You could have a thousand people up there onstage, but if they ain't playing nothing, you are going to lose a thousand people! They're going to walk away from you.

Like them two boys I saw up in Seattle; man they had them people's attention! Boom! Right quick . . . man, they had my attention. They was *playing*, see; I don't stay around and listen to nobody, but they was *playing* something! You see a lot of people, they pass on by you. They got them gathering songs; them people was gathering. I seen them sell a hundred tapes out on the street at Pike Place market. I didn't sell no hundred,

but I sold forty or fifty. At the Street fair, in Pike Place Market. Boom, they hear me, "give me one, I'll take one." Hey, you can do it, if you've got something. If you got something to sell.

See, like this guy here. He says, "hey man, I've been wanting to catch up with you . . . I'm a harp player. My name is Jake." I said, "yeah?" "I was just wondering, I see you out by yourself, I was just wondering, do you ever play with people?" I said, "yeah, if I can get my price." He said, "I've been playing with this one guy; he's out-of-town now. I got this place down here, across from Penney Lanes. I can get a gig in there."

I said, "I have to have a hundred, when I play in a club. I can play out here on this street for nothing. I got to make at least a hundred dollars, 'cause three or four hours in a place. . . ." He said, "I don't know. . . ." So I walked on a little further, he came down and said, "would you play if I could get a hundred and fifty?" He said, "I need the money, too." I said, "Yeah. I got to have a hundred. Do we need any sound? It might be more if we need sound. . . . " "No," he said, "we don't need no sound." "How crowded is the place? And how noisy is it? I'm not going to be hollering my guts out." He said, "People played in there before, I don't think we need no sound."

Now, he might get that gig. If he do, I'm taking over. I going over there on my own, drop my card off. If they want to hire him, and pay him a hundred dollars, they should want to hire me, by myself. And we got a gig . . . see what I'm saying? I appreciate him turning me onto the place; I'm going down there, see what I can do. I ain't going to be playing with nobody there I don't want to play with. I got a feeling right now, 'cause I'd talked to Freddie the hot dog man, and he said, "you don't want to play with him. He done played with everybody here on the mall. Everybody left him."

Like up in Seattle, when I hit town. Who grabbed me? 'Dockadoo,' talking that mumbo jumbo. And everywhere I went, I seen him. That first day I hit the market, he was all over me. Me and him played some sets and stuff. Every time I moved, he was right there. I said, "man, I want to play by myself." After I seen what kind of guy he was, I said to myself, "I got to get away from this guy." But man, every day he was following me around.

Finally I had to come out and tell him, I said, "hey, man, I don't want you to play with me." "Oh man, come on, blue, come on!" 'Cause he was dealing dope and drugs and stuff all over the place, drinking . . . and the police had their eyes on him, they was watching him. Anytime I looked around, one guy told me, "Slim, you got to try to stay shed of him." Yeah, people be picking you up as soon as you hit town.

Like this guy Jake here, he is going to show me, he's got a gig already! He's going to carry me in there and show me a gig that he can get. And he gets me to play with him, you know who's going to be doing the playing. He's just going to be up there blowing and trying to play his harmonica, and show his friends. He's not serious at all.

Like I say, people turn you onto ideas, like that club. I'm going by there, going to drop off my card, and see what's going on. Right now, they got a new place they just opened up over on 17th Street. It's a coffee house and stuff, there's going to be people gathering around. The places are opening up, a coffee house here, a coffee house there. The coffee house scene is back again. There is going to be a lot of acoustic stuff going on.

People are still searching for something good. If you can come through with something good, and be good all the time . . . don't be good in the morning and be bad at night, don't be good at night and be bad through the daytime. Don't come out cranky and all that. Play your music, be your best at all times, so people can't say, "Oh, she's down

today, now she's on it, she don't sound right today." I have people tell me every day, "you sound good." Thank you very much, I'm glad, thank you Lord. I thank to the Lord who give me the voice. Like I said, I learned from other people.

I see why they don't have nothing. You know, they're coming out cranky, half playing. "Don't mess with me, I ain't had my coffee yet." I'm ready to go and bright-eyed all the time. 'Cause I'm not going to do it if I don't feel like it, ain't going to play no music if I don't feel like it. When I get tired I'm not going to play, and half-play; I'm going to play and belt it out. I play the best songs I can play at all times. Ha! See, I ain't going to be like Joe and Ed, I seen them in Seattle. He told me, "come on, play!" I told him, "I don't feel like playing." He said, "you don't need that stuff. . . ." I seen what he was talking about. If that's holding you back, if you need your drugs before you can sing, you're in big trouble.

That's a bad attitude. When you wake up, you're supposed to be up! You get what you need, don't be pushing it out on me . . . "ain't had my coffee, ain't had my fix," I don't want to hear that. It's up to you. You make sure you get what you need, even if it means you getting up two hours early. Don't wake up at nine clock if you got to play at nine-fifteen. I don't want no musicians telling me that. They coming in late, and they always say, "man, I'm sorry." That ain't going to get it. You keep on being late, somebody's going to be in your place.

I had this one horn player, you know. We started at nine o'clock. He always come in at nine-thirty, and I told him, I said, "next time you be coming in late, I'll have somebody in your place." He said, "I've got things straightened out." He came in late, and I had seen this other old boy who played horn, and he wanted to come down and sit in anyways. So I told him, "why don't you come down and sit in this week-end." He said, "two nights?" "Yeah." Friday night he came down, and he came in five minutes

late, but he was there, you know. We was getting ready to start at nine, no horn player. "Come on!" He said, "come up now?" I said, "yup, right now!" We started jamming. We played about five songs, and our regular horn player walked in the door.

People were looking at him, and he was looking at people having a nice time. He seen that we were playing and wasn't paying him no attention. We ended one song, and started another one. He came up to me and said, "hey, man, what's going on?" I said, "you tell me." "I had an emergency. . . ." I said, "man . . . my little boy fell and bumped his head tonight, and my wife had to take him into the doctor. But I came on here. Don't tell me about your excuses, I don't want to hear about it. Man, you got to be here. All the time I told you. Right now, you're fired. I've done warned you ten times. This guy is working out okay; he gets here at eight o'clock. Everybody gets here at eight except you. You gets here at nine-fifteen, come on . . . you're not a part of this organization."

