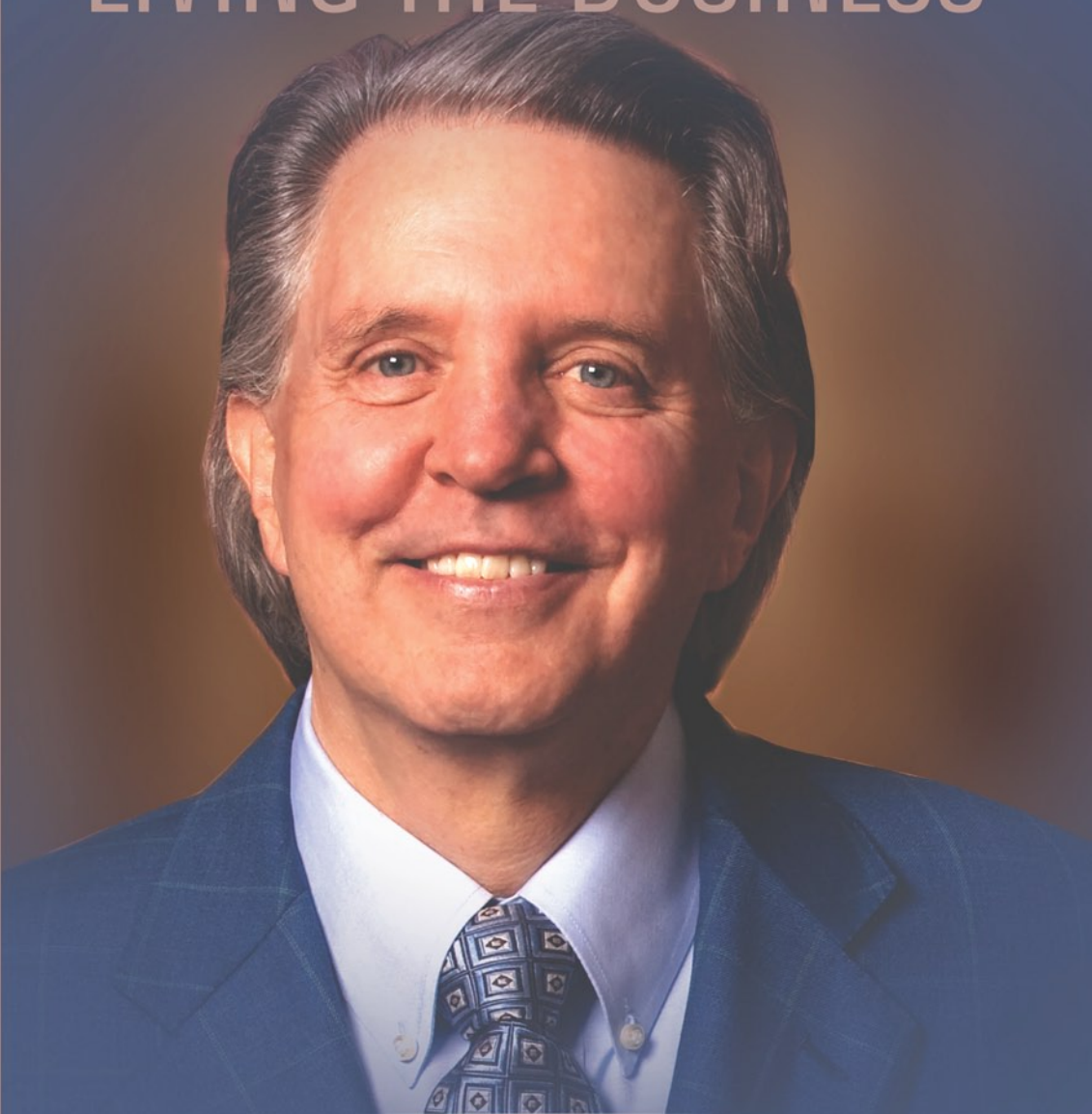


LIVING THE BUSINESS



MIKE CURB

WITH DON CUSIC

Living the Business

By Mike Curb

With Don Cusic

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Contents

Introduction.....	9
LIVING THE BUSINESS:	
<i>50 Years as an Entrepreneur in the Music Business by Mike Curb</i>	<i>13</i>
CHAPTER 1: The Early Years	17
CHAPTER 2: Early Music Influences	25
CHAPTER 3: First Steps in the Music Industry	33
<i>The Mike Curb Congregation, Crickets, Buddies, Bobby Darin, Hondells (composing the commercial You Meet The Nicest People On A Honda)</i>	
CHAPTER 4: Soundtracks	49
<i>Composing Movies Themes: SkaterDater, Wild Angels (“Blues’ Theme”) Composing TV Themes: Cattanooga Cats and Hot Wheels Composing Commercials: On The Move With Chevrolet</i>	
CHAPTER 5: Eddie Ray and My First Record Label.....	57
<i>Arrows (featuring Davie Allan), Stone Poneys (featuring Linda Ronstadt), Electric Flag (featuring Mike Bloomfield and Buddy Miles)</i>	
CHAPTER 6: Building Amazing Future Relationships.....	63
<i>Casey Kasem Composing the “American Bandstand Theme” Dick Clark Co-mastering Pink Floyd Producing Savage Seven Soundtrack (Cream, Eric Clapton and Iron Butterfly) Building Early Relationships with Future Curb Recording Artists Buck Owens, Merle Haggard and Sonny James</i>	
CHAPTER 7: On TV with Glen Campbell	79
CHAPTER 8: MGM/Curb and The Osmonds.....	81