I said, "I'm tired of your lies . . . last time, somebody stole the battery out of your car, somebody tried to break in your house. One time you told me your boy got in trouble with the police. Every time you coming in, it's a different excuse. If you got that many excuses, you need to be at home. I found out, ain't everything the way you been telling me. The drummer said he seen you today down at Walgreen's." He said, "Well, I didn't see him. . . ." "No, he didn't want you to. He seen what you were doing ! After he seen what you were doing, now he *know* why you were late! You told all those lies about your family . . . I bet if I go there now, she'd tell me you told a big black lie. That's why I got this other man, he can't blow like you, but he sure can be on time!" "Oh man, you're crazy!" "You wasn't taking care of business, you're all the time running around with some woman, going on, got a wife at home . . . I've had enough of it! Look how many times you come in here late and I held your job . . . but I got tired of

you. And I'm glad that this other man was here." He said, "Okay, man I don't appreciate playing in this band."

I said, "the band don't appreciate you! The band ain't done nothing to you! They grumbling to me all the time, 'you let him get away with all that stuff.' They told me to lay you off. I kept holding onto you, man. But you going to be late! Lucky you're the horn player; if you was the drummer we couldn't start! If the bass player started coming in late like you, man, the show's still going to go on." So he didn't apologize, thought about it for about a week, then he showed up. He came down, and tried to buy the guys drinks and stuff. He said, "I was a butt-hole, not showing up and stuff." He is the one who messed up his own job. He'd come in, when he got ready, telling all kinds of lies on his wife. Oh, man . . . he gave me all kinds of lies. It always was something. Man, I'll tell you. There'll be more trials and tribulations on the other side!

They Don't Want no Motor on It

Slim Recounts an Evening's work in Denver, and His Success in Competing With Other Musicians

Right now, Denver is becoming an interesting city. People are getting excited and the baseball hats and clothes are selling all over town. It's a great feeling here; I got a feeling this summer is going to be really, really nice. God bless everybody out there, the Lord is already blessing me. In the name of Jesus Christ, I say amen! I'm so excited, I'm so excited, and I'll tell you why. I was just saying that things are really happening.

I just went in yesterday and played the Black Timber Tavern. Which was a new place opened up for music. And, I'm telling you I didn't know how it was going to come out. First when I got there, people was saying, "Oh, it's going to rain, it's going to rain."

I said, "If it's going to rain, we'll just go inside. If it started raining, ain't nobody going to be out here." "Well, it's supposed to blow over." "Well, it might blow over; it might get worse. But still, we could move inside." So they fixed me a little place inside there. They moved out a couch and some stuff. I told them, "This is the band stand, right here." I set up right there, I put my little pooh bear out, Winnie the Pooh, man, let me tell you . . . before I even started playing I had a couple bucks in the tip jar.

I finally got cranked up there, I played one song. I got a standing ovation, almost. Everybody clapped in the place, smiling, and so excited. Man, let me tell you, I didn't know what was happening. Right next door there, you got Cliff Young's; they had a big band in there, the Woody Herman band. Next door there, at Ruby's they were having a surprise party for him. Next-door to that is a place called the Arcada, and man they was packed. Next to that was an espresso shop.

So I went down there, went and got me some coffee. I walked in, I knew the lady; she said, "hey, I got some friends coming down here tonight." I said, "what's going on over across the street there?" "This is Friday night, and they start gathering early-- it goes all the way into the late hours. Are you playing? What time you quit?" I said, "I'm going to be quitting at ten o' clock or so, maybe I'll come down here afterwards." She said, "Yeah, come on down." I said, "Okay."

I come back after my break and started back up. It seemed like about ten bucks in my tip jar already, and the waitress come up, she said, "thank you a lot for coming to play, it's good to have music, we never had no music before. Everybody is going out the door saying nice things about you. Everybody seems to be so happy. I hope you come back." I said, "I'll be glad to come back, anytime." Man, I never seen so many people excited, little kids in there. And their mama and daddies couldn't understand why them

little kids would keep running to the stage . . . they couldn't understand it! Them kids was after that kazoo! And Winnie the Pooh! Ha!

I got everything a kid loves! See, and the parents couldn't understand. This little boy got out in the middle of the floor, and he was throwing his arms around like he was on Soul Train! Oh, it was nice, 'cause they was getting a kick out of him dancing, and me playing the music; you know they was getting a kick out of the music. It just thrilled me all the way through!

Finally, one of the hostesses came over and she said, "can you play next Friday?" "Nope." She said, "are you sure?" I said, "next week I'll be in Seattle." She said, "do you know anybody I can get to play?" I said, "no, not really. . . . " I ain't telling nobody about it, uh uh! I'm trying to get my foot in the door, see. But I'm getting ready to leave.

I'm going to let them get their music the best way they can. But they know they ain't going to have no music in their place like they had last night! So many people complementing me, I had bus drivers coming in, old friends showing up, people that knowed me back in the '70s, years ago. The owner came up there and told me, he said "can you turn it down?" I said, "okay." I turned it down, and I realized that the place had nice acoustics. You don't need to be that loud, and I didn't have it loud. He told me, he said, "Slim, you're loud enough! Just turn the sound down." And everything was just mellow; it was a great night.

I moved outside, because the sun did come back out. There was a party outside, people were beautiful. I'm standing right there, looking at it, and playing to it. They was eating food, having drinks. There was one guy and a girl over there, making love to my music. When they walked out, they said, "thanks for the music, we had a wonderful time. We really enjoyed it." I said, "you must have enjoyed it, you stayed till the end!" I mean, she was there before I even started, she come up to me, she said, "can you play Mr.

Bojangles?" "No, I don't know it, I'm still trying to learn it." "It's a good song. . . . " I said, "I know it, man." And I am going to learn it. She was a Korean girl, Japanese or something . . . and anybody that knows about Mr. Bojangles is okay.

Some guy asked me, "what time are you going to quit?" It was about twenty minutes to ten. I said, "I'm going to play till about ten-fifteen." He said, "thanks a lot, Slim, thanks a lot." The bus driver, he was there, he came up, he said, "I got to be leaving." I said, "me too, man, I'm about to get out of here." So I got through, right quick and I wrapped up my stuff.

As I was going through the door the owner stopped me; he said, "thanks a lot, Slim," he paid me off. He gave me a hundred bucks plus; he said, "here's a little extra." "Thank you." He said, "I got to get that license now. I had a lot of people come through this place tonight, and they didn't know this place was here." You should have seen the smile on his face. . . . "Well, we're going to have to get you back in here." "Well, I'll be coming back in June. . . . " "We should know more about what we're doing by then." I said, "I hope so." I left there, and went right down the street and played at that espresso bar for about another twenty-five minutes, made another ten bucks. You see what I'm saying? It would be good to pick up some money, late nights down at that espresso bar cross from Ruby's and Cliff Young's and the Black Timber Tavern.

See, all them places got music, and that's an entertainment row now. All up and down there. The cafe Euphrates, and there is a couple more places up and down that line. There is a place called A Cappella; groups come in there and sing doo wop music. Hey man, there's all kinds of clubs opening. But I think, last night . . . you just got to play something that feels good. 'Cause I was looking at the people's faces. There was some ladies over there, "hey, this guy's all right!" One of the girls, up, before she left, she said, "I got to go." I said, "come back!" She said, "we can't make it back, but we got your

Illustration 5. Selling tapes and singing for tips

schedule." You see that? I picked up some new friends, a bunch of new friends. You better believe it!

I went down the street, and picked up some more fans! I went down to the espresso bar, there was some Spanish guy and his girlfriend sitting in there drinking a cup of coffee. They got away from the mess, you know. Across the street, everybody was drinking, womanizing and manizing; the joint was jumping! That's a hell of a place, on a Tuesday night they be lining it up! Yeah! They be *lining* it up! The lady at the espresso bar told me, she said, "Slim, Tuesday night would be a good night to play here." I said, "hey, I'll be here baby! I'll let you know." You see that? She tells me, "hey, you can go for yourself!" She ain't able to pay nothing right now, but hey, I can make something for myself, and make something happen for her, too!

I want to help her if I can, 'cause I know she just gone into business by herself, and she don't know what a business is like. She told me in the morning time her business is real good, during that day . . . nothing happening. Around about happy-hour times, she said she tries to close up about eleven o'clock. But she thinks she maybe should stay open. "Yeah," I said, "you should." "Well, I can't afford it." The crowd that they have over at that fish-fry place, I can get me a thing going on over there! Man, it's just so many people, you wait three hours in line! Man, them people will be coming across the street there, 'cause she told me. I said, "hey, I'll be here!"

Like I said, that 17th Street there is going to be a big exciting place. And it's already happening downtown, see? All the clubs downtown are having blues, and up in the mountains there, Cripple Creek and all them places. If a man had some good transportation he could make some good money up in them hills. They used to pan for gold up there, and there's gold up there now! You can't pan for it down here, you got to go up there and pan for it. Opportunities up there, a chance to make money, to get

someplace. See, I know all these things, and I'm working on it. But you can't just jump up there.

After I got this thing worked out, I'm going to be jumping a lot of places. New York, if I can. I'm just saying, it's really happening here in Denver. I'm getting ready to hit to Seattle, another place where it's getting ready to happen.

I just found out something here, that almost broke my heart, the street fair that I'm going to, they're having it this weekend, the 15th and 16th, see, I'm thinking that it's going to be on the 22nd and 23rd. But, a friend of mine called me and told me that we got a gig on that 22nd. So, I got to kind of fill in there, but I can work at Pike Place market. Then, the next week there is going to be a big week at Pike Place Market.

See, the Folk Life Festival is four days at the Seattle Center; it's going to be a big, big Festival. Going to be a lot of guitar pickers, man, and a lot of drums, and a lot of banjo players. Anybody with a guitar's going to be there. There'll be a lot of music; but if you got something special you don't have to worry about all that. You see what I'm saying? People used to tell me, "there is going to be a lot of competition out there, Slim. You may be better off right here."

I went right out there, man, and *played.* There was a band that had just took a break. Some guy said, "hey man, get on right here! The band just took a break." By that time, people walked up and said, "hey Slim, are you going to play?" I opened up my case right quick, got my guitar and started singing the blues. Man, people started throwing money in; people was stopping, I had a big crowd. People were trying to get by, cars was coming. And I played there for about an hour.

There was guitar players standing right beside me; there was a clown right behind me. You see what I'm saying? They didn't have what I have. They was hugged up, and rocking to my music! I had a harp player come up and join me, 'cause I had been playing

about fifteen minutes . . . and you know what? I walked away from there with about eighty-four dollars. When the band started back up, I had to quit.

You see what I'm saying? There is a band right behind you with sound and stuff . . . when they start up, you're on your own. But when they break down for another band to start up, it takes a half-hour. I stayed there, and I went and got me some food. The band played, and I was sitting down there. People were coming by there saying, "Slim, are you going to play?" "Yeah, as soon as the band is done." "Okay, we'll try and get back." As soon as the band quit, boom, I started up. And they started throwing money in my case. And like I said, all these guitar players are still playing, violin players and everything.

See, the band was the only thing that was driving me out. All these other acoustic players, they didn't have what I have. I had the sure-enough *blues*! And they knew it. They come up to me and said, "man, your music, I feel something when you be playing. Some of these boys, I don't feel nothing." I said, "thank you." See what I'm saying? I'm not worried about it; I can still go out there and make money. Somebody be telling me about competition. See, I played behind Albert King, and all them people. They'd go onstage, and I'd follow them. I'd go right back up. It don't mean nothing. I don't care, ain't going to do nothing but what I'm doing!

Some guys try to do something special, try to turn the crowd on. I just go out and play the music. I do it the way I learned it, and I think that's what people want. Just a simple thing. They don't want no motor on it. That's why I think this acoustic thing is with it, 'cause when you go acoustic you're going down to the bone. You can't cover up a bad note, they hear it, acoustic. And they hear the acoustic in your voice. Everybody is going to bands . . . it's bands this, and bands that. They can't make no money. Here I am, making a hundred dollars by myself. See what I'm saying? You see a band, it's got

four pieces . . . what kind of the band is that? I'll tell you, it's a band nobody wants. And it's a band that's done played in every place in town. But they play *one* time, and that's all!