<i>Producing Donny and Marie, Writing and Producing Roy Orbison Signing Eric Burdon and War, Tompall and The Glaser Brothers, Chicago Transit Authority Strawberry Statement Soundtrack (Crosby Stills, Nash & Young)</i>	

The Relationship with Bob Lifton

The Relationship with Karen Carpenter

CHAPTER 9: The MGM/Curb Merger 97

Composing “Burning Bridges” for the Clint Eastwood Movie Kelly’s Heroes

Composing the Music for Frank Sinatra’s Dirty Dingus Magee

Composing the Music for Liza Minelli’s Emmy Award Winning Liza

With A Z (“It Was A Good Time”)

Producing Steve & Eydie, Andy Williams, Sammy Davis Jr. (“Candy Man”)

and “It’s A Small World” for Disney with The Mike Curb Congregation

CHAPTER 10: The MGM/Verve Years..... 105

Eric Burdon and War, Sylvers, Tony Bennett, Sammy Davis Jr., Shaft,

Gloria Gaynor, Solomon Burke, Neil Sedaka, Richie Havens, Lou Rawls,

Johnny Bristol and The Five Man Electrical Band

CHAPTER 11: Early Hits In Country..... 111

Composing and Producing Hank Williams Jr.’s First #1 Record,

“All For The Love Of Sunshine”

Producing Eddy Arnold, Signing Mel Tillis, Kenny Rogers,

Billy Walker, Don Gibson and Ray Stevens

CHAPTER 12: Producing Recordings..... 121

Billboard Producer of the Year

CHAPTER 13: Analyzing the Music Business..... 129

The Importance of the Influence of R&B and Rock & Roll

Distributing Historic Sun Records

CHAPTER 14: The Music Business Lifestyle..... 135

CHAPTER 15: Warner Curb..... 139

Five Consecutive #1 Pop Hits, The Four Seasons, Bellamy Brothers,

Shaun Cassidy, Debby Boone, Exile, Foreigner, T.G. Sheppard and

Berry Gordy Jr.