CHAPTER VII

SONGWRITING

It Goes Kind of Like This

How Slim Writes Songs, the Circumstances in Which Particular Songs were written, and How He Feels About Them

Songwriting comes hard for some people, and comes easy for other people. I think songwriting is about life, and experiments. I guess that's why it's so easy for me to write a song. I've had so many experiences, and I've seen so many experiences of my friends and colleagues. So, what I do, if I see something or hear something, I'll go and write about it.

I wrote songs about a lot of beautiful girls that I *knowed* that I would never have. But I wished! They didn't leave me with no love, but they left me with a song. And I think that's better, you know, 'cause a song will carry you a long ways. Love can carry you around the corner and drop you, put you down. It's been proven.

I started writing songs around the age of fifteen. I remember the first song I wrote. It was called 'A woman with no husband keeps a married man on the run.' I wasn't a good singer at that time. I wasn't even singing at all; I was just playing guitar. I think I started my style back then. I used to go around and sing, "a woman with no husband . . . keeps a married man on the run. Sacrifices his check week after week, and still going out and borrowing more." I remember Carl Brown, I sung that song for him and he liked it. 'Cause he come up to me one day and said, "what's that song that you

wrote? Sing me that song again." At the time, it was right. 'Cause I wrote it about this guy that had three or four girlfriends. See, he was running over here, and running over there, and running over there.

At the time, you know, it was a true song. But I've never recorded that song, and I don't think I never will. Right now . . . I've learned a lot about songwriting . . . it would be bad to do a song like that now, but it's still happening. There is a lot of men that's got a wife, and got a girlfriend too. I think, in that song, it said, "she's always saying the baby needs new shoes, but I need some money, too."

That was one of my first songs I wrote. After then I started developing a style of writing, 'cause I started coming up with so many different types of songs. I kind of developed my own style. Because after everybody had left me, you know, my first and second band, I was kind of left all alone there. I remember one day I was out there, in my mama's barbecue pit and I was hitting some stuff, and just started messing with some bass tunes, and bass notes, and started phrasing and putting them together. People used to come by and say, "yeah, I heard you the other day out in the barbecue pit . . . you was hitting some heavy stuff, man! Is that some stuff you wrote?" "Oh, I was just messing around." "Sounds good, man, sounds good! Keep playing; that stuff there's *heavy*!" I just said, "thank you."

When I was in Denver, I heard a guy tell me one time, "if you can write a rain song, you got some money! Rain songs are worth a lot of money." Until I came out to Eugene Oregon, I didn't think about no rain songs. But after I'd been out here and it rained ten days in a row, man, I started writing rain songs! One of the first rain songs I wrote was 'save your money for a rainy day.' I was broke, I didn't have no money, and I wanted to get this and that. And I came up with some tunes.

Save your money for a rainy day,

save your money to go out and play
Save your money for a rainy day,
you better save it . . . right away

You spend up your money like it's going out of style
Don't you know, you better save it for a little while

Save your money for a rainy day,
save your money to go out and play.
Save your money for a rainy day,
you better save it, baby, right away!

That was one of my first rain songs. That's a rock and roll song. I'm thinking about going into the studio and doing that. Another song, one of my rain songs, is called 'Me and You and the Rain.' I was over here at Amazon Park; I was living right across the street from there, at 27th and Hilyard. There used to be a big hill over there. I used to go over there, and it rained all the time. I would go out and take my guitar over there and play. At the time, I was feeling kind of lonely. There was two little girls over there, sliding up and down the sliding board, and doing the swings. One of the girls said, "I'm glad it's not raining right now." So I started kind of singing, you know, and some girl was passing by on a bike. And I just started humming. . . .

Me and you and the rain
used to be lovers.
You and me and the rain
used to be friends.

Since you went away

the rain has changed my ways

and it's moving closer

it's moving closer.

Oh man, that melody just stuck. Like I said, you get that bass pattern first, and you can work with some words. 'Cause you can take words and do what you want with them. As long as it fits, you find something that fits. I think that's the secret to songwriting. You got to lay down a foundation. 'Cause my dad always told me that, when we was out building houses. He said, "son, we got to put this foundation down strong. Lay down a fine strong base, and you got a fine house." So when I lay down a strong foundation on my songs, I know I got a good song.

I try to write songs now that are kind of commercial, and what's going on. Like I wrote a song called 'Designated Driver.' On the radio and TV everybody was talking about designated drivers, so I came up with this song.

Go on drinking, my baby

you have your fun.

I'll be your designated driver.

yes, go on drinking, baby

I'll be your designated driver.

Yes, and when the party's over,

I'll be the want to take you home.

Give me your car keys, baby

I'll drink love punch all night long

yes, give me the car keys, Darling
while I drink love punch all night long.
(Ha! You know what I got on my mind!)
And when the parties over
I'll be your designated driver!

I was talking to a man one day. He told me, "man, I got five more miles to go." We was riding on the bus, and he said, "I got five more miles to go, then I'll be home." I came up with a song called 'Five More Miles.'

I got five more miles to go,
I'll be back in my baby's arms
five more miles to go,
I'll be back in my baby's arms
I got one, I got two, I got three,
I got four, I got five,
I got five more miles to go

I came up with it and put it into a rock and roll-type beat song.

I wrote a song called, 'You're my Jamaica.' I had been messing around an Al Green song, 'Stay Together.' I changed the chords, went from a major, and the other two chords are minor. It went from 'F' to 'G' to 'A,' and back from 'A' to 'G' to 'F.'

Palm trees growing in my backyard
Somebody's coming in,
the work is going to be hard

rum punch, and my stereo on,

reggae music playing soft and slow,

you're my Jamaica

if I never get to go there,

you're my Jamaica

I never thought much of the song until I started playing it out. When I played it out, I played some coffee houses, on the mall and different places. People said, "Oh, I love that; is that your song?" Everywhere I went, man, Seattle, Denver, people be hollering out, "you're my Jamaica!" So I had to play that song three or four times a night! Whoa, man. I heard a guy talking one day. He said, "I got your tape . . . 'you're my Jamaica' is such a great song!" I seen right then and there that I wanted to write more, other stuff. So, I was kind of out here, in the Northwest, and it's always good to write songs about where you're at. If you're in New York, write songs about New York. People in New York love for you to sing songs about New York. If you're in L. A. they love for you to sing songs about L. A. In St. Louis they love songs about St. Louis. I'm here in Eugene Oregon, so I started writing songs about Eugene, in the Northwest, Seattle, and places I've been.