CHAPTER 16: Marriage to Linda Dunphy Curb..... 145

CHAPTER 17: Government..... 149

Elected Lt. Governor of California and President of The Senate

Elected National Chairman of all Lieutenant Governors

CHAPTER 18: Acting Governor of California.....	159
<i>At the time California's economy was equivalent in size to the seventh largest country in the world.</i>	
<i>Co-Chairman of the Reagan for President Campaign and Chairman of the National Convention Program</i>	
<i>President Reagan and Motorsports</i>	
<i>Richard Petty's Historic 200th Victory at Daytona</i>	
<i>Winning Dale Earnhardt's First Championship</i>	
<i>Winning Two Historic Indianapolis 500 Races</i>	
CHAPTER 19: Going to Washington with President Ronald Reagan	169
<i>Curb Serving as Chairman of the Presidential Trust, Chairman of the NRFC, Trade Negotiations Board and National USO Board</i>	
CHAPTER 20: Back in the Music Business and The Judds	181
<i>Dick Whitehouse: 35 Incredible Years</i>	
CHAPTER 21: Hits and Soundtracks	197
<i>Righteous Brothers, Bill Medley, Dirty Dancing, Coyote Ugly, Real Life and Maureen McGovern</i>	
CHAPTER 22: Contemporary Country	209
<i>Lyle Lovett, Sawyer Brown, Hal Ketchum, Wynonna, Wayne Newton, Junior Brown, Gene Watson, Beat Farmers, Ronnie McDowell, Jeffrey Steele and Shane McAnally</i>	
CHAPTER 23: Contemporary Christian Music.....	219
<i>Larry Norman, Second Chapter of Acts, DeGarmo and Key, Debby Boone, Selah, Michael English, Jonathan Pierce, Patty Cabrera, Fernando Ortega, Whiteheart, Plumb, MercyMe, OBB and Natalie Grant, Acquisition of Word Records (for KING & COUNTRY, Francesca Battistelli and Big Daddy Weave)</i>	
CHAPTER 24: From Los Angeles to Nashville and Tim McGraw	227
CHAPTER 25: LeAnn Rimes.....	237
CHAPTER 26: Jo Dee Messina.....	253
CHAPTER 27: Inside a Record Company	261
CHAPTER 28: The Future.....	275
CHAPTER 29: The Business	289

CHAPTER 30: Motivation	299
CHAPTER 31: The Accident.....	311
CHAPTER 32: Word Records.....	321
CHAPTER 33: Curb Records – Billboard Christian Imprint Of The Year.....	327
<i>“God Bless The U.S.A.,” “Three Wooden Crosses” and “I Can Only Imagine”</i>	
CHAPTER 34: Problems in the Music Business	333
CHAPTER 35: Curb in the 21st Century	341
<i>Rodney Atkins, Steve Holy, Hank Williams Jr., Tim McGraw, LeAnn Rimes, Wynonna, Jerrod Niemann, Mo Pitney, Clay Walker, Kimberley Locke, OBB, Natalie Grant, Lee Brice, Dylan Scott and for KING & COUNTRY</i>	
CHAPTER 36: Curb Records.....	353
<i>First Independent Company to Become Billboard Label Of The Year The Importance of Five-Year Plans</i>	
CHAPTER 37: Listening.....	363
CHAPTER 38: Challenges.....	367
CHAPTER 39: Circles.....	375
CHAPTER 40: The Mike Curb Family Foundation.....	379
<i>***Five Honorary Doctorates</i>	
<i>***National Business Hall of Fame and Musicians Hall of Fame</i>	
<i>***Stars on the Hollywood Walk of Fame and Nashville Music City Walk of Fame</i>	
QUOTES	403

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Introduction

Several years ago, Don Cusic, who holds the History Professorship at the Curb College of Entertainment and Music Business, began research and interviews for a book that would present the story of Curb Records to the students attending Curb Colleges at universities across the country. During Curb Records' 50th Anniversary, we were fortunate to have Grandin Hood, Publishers, led by Pulitzer Prize-winning photographer Robin Hood undertake publication of our story. His creative team, including Randy Powers, Jay Sheridan, and the designers at Robertson Design, brought creative energy and focus to Don's vision; resulting in our 50th anniversary book, which is available online at mikecurb.com.

As the oldest record company that is still operated by its original owner, Curb Records has created numerous jobs, started many artistic careers, and most important of all, developed the Curb colleges and supported over 100 charities. Our success has been a result of the incredible positive strengths of our artists, our employees, the vendors, our friends at radio, film and television and the creative synergies that come from songwriters, producers, engineers and everyone involved in the making of music.

It's almost impossible to explain the number of people contributing to the process of creating a major hit record, but nevertheless we've tried to individually thank by name those who made a difference for each record. We have chosen to include important moments – some celebrated and others behind the scenes – responsible for our success, hoping to encourage those who may consider a career in the music and

entertainment business. We try to show examples of all segments of the music industry, whether it's writing the song, finding the song and matching it to the right artist, engineering the song in the recording studio, arranging, producing, the marketing, the advertising, the creative design, the promotion, or numerous other aspects of the industry. This book also illustrates the importance of being involved in all genres of music; for example, in virtually every one of our 50 years we have embraced rock music, country music, pop music, R&B music, international music, gospel music, television and motion picture soundtrack music and co-ventures with over 100 other record companies.