I wrote a song called, 'Northwest Blues.' It's all about this girl bringing this guy out here. She left him and went back to Chicago. She'd tell everybody he got out here, and he got to liking it. He got a lot of friends, and he got him a job, and she left him. It's a song that, when people hear it, they look up. It's called 'Northwest Blues.'

You get me out here in the rain and then you leave me

You got me down here in all this rain, and I like it

I like the Sunshine,

I like the green grass

But you up and left your home

I also wrote another song called 'Seattle, U.S.A.' I was thinking about a Chuck Berry song called 'Back in the USA.' I came up with these lyrics:

Well, I'm back again,
back to Seattle USA
Yes, I'm back, I'm
back to Seattle USA

Well, you can catch a fish for your meal
each and everyday
get out Mr. Supersonics
get out Mr. Seahawks, play? No!
I tune in on my radio
each and every day

Well, I'm back, I'm back
back to Seattle USA

It was a better song than I thought it was; I didn't think much of writing it, but the words came in good.

I played Pike Place market so long, walking through there, and being there for month after month. After a couple of years, I came up with this song called 'Pike Place Blues.' And I get a lot of requests for it. People come up to me wherever I'm playing, at coffee houses or the Black Forest, the Goodtimes. I was way up in the San Juan Islands,

and somebody was hollering out, 'Pike Place Blues!' I wrote this song, and took a little time on it, 'cause I wanted to make it worth something.

I'm going shopping
I got the Pike Place Market blues
they tell me the fish just came in
and all the arts and crafts are on sale

I'm going to eat my breakfast down at the cafe
and eat my lunch at that chicken valet
I'm going shopping because I need a new pair of shoes
I got the Pike Place Market blues

There is a chicken stand there, you can be eating your lunch and watch the musicians perform. The lyrics in the songs, people recognize all these things. If people don't recognize nothing you say in a song, you ain't got no song. They got to be able to *recognize* stuff.

I wrote a song called 'There's Going to Be a Showdown.' I was kind of messing around with it one day down in the basement. Somebody came over and said, "I like that song you was playing a little while ago, about a showdown." I said, "Oh, I'm trying to put it together." He said, "it's going to be great." So I started thinking about it. . . .

There is a new kid in town
there is going to be a showdown

Because what this kid was doing, he was picking up my girlfriends, and putting them down! He was picking them up, like, "hey man!" He had so many girlfriends, that he was dropping them and they was running back to me. So I said, it's going to be a

showdown between him and me. Going to find out who's the best, and who's the less! I already had me a bass pattern and a groove, you know. So I started putting these words on:

Extree, extree, read all about it!
there's going to be a showdown
Extree, extree, read all about it!
there's going to be a showdown
showdown, showdown, showdown, showdown
if you see this new kid in town
tell him it's going to be a showdown
it's going to be between me and him
it's going to be a showdown
showdown, showdown
take this! (Boom, Pow!)
take that! (Boom)
showdown, showdown

It would be me and him fighting it out, in the middle of the street there, right in the song. Man, I worked on that. And just like that guy said, people loved it. Sometimes I put that song on my answering machine, and I have people call me just to hear it. I use a lot of my songs on the message just to see what kind of feedback I get. A lot of times, I won't even answer my phone, 'cause people be calling just to hear these songs. Even the doctor's office calls me and says, "I like your message."

I wrote a song for one of my doctors. It's called 'You Send Me.' It's not the Sam Cooke song. It's Eagle Parks Slim's 'You Send Me.'

You, you send me

you send me with your kisses, baby

I said you, you send me

you send me with your love

You always do things that I forget

you always put things where I could find it

That's a hit a line right there. See, you got to make lyrics that makes sense, and say something. And that's saying something. That's why you send me.

I wrote a song called 'skateboarding,' it was all instrumental stuff. I wanted to work on instrumental stuff. What we did it is record the song, then we went back in the studio and put a hand-clap to it. It really sounds like something that is happening. I wrote it for skateboarders. You see that I'm up to date on what I write. There's another song called 'Everything's Back in Style Again.'

People are going back, getting the old clothes,

wearing them again, getting stuff out of the goodwill

Suddenly my old brown coat and my leather jacket is back in style,

especially when I wear it down on the mall

Everything is back in style again

My 1953 Ford is back in style again

'cause the girls don't want to ride in a new car,

they want to ride in a classic

Everything's back in style again

I wrote a song called 'Homeboy.' This is about the city guy going to a little one-horse town; he's going to play the streets, get him a bunch of gals, and get them working for him. So when he got to this little town, he seen this old man and he said, "hey, where's everybody at?" The old man said, "everybody's working on the tomato farm." "Tomato farm? Man, where's the girls, where's the party?" The old man said, "where's the party? If you're going to party, that's where all the girls are. The girls are working now, you're going to have to go down to the tomato farm."

"Come on, old man!" He thought the old man was giving him some jive. So another guy came by, and he said, "if you're going to talk to any girls here, you better get you a uniform. 'Cause you're going to get awful dirty working on the tomato farm." So the homey said, "where's this place at?" The old man said, "Just be here at seven o' clock in the morning; they'll pick you up. But you better get you a uniform!"

And homeboy went out there on the tomato farm, and he started in. "Hey baby, what's happening? You sure look good!" He seen that the girl was still working, and wasn't paying him no attention. Then somebody walked up 'side him and said, "hey man, you better get to work if you're going to make any money, 'cause if you don't pick no tomatoes you ain't going to get paid but five dollars."

Homeboy, what you doing in a one-horse town?
I said, homeboy, homeboy, what you doing in a one-horse town?
don't you know, ain't nothing but work here
you're going to have to get you a uniform
Don't you know, ain't nothing but work around here
you're going to have to get you a job down on the farm
yes, the girls are working now,
they're working down on that tomato farm

yes, the girls are working now,
down on the tomato farm
you want to see them,
you're going to have to work down on the farm

You know, it goes on and on, 'cause you're going to get awful dirty, you're going to have to get a uniform. Ha! You understand?

I know there is a lot of classic songs called 'Here's That Rainy Day,' but this is a song that is kind of true in a way. It goes way back; this guy was spending his money, which his parents had died and left him a bunch of money, so he was rich, the boy was rich. He used to hang out at the little coffee shop, but after he got this money he started hanging out at steak houses, drinking expensive wine and partying with the girls, and wearing a new suit everyday. Things was going for him. This friend of his told him, "Hey Jake, you better let me hold some of this money for you." He tried to talk to him, 'cause he seen him spending a lot of money. He was spending a lot of money, taking it out of the pile, and not putting nothing back on the pile. Pretty soon that pile going to be empty! That's what the boy was trying to tell him. Save some for a rainy day. But the rich kid said, "Aw, man it's raining right now! I got a hundred thousand dollars, it's raining right now! Give me another drink; shut your mouth!" So I came up with this song.

Here's that rainy day
that they told me about
here's that rainy day
that they warned me about
that rainy day is here

the one that I didn't put away
the one that my friends tried to tell me about

here is the rainy day
but I forgot to save
my friends told me
here's that rainy day
(but my head was so hard,
I didn't listen to them)
then I didn't put away
now all my friends are gone
the money is gone
and that rainy day is here

It's raining out there, and the boy didn't even buy him an umbrella! You understand what I'm saying? Ha! What a story! You see what I'm talking about? He didn't even buy him an umbrella, out of all that money he had. 'Cause he was catching cabs, and had people taking him places!

There is one called 'Landlord Blues.' I was in Denver Colorado, this is a true story, and I got a couple of months behind on my rent. The landlord, you know, he came over. I told him, I said, "man, I got some jobs coming through, and they ain't come through. People canceled out on me and stuff." He said, "Slim, I got to have my rent." I said, "I'm trying to get it for you, man. I should have something coming through here pretty soon." So he kept hanging around the house out there. And all the other times, you couldn't *even* get him over there!

Since I owed him that money, he was letting me know, "hey man, I'm going to be staying in your eyesight until you pay me!" You know, he was out there raking the yard... and he ain't *never* done that! Fixing the fence, and a year ago he wouldn't fix it! Also putting in some grass, and different little things. All day long, every time I'd leave, I'd come back, and he was there. I said to myself, "I got to get this man his money." He was also getting ready to raise my rent. So I wrote a little song called Landlord blues, it goes something like this:

Well, my landlord raised my rent
and people, that ain't all he did
(what else did he do, Slim?)
I said, my landlord, he raised my rent
and people, that ain't all he did
he charged me ten dollars for being late
and three dollars for every day he had to wait
And then he said:
I don't mean to worry you, Slim
I just want you to pay your rent on time
(hey man, I'm doing the best I can, I'm working two or three jobs now!)
I don't mean to worry you
I just want you to pay your rent on time
'cause the last time, you didn't have it all
and this time, you say you ain't got enough

And it goes on and on, you know, "you hang around my house all day long." It's a true story, you know. I get a lot of feedback on that song, 'cause everybody's done had trouble with their landlord, so they can understand it. I'm sure you have. I wish you

could tell me somebody who hasn't had trouble with their landlord. Ha! 'Landlord Blues' is a *monster* song.

Another is called 'Late, Late Love Shift.' This is one for the ladies and the girls. It makes them smile and feel good, 'cause it talks about making love. People out there love to see songs like this here. It makes you smile and laugh. I've had great response, people would come up and tell me, "play Late, Late Love Shift."

On the late, late love shift
yes, I'm working late tonight
on the late, late love shift
I'll be putting in some loving time
because I'm so far behind
me and my baby, making sweet love

Oh man, what a thrill, right there. Every woman be thinking, I wish that was me!

Making sweet love all night long
I said, I'm working late tonight
on the late, late love shift
don't call me on the phone
'cause I won't be at home,
don't be knocking on my door
'cause I'll be gone, I'm working late tonight
on the late late love shift
It'll be me and my baby,
catching up on some loving time

Another little thing, I was trying to get something that would be funky, and would describe my own sound. I call this the 'Eagle Park Slim Sound.' It's got a James Brown kind of riff.

There's a sound that's going around town
the name of the sound is the Eagle Park sound
it makes you want to dance
it makes you want to prance
and jump up and down
its the Eagle Park sound
let me hear you now!
They're doing it in Chicago, 'cause I've been there too
they're doing it in St. Louis, 'cause I've been there too
they're doing it in L. A. and on the Frisco bay
they're doing it in Eugene, they're doing it in New Orleans
that Eagle Park sound, that Eagle Park sound
got you dancing on your feet
makes you feel good when you eat
it's the Eagle Park sound!

Hey man, you tell me you can't get the people jumping up and boogying with that! Yes, Sir!

People always like songs about trains, so I wrote a thing called 'Train Number Four.' 'Cause I was at the station one day with a friend of mine, and he asked the station man, "did train number four ever come in?" The station man said, "no, I don't think they come in yet; they are having some problems." I went down with my friend that day to

pick up his girlfriend. The train was about two or three hours late. So, I told him I would take him back down there whenever he got ready to go. I went home, and the idea came to me; I was thinking about train number four. I started playing the harmonica:

Train number one has come (wa wa wa wa)
train number two has come (wa wa wa wa)
train number three has come (wa wa wa wa)
where is train number four?
where is train number four?
What train is that, son?
That's the train my baby is on! (wa wa wa wa)
train number one is come
train number two is come
where is train number four?

And I would blow the harmonica, and make it sound like a train: wa wa wa wa wa! Where is train number four? I put that song together from the top of my head. Every time I go to Denver Colorado, they be hollering, 'Train Number Four!'

Another one of my big songs using the harmonica is 'Get off of My Sofa!' It relates to back in the '70s and '80s when people would lay around on the sofa all day drinking and smoking. I went to a house one day, and this guy came in. We was all over his sofa and stuff. He said, "don't be drinking and smoking on my sofa. I don't want that stuff to get in there. Get off of my sofa!" We had been kind of kicking around, laying around. It was raining, and we didn't have no jobs. We was partying, watching TV, and playing cards. We was all over the house. So that guy came in and yelled, "get off of my sofa! I got to clean it off!" So I came up with this song.

Get off of my sofa!

I'm talking about you!

Get off of my sofa!

I do mean you!

Get off of my sofa,

get up, get up!

Get off of my sofa,

I got to clean it off!

Get off of my sofa,

get out and get you a job

get off of my sofa,

I do mean you!