To help encourage young people to become involved in some form of public service, I have included my experience in public office as Acting Governor and Lt. Governor of California and my experiences as National Co-Chairman of Ronald Reagan's Presidential Campaign and Chairman of the Program Committee for the National Convention, and in Washington chairing the RNFC and the Presidential Trust. We live in the greatest country in the world where so many of our great patriots have made major sacrifices, and we owe it to them to do everything we can to make sure that their sacrifices were not in vain. I hope this book will inspire young people to start or be part of a business and a foundation that begins with little or no money and through hard work, teamwork, and passion, can build something that makes a positive impact on many peoples' lives.

My life really came full circle during the year of the Centennial Celebration of my mentor and friend, Ronald Reagan; Curb Records achieved its 300th Number 1 hit; our Curb-Agajanian Racing Team experienced its 500th NASCAR start; and we were a part of the winning

team for the historic Centennial Indianapolis 500 with driver Dan Wheldon. In 2016 we were fortunate to win the Indianapolis 500 again with driver Alexander Rossi. Amazingly, we were able to bring together motorsports and President Reagan at the historic Daytona Speedway in 1984 while he was President. I was able to arrange, along with Bill France Jr., for Ronald Reagan to become the first sitting President to attend a major motorsports event. The car I owned, driven by Richard Petty, won the event and it was his record-setting 200th victory. It became a major event because President Reagan was there to congratulate him on his victory. We were also involved with Dale Earnhardt when he won his first championship and I believe I am the only car owner to have won races in all 10 of NASCAR's domestic divisions. We've had over 500 victories in 40 different motorsports divisions, including IndyCar, NASCAR, World of Outlaws, NHRA, USAC and other sanctioning organizations.

This book also celebrates 40 years with my wife, Linda. Thanks to Linda, we have two beautiful daughters. Megan, and her husband Dr. Brian Cox, have given us four grandchildren, Catie, Brandon, and twins, Connor and Ethan. Our other daughter Courtney and her husband, Taylor Childress, both playing important roles with our music companies and our charitable activities, have given us two wonderful grandchildren, Carter Curb Childress and Caroline Curb Childress.

Unfortunately, during the last couple of years, Linda and I have both lost our mothers, and it's the 25th anniversary of the loss of my father. We had wonderful parents, and we all stand on the shoulders of our ancestors. They showed us the importance of hard work, community participation, a positive attitude, and realizing that we

can't be successful by ourselves. This book is dedicated not only to our ancestors, but also to all the employees, and artists, and our other friends who have supported our efforts in the entertainment industry, in government, and in all of the wonderful educational and charitable organizations with which we've had the opportunity to be involved.

I particularly want to thank The Grammy Museum for supporting our mutual educational goals and for making our book available in the Museum, in conjunction with the honor of being chosen as a Grammy Icon.

Thank you all for the important role that you played in helping us reach our 55th year.

Mike Curb

LIVING THE BUSINESS:

50 Years as an Entrepreneur in the Music Business

by Mike Curb

(with Don Cusic)

Entrepreneurs of music companies are more than just owners; they are a big part of their own product. Some of them put others in charge, but most of the successful ones live their work.

To me, living my business means that it is on my mind every waking moment. If I wake up at two in the morning, this business is on my mind. Living a business is not being able to separate the business from myself, and that may be what it takes to be an entrepreneur in the music industry for a long time.

Living the business means listening to music and having a musical plan for where you want to go. I believe in five-year plans and during the over 50 years of Curb Records we have completed ten of those; we have now reached the end of our tenth five-year plan, with the realization that I will have spent over 50 years of my life living the music business.

The record industry has a mystique and appeal that attracts many people and repels others. This is an industry that produces stars but most people do not know or understand the companies behind these stars. I'm reluctant to say that record companies are not liked, but I will say that record companies are very misunderstood. The evolution of the record company since Edison invented the first phonograph

has produced a global industry worth billions of dollars. Although the music and the stars of this industry are loved and emulated, the industry itself is condemned and criticized by those who do not have a true understanding of it.

The music business is an industry I have admired my entire life. I feel proud, honored and blessed to have been part of the music business since I recorded my first musical group while I was a student at California State University at Northridge and released my first record in 1963. At that time, as part of a class project I wrote a song in one of the music rooms at Cal State and released it on a small record label that I formed with less than \$100. A year or so later, thanks to my mentor, Eddie Ray, I was able to obtain major distribution for my label, Sidewalk Records, that evolved into Curb Records, so the history of my label goes back over 50 years. Along the way, I have partnered with and served as President of major labels MGM and Verve, Chairman of the Board and owner of Word Records, and have been involved in the lives and careers of major superstars. I have been a recording artist and produced, wrote, or released records on RCA, Columbia, United Artists, Elektra, Atlantic, Mercury, Reprise, Dot, Liberty, MCA, Universal, Capitol, Warner Bros. and Chess along with many small independent labels that unfortunately no longer exist.

Curb Records has had over 300 number one records on the *Billboard* charts, which places it in the top 40 labels of all time, in all genres, as compiled from chart activity. It is the only label in the top 40 that is still owned by its original owner. According to Joel Whitburn's books on *Billboard's* charts, in addition to the many hit records Curb Records has had in other genres, it is one of the all-time top ten country

music labels since the inception of the country music chart in 1944. In Whitburn's recent books, Curb Records is the only label of the top 40 pop or top 20 country labels that is not owned by international interests.

This book is the story of how an independent record company was started and rose to become one of the longest privately held and independently owned labels today. It is also my story – from the teenager who loved and collected 45 rpm records, to a record company executive who produced 45s. For about ten years I had a career in government service, where I served as Lieutenant Governor and Acting Governor of California, President of the California State Senate, Chairman of the Economic Development Commission and served as a Regent and Trustee of the California University systems. During the Reagan Administration I also lived and served in Washington as Chairman of the National Finance Committee and Chairman of the Presidential Trust, and was a member of President Reagan's Committee on World Trade Negotiations and the World USO Board before I returned to California and resumed my career in the music business full time. In the 1990s I moved to Nashville and have been actively involved in the music industry here ever since.

I have lived during exciting times and, I must confess, I have had a wonderful life. Suddenly, there are new issues in the music industry, created by new technologies that threaten life as we have known it. It is both a threat and a challenge to Curb Records, but I have always chosen to take negatives and turn them into positives, so my company, along with other music industry firms, will continue to seek solutions. In this book I address those issues and discuss how Curb Records is dealing with them.

It is encouraging to see so many young people with a passion for music who want to be part of the music industry. I hope this book ignites their passions, encourages their dreams, and gives them hope, help and ideas that will make them successful in this wonderful industry where I have spent my life.

Let us start at the beginning because we are more than just a moment in time; we all stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before us – both personally and professionally – and we owe a great debt to them for paving the highway on which we now travel.



The Early Years

My father's family is a First Tennessee Family. Joseph Whitwell Curb was living in Tennessee in 1796 when statehood was conferred; he was my great great great great great grandfather living in North Carolina when Tennessee was separated from North Carolina. At the time of statehood he was living in Hickman County, which is 40 or 50 miles southwest of Nashville. His son, Thomas Curb, was born in Tennessee but the family moved to Curbville, Alabama, a town which doesn't exist anymore. My great-grandfather, Aaron Monroe Curb, fought as a Confederate soldier in the Civil War and after that war the family moved to the Texas Cherokee Indian country, which is now part of Oklahoma.

My grandfather – Charles McLeod Curb – was a very sickly child for the first 23 years of his life. He and his mother constantly read the Bible together and he made a commitment that if he ever regained his health, he would spend the rest of his life in service to God. He regained his health when he was 23 and moved from his birthplace in Bell County, Texas and married my grandmother, Martha Kilgore in

Denton, Texas, near Dallas and spent the next fifty years traveling in Texas and Oklahoma as a Baptist minister. Our family is proud of the fact that in 2003 Reverend Charles McLeod Curb was inducted into the Oklahoma Baptist Hall of Fame.

My father, Charles Curb, was one of five children. He grew up in Oklahoma City and went to Oklahoma State University in Stillwater, which was then known as Oklahoma A&M. After graduation he studied law at night; by day he was a Math professor. In 1943 he received his Law degree, then entered training for the FBI and became an agent and was sent to the Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania FBI office. One day, while in the Dean of Men's office at the University of Pittsburgh, he was helped by a secretary, Stella Stout, who was a recent graduate of the University. By January, 1944, three months after they met, they were married in Charleston, South Carolina, which was his next FBI assignment. Later that year he was transferred to Savannah, Georgia.