Oh man, what a great song! One lady said to me, "Slim, my little girl just laughs and laughs at that song. I tell her that she's not supposed to laugh at Eagle Park Slim's music." I told her, "that's all right, that's a funny song. It's supposed to be funny." I said, "your little girl is right, you should get in there and listen!" I said, "she probably plays that all the time. . . ." She said, "yeah, she does." I said, "she knows what she's doing!" Get off of my sofa, get out and get you a job, get out with the working crowd! It's saying something: get up, get up! And get you an umbrella! Don't be saying it's raining out there! And the way I sing it, it's funny.

I got another song that gets me a lot of good feedback. You know, people let you know the songs they like. This one's called 'Party Pooper.' Every time I walk in someone hollers, "party pooping song!" Evidently he has run into some party poopers; I know I have. You can usually spot them. They're more aggressive, they have more to

drink, and they got more to say than an ordinary person. I wrote this song, after I was invited to a potluck.

So I went down there; I wasn't sure where I was going, so I went earlier. 'Cause the party didn't really start till about six-thirty, the girl told me. It was five-thirty when I got there. And there was a party pooper; he was there before me! He's the one I met . . . I didn't meet the people who owned the house. He went, right quick, and got me a beer. I was still trying to find out if I was at the right address! He went and got me a beer, he was there drinking, and there was a couple of more people. Finally, a lady came out and introduced herself, "My name is Sarah. So glad you could come by." I said, "yeah, I'm kind of glad too." So, people started showing up, and this guy is putting drinks in everybody's hands, he was all over the place. He was in everybody's conversations. He was picking up everybody's drink and drinking out of it, and pretty soon we just started looking at each other. So I made up this song called 'Party Pooper.'

You're a party pooper
you got pooped before the party started
You're a party pooper
you got pooped before the party started
you're showing your party pooping side
you're drinking out of everybody's drink
and telling everybody that you're sorry
you're drinking out of everybody's drink
and telling everybody that you're sorry
yes, I think it's time for you to leave
you're showing your party pooping side

Everybody at the party was getting tired of him, you know. I get requests for that because it's a nice easy, jazzy type thing. It's real easy to listen to.

It's a Shame the Way He Done Me

Slim's Songs Are Stolen by Albert King

It must have been the end 1969 or '70, somewhere around there, I was at home. I went up to see my nephew Boochie, and he was telling me about Albert King needing some songs. I said, "Albert needs some songs?" "Yeah, he's getting ready to go into the studio, heading down to Memphis right now." "Man, I got some songs." "Well, you ought to get them together and give them to him." So I went and called Albert up.

After calling him up about three or four times, I finally got through. I asked Albert, "what kind of songs are you looking for?" "Well, they got to be songs with a strong hook to it, or strong lyrics." "Like what?" "Like, 'I got eight kids at home, and a wife and the girlfriend too,' something like that." "Oh, those kind of songs. . . ." 'Cause this was right around 1971, and I always write way ahead of my time. And all these songs was ahead of their times. At that time, I was working with a group called Little Walter J. Westbrook and we had a vocalist named Smokey. Me and him, one day, rushed and put a bunch of songs together. We wrote them down and went over them. I guess we got about eight or nine songs down there.

One of the songs, I know, it was a blues song, "if you're feeling lonely, come on over," it was something like that. Another song, 'Little Brother,' that sounds like one of my songs. 'Don't burn down the bridge,' 'High Cost of Love,' and also the answer to 'Laundrymat Blues' . . . 'I know you don't know it, baby, but things look bad for you.' And there's a couple more I had on there. Something about Lucy, and I think he

recorded something about Lucy. It was a bunch of songs that I handed to him on the tape.

I didn't hear from him for a long time. I was staying at 1105 College Street in East St. Louis, and I remember he came by himself, 'cause he was on his way somewhere and I had told him where I stayed at. He said, "I'll come by there and pick up the tape, 'cause I'm in a hurry." So he came by; there's a phone in the hall where I lived at, and he used the phone right there to call somebody to meet him someplace. This was in 1970 or '71. So I didn't hear no more from him, and I left the East St. Louis area. These songs came out right after I left, all these songs. I never did hear no more from him, but I called him, 'cause I asked him about it. I said, "What about my songs?" He said, "I didn't use none of those songs." "Well, can I get my tape back?" "Well, my manager, he's got the tape. He misplaced it somewhere, I got to look around here for it." I said, "Okay, as soon as you come up with it, get it to me."

So I didn't hear no more from him; that had to be in 1975. But he was really popping then, he was everywhere. I heard he was in Denver one time, but I was playing on the night he was down there. He had a lot of gigs, he was working everywhere. It wasn't until 1980 that I seen him again, when I came out to Oregon. After I had been out here a couple of weeks, I had put me a little band together, and I heard that Albert 'Blues Boy' King was going to be playing in Eugene, right downtown. So I said, I'm going down there that night; I'm going down and see him. I wasn't thinking nothing about the tape or the songs, I just wanted to see him, man, and shake his hand 'cause me and Albert go way back, way back. I got a lot to tell you about Albert, but I want to get this out first, 'cause it's been eating into my heart.

I went in, and I didn't see Albert, so I asked one of the guys "where's Albert?" "Oh, he's out on the bus." He had a big old bus outside there, so I went out there and I

pecked on the door. "Come on in! Who is it?" I said, "it's Autry." "Oh, how are you doing?" He didn't look really happy. I said, "Albert, what's going on?" "I'm getting ready to go onstage here in a few minutes, I'm trying to get some rest." I said, "Well, I didn't mean to bother you. . . ." "Nope, that's okay . . . I've just been working so hard." I said, "I know how it is, that's okay." So, I took on off.

But he looked at me like he had stole something, like, "Oh Lord, this man's come to kill me." He looked at me like I was the last person he wanted to see way out in Oregon! Ha! He didn't want to see me no more, because of *that tape* . . . he knew he never did give that tape back to me. And he *knew* that he used some of my stuff. I didn't pay no attention. I went home in 1981, and I got together with some old boys and we was playing. I think Charles was running around with him, Charles Lewis, being Albert's valet. He lived right down the street from our old drummer called Ray. Charles told Ray, "a lot of those songs of Albert King's, Autry wrote them."