My mother was not from Pittsburgh; she was born in Ashland, Kentucky in the same town and in the same hospital where The Judds – Wynonna and Naomi – were born. Her father, Charles J. Stout, was a graduate of the University of Chicago who majored in Social Work and later served with distinction in World War I. While serving at Fort MacIntosh in Laredo, Texas, he attended a Baptist church and met a young lady, Eloisa Salazar, who had just graduated from San Marcos Baptist College. Eloisa returned to her home in Laredo to work at an international warehouse as a translator when she met the young soldier. They were married in San Antonio in August, 1919 and moved to Ashland, Kentucky because there was a job opening at the YMCA. My mother, an only child, was born there on October 19,

1920. My grandparents remained in Ashland until the end of 1929 when, because of the Great Depression, the YMCA experienced cut-backs. My grandfather had to relocate so, since there was an opening at a YMCA in Pittsburgh, the family moved there. They lived in a one bedroom apartment in the Bellefield Dwellings in Oakland, which is Pittsburgh's cultural area. The Bellefield Dwellings were two blocks from the University of Pittsburgh and four blocks from Carnegie Library, Carnegie Museum, Carnegie Art Galleries and Concert Hall and Sculpture Gallery. Andrew Mellon had erected a perfect replica of the Parthenon which had pillars carved from stone quarries in Greece which became the Mellon Bank. My mother did not mind sleeping in the living room because she was happy they lived in such a cultural area. It was my grandfather's custom to read the Bible to my mother every day, which influenced her life. After his retirement from the YMCA, my maternal grandfather worked in Juvenile Court as a Probation Officer in Pittsburgh until his death in 1952.

Charles Curb and Stella Stout were married in January 1944 in Charleston, South Carolina but my father was soon transferred to Savannah, Georgia, where I was born on Christmas Eve, December 24, of that year. As a Georgia native, I was honored to be inducted into the Georgia Music Hall of Fame in 2003.

After Savannah, the FBI transferred my father back to Charleston, South Carolina where my only sister was born about a year and a half later. Another transfer was to Phoenix and then to Prescott, Arizona where he left the FBI and returned to Oklahoma City to practice law and spend time with my paternal grandfather before he died. My earliest childhood memories are of Oklahoma City because I was too young

to remember Savannah or Charleston. One of those vivid memories is going to my Grandfather's church, where I sat at the organ and he taught me how to play the old hymn, "Just As I Am."

We moved from Oklahoma City to southern California in 1949 when I was almost five and ready to start public school. My first school was racially mixed and I enjoyed it immensely. We lived in Compton, in southeast Los Angeles near Watts, right beside Enterprise High School. My father, a member of the Oklahoma Legal Association, passed the California legal exam and worked in the legal department of Continental Oil Company, or Conoco as it was known. During our time in California, the company lost its bid for off-shore drilling and moved its operations back to Houston, Texas, but my parents did not move until my sister and I graduated from high school.

When my sister was accepted by the University of California, Santa Barbara on a Conoco half-tuition scholarship and I was enrolled at San Fernando Valley State College, which is now known as California State University Northridge, my parents moved to Houston and my father joined the legal staff of Continental Oil Company. Later, he helped negotiate the purchase of Consolidation Coal Co. in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, which was the world's largest coal company. That was one of the largest mergers at that time. He then became the General Counsel and a Vice President of Consolidation Coal in Pittsburgh for the final five years of his career and my parents returned to live in the city where they originally met. It was amazing how his life came full circle. I don't think money was ever very important to him. What was important to him was leaving my mother with enough to live comfortably for the rest of her life, which he did, and to be with his family every night for dinner.

I always felt total respect for both of my parents because they were the center of my life. I was also very close to my maternal grandmother. Her father, Rafael Salazar obtained a tutor for his girls when my grandmother was five years old. He owned a dry goods store in which he sold bolts of material as well as patterns, threads and enhancements for dressmaking. His five daughters often selected ribbons for their hair for church on Sunday. After his death my grandmother worked to put herself through San Marcos Baptist Academy in Texas. My grandmother was tremendously interested in politics – she was a Democrat and loved Adlai Stevenson. She believed in the great Democratic politicians who cared about who she referred to as “the little people” because she was raised in Laredo, Texas, a town that was poor but emerging because it had obtained a railroad. Her forte was her ability to speak and write grammatically in two languages and to use that ability in an international produce store. However, my grandfather was a staunch Republican so at the election polls they canceled each other.

I never really knew my father’s political views because we never discussed politics. He was an Oklahoma Democrat who turned Republican after marrying my mother. My mother and I talked about politics a little while I was growing up; she was a Republican. However, my grandmother and I talked about politics all the time. I remember we sat in front of the television during the Republican Convention in 1952 when Eisenhower was drafted to run for President. At that time, nobody knew whether Eisenhower was a Republican or a Democrat and neither did Robert Taft, who would have been the Republican nominee if Eisenhower had not been nominated. I also remember

sitting with my grandmother and watching the entire 1956 Republican Convention on TV; I must have been eleven years old. Later, when I was in public service, I felt that I had benefitted from watching those conventions and learning about Democrats, Republicans, Independents, delegates and conventions from her.

In addition to teaching me about government, my grandmother Eloisa Salazar Stout taught me about caring for people and my father taught me about respect for the law and that our country is a nation of laws. Those laws have to be interpreted by people in a great system that was put in place over 200 years ago by some very forward-thinking people. It has not always been perfect, but it has worked well for the United States.

I was very fortunate in terms of my parents and grandparents and have been lucky with my wife and children. A lot of what I have accomplished is because I grew up in a loving, stable home. I have to thank my parents for taking me to church when I was young because it was there that I joined the choir and learned gospel songs. I became president of my high school choir and without those experiences I would not have formed The Mike Curb Congregation. My parents wanted to encourage me to continue my education, and they obviously never had the money or the desire to invest in a record company; nevertheless, my father constantly taught me about legal issues and my mother encouraged me to write songs and allowed me to use the family home in which to rehearse my musical groups and pursue my dreams.

It's hard for some people to believe that the grandson of a Mexican immigrant and the son of an FBI agent could start public school in

Compton, California and then move to the San Fernando Valley of Los Angeles and attend four additional public schools and start a business in Hollywood on the Sunset Strip with virtually no money, living in a janitor's section, and would later lead that State, which is the most populous state in the country.



CHAPTER 2

Early Music Influences

My family was not really a musical family but there was always music in our house. My grandmother liked Kate Smith, Lawrence Welk, Perry Como and Perez Prado, a Hispanic bandleader; she enjoyed his recordings of “Cherry Pink and Apple Blossom White” and “Patricia.” She loved to watch Kate Smith’s television show.

My mother enjoyed listening to Frank Sinatra, Bing Crosby, Guy Lombardo, the Mills Brothers and Patti Page, especially “The Tennessee Waltz.” I remember in the early 1950s, one of the first records my father bought my mother was that special hit. I can still see that Mercury record, which my mother accidentally dropped and broke. There is a tape of me singing “I’m Looking Over A Four Leaf Clover” back in 1949 and a picture of me playing a small violin when I was taking group violin lessons in Compton at the age of five. I remember the day my father bought the *Hymns* album by Tennessee Ernie Ford. In fact, he wanted to listen to any song Tennessee Ernie Ford recorded. He liked everything from “Sixteen Tons” to “Sweet Hour Of Prayer.”

I don't remember my father listening to Hank Williams or ever buying what is called "pure" country music, but I do remember hearing his radio playing Tennessee Ernie Ford. In those days, California TV and radio played Ernie Ford, Merle Travis, Roy Rogers, Gene Autry and Tex Ritter. I guess I would say that the music my father liked was western.

Our family joined the huge First Baptist Church of Los Angeles while we lived in Compton and I heard hymns every Sunday. We belonged to that church for many years and I was always active in the choir. Church is where I became interested in the piano, organ and other musical instruments and sounds. Many of my musical roots go back to that time in my life. My parents gave me violin lessons when I was five.

Then, when I was in the first grade, I started lessons on an upright piano we bought.

The popular musical influence on me came from the music I heard when I went to kindergarten and first grade in Compton. I had friends who were black and Mexican-American and I remember going to their houses where their older brothers and sisters were listening to radio stations playing what is known as "doo-wop" music and early rhythm and blues. I'm talking about songs like "It's Too Soon To Know" by the Orioles, "Good Rockin' Tonight" by Wynonie Harris, and "I Almost Lost My Mind" by Ivory Joe Hunter and artists like Big Joe Turner, Louis Jordan, Dinah Washington and Fats Domino. I was hearing those songs and artists on radio and sometimes on records. I started seeing new little 45 rpm records by those doo-wop groups – mostly black – in the early 1950s. I also saw groups singing on street corners

on the way home from school. I was very fortunate that the 45 rpm record was introduced in 1949, the same year that I started school.