We was at rehearsal one night and Ray was drinking and drinking, and talking about Albert's songs. He said, "Slim wrote them tunes, didn't you, Slim?" I shook my head; I said, "yeah." But I didn't tell them that I didn't get no money. He didn't know that I didn't get no money for them. I think Charles knew it, 'cause he was telling Ray. Charles was real sick, he had heart trouble. Finally, he died. I didn't ever get a chance to talk to Charles, but Ray talked a lot to Charles. I went back there again in 1984, and they was talking about it again. I had never paid no attention, but I kept listening and thinking, those songs sure sound like mine.

He did steal a lot of my tunes, and he didn't give me no credit. The way he done me . . . I mean, when I first met Albert, a long time ago, he came from Mississippi or someplace, Arkansas maybe. They said the law or somebody was after him, so that's why he came up to St. Louis in the first place, 'cause he couldn't stay down there no

more. I mean, when he come up, he had some bib overalls; a red shirt and some bib overalls. He didn't even have a guitar, 'cause my mama bought him a guitar and amp. She signed for him to get a guitar and amp, and he played for my mother for about two or three weeks. Then the guy over there on the Lakeside, 'Slick,' bought him out from my Mama, started paying him a little bit more money.

So he left . . . well, that's okay . . . he stole Albert from us, and then somebody stole Albert from him, you see. So Albert started going to St. Louis, to the Dynaflow, places like that. He started making money and building crowds. He could go any place he wanted. Anyway, he went on and on, but he used to always come back to my mother's place. He always would come there and she would feed him, and give him money, and help him out. She done signed for him to get that guitar and stuff. But that's okay.

I think that I wrote those songs. I can't prove it right now. If I could find that tape . . . I'm praying to the Lord to let me get my stuff from Margie. I'd bet I could come up with the tape in there. I'm going to be doing that, because I sure believe that some of those songs on there are *mine*. I got to go back and check out some of these other records too, songs that Albert wrote, 'cause Albert can't write no songs, he never could. That's why he was looking for them, you see what I'm saying? It's a shame the way he done me, that was really bad.

I went in there to see his show, I think Margie went with me that night. And he was so mean, Margie said, "come on, let's go. I don't like him, he's mean." He was mean to his soundman, to everybody. He just seemed like a very big old black mean man. The way he treated made made me feel down. We left before the show was over, and I didn't see Albert no more. That was in 1980.

So I goes home in 1981, before I had my heart surgery. And now I *know* why Albert didn't want to talk to me. When I got back there I run into an old friend of mine, Brad, a bass player, and Ray. There was another guy that used to play with Eugene Neil and Benny Shaw down there that night. This guy had played with Albert King too. And Ray told him, "yeah, Slim wrote a lot of them songs." He said, "yeah?" I just shook my head again. Because Charles was on the road with Albert that time, and he told Ray. Because he was on the bus with those guys, but he wasn't thinking that I was getting cheated, because if he would have known, he would have said something. Charles wasn't that type of guy.

One thing about Charles Lewis: if he would have known that I wasn't getting paid for those songs, he would have told me. He thought I was getting paid. See, he was getting sick at that time. Charles loved my mother; Charles would come over there and work for my mother and do anything for her while she was living. She loved Charles like a son. She was crazy about Charles, 'cause Charles didn't mind working. He'd work, then he would come in there on the weekend to our place and sing. So that was a great relationship, and he liked me. And I played with Charles a million times; I played with him when he was with the Midnighters. I think if Charles knew I wasn't getting paid, he would have told Ray.

The only reason I didn't get in touch with Ray no more is the way he treated me. He got drunk one night, and he was talking to this lady, she was an agent or something with some big company that could ship you 'round to New York and different places. We had been drinking that old cheap 'generic;' you seen that stuff at the liquor store with the white label. I ain't never seen no whiskey with that white label. We went over to his house to practice and he had four or five fifths of that stuff laying around. I said, "Dog! They got generic whiskey? I've had the green beans, and the ketchup and everything

else, but I didn't know they had whiskey!" I don't know what kind of proof it was, a hundred-proof or seventy-nine. There was about a half a fifth there, and six or seven guys drinking out of it, and we finished that off. He went and got another fifth and brought it out there.

He gets to the East side over here, and we stopped at a little club. He started talking to this woman, and she was trying to talk to me about the band . . . and he was trying to get her into bed! I spoke up, I said, "hey, let's go!" And he got pissed at me. Then when he was driving me home, he got real uppity with me. "Who in the hell do you think I am?! I'll kick your ass! I'll stop right now, you want to fight?" "I was just trying to talk some business there." He said, "man, don't you mess with me!" He kept driving. I started to tell him to let me out, but we was way out there by the old junk yard, where they keep them old cars. But I figured if he let me out there, we might have got into it. So I got quiet, 'cause I seen that generic whiskey was working on him, man.

That was the first time in years that he ever talked back to me. But this time he was hollering and screaming at me. I thought, "I don't need this guy." Ever since then, he thought I took that tape and done something with it. 'Cause I went home and June told me, "You took that tape and went off and made a lot of money with it." I don't even know where that tape is at, I don't! That's how much that whiskey had been working on him, and affecting his brain. He figured, Slim, he ain't here, he must have took that tape and made some money.

Shoot! That tape's something I made back there in St. Louis! I don't know whether Margie's got it, or it's back there with Charles. I've got stuff scattered all around. Ray was really drinking, I don't know if he has slacked up. He said, "I got to die of something. It's killing me every day, I'll just drink it till I die." I seen what was

happening, so I got out of that circle right quick. But he is the only witness about the songs. He is the only one that Charles told.

I want to go to Memphis and see if anything can be done about it, check around some of them songwriting companies. Because I believe that a lot of those songs was my ideas. But if I could find that tape, that's my prayer. If I could have some proof, and if I could find Smoky, if he's still alive. 'Cause he sung on them. So I got to try to get back home some kind of way. I'm praying to the Lord to help me get back there. My nephew Boochie can help me because he knew who Albert's manager was. Those guys took my songs and sliced them up, I believe deep down.

Like Ray said, Charles told him. And I really appreciate that . . . thank you Charles, God bless you, wherever you are at. I knew something was happening all the time, the way Albert treated me when he come out to Oregon, 'cause he went, "Oh!" He thought I was coming to get him. When a person has done you wrong, Mama told me a long time ago, you can always see it in the eyes. Thank you Mama for that, in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen. And thank you Lord . . . for Mama.

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