I used to hear those records from disc jockeys on the radio, but the signal didn't carry very far. The sounds from that radio influenced my earliest playing. I would come home from school or piano lessons and play those doo-wop songs as well as my family's favorite pop songs such as Patti Page's "How Much Is That Doggie In The Window" and "Tennessee Waltz" – all of which I played by ear. I would also play the hymns from church such as "Bringing In The Sheaves" or "Just As I Am," but I played them with an R&B rhythm. At my piano lessons, my piano teacher would give me a standard song to play and I would play it, but I would be playing the doo-wop beat with my left hand. She'd ask, "what are you doing? what are you playing?" and I'd say "That's what I just heard on the radio." "Where did you hear that? I don't hear that." and I'd say "There's a little station in town that is playing those songs every night after six."

I was heavily influenced by the music from the African American churches, which I occasionally attended with my friends in Compton, when my father had to travel. To this day I believe that Mahalia Jackson was the greatest singer in the history of our country and I am thankful that I was exposed to her music through those churches. I learned that the African American church is the most important institution within that community. To this day it makes me angry when I hear people criticize the African American church and its preachers. Many Americans don't realize the injustices those preachers had to endure during times of segregation. I don't believe that any political candidate should be criticized for statements made by anyone in their places of worship.

My family moved to the San Fernando Valley when I was eight or nine and I missed my friends in Compton. I could no longer hear the same music on the radio stations, and it was a difficult transition because, until then, I didn't realize how much I loved those early African American rhythm and blues records. For me, rock & roll was the music that sounded great on those 45s back in the 1950s.

On a positive note, when my family moved to the San Fernando Valley in the mid-1950s, I was able to hear great crossover records like Sonny James singing "Young Love," "Battle Of New Orleans" by Johnny Horton, "El Paso" and "Singing The Blues" by Marty Robbins. That's where I first heard Top 40 radio – a station called KFWB – which I enjoyed. I believe the golden age of R&B was 1950 to 1955. After that a number of acts continued to develop R&B and rock & roll, but that period of 1950 to 1955 is where it all began for me.

After we moved to the San Fernando Valley I heard artists like Elvis Presley, Pat Boone and Ricky Nelson taking the same music that I heard from the black artists and moving it to a new, larger audience. It was the American rock singers who took this music to mainstream America. That period from 1956 to 1963 was an incredible mixture of music from different sections of the country. In New York, the Tin Pan Alley writers like Gerry Goffin and Carole King wrote incredible songs for the Chiffons and other groups. They were just "one-off" things; that means they weren't developing great, long-term acts like the next Beatles but instead had one hit after another with groups that were here today and gone tomorrow. At the same time on the East Coast independent labels such as Atlantic Records continued to develop long-term stars such as Bobby Darin, Ray Charles and the Drifters. In

Detroit there was Berry Gordy in the early 1960s with a whole range of groups – everything from the Supremes to the Temptations to the Four Tops – putting real production into layers of sound to enhance a song. On the West Coast there was Phil Spector with the Crystals and the Ronettes and all those beautifully produced R&B records with a very distinctive wall of sound. Brian Wilson and Mike Love with the Beach Boys put great production behind their records. Bob Gaudio and Bob Crewe in New Jersey took doo-wop type songs like “Sherry” and “Big Girls Don’t Cry” but gave them incredible production with the Four Seasons. “Production” is taking a song and making it a record, with a total package of sound. In the early 1950s I listened to doo-wop and in the later 1950s I listened to rock & roll, which was based on many of those doo-wop records that I heard earlier.

Almost all of those records I loved during the early 1950s were later recorded by rock & roll stars who took those songs to new audiences via television on shows such as “Ed Sullivan,” “The Hit Parade” and “American Bandstand.” On “American Bandstand” I started seeing those groups I loved, like The Flamingos and the Platters.

I know that people say rock & roll started in July, 1955, when “Rock Around The Clock” went to number one on the *Billboard* charts and I agree that’s the day on which much of America discovered it. However, before July of 1955 there were already at least five years of great R&B records. Some of the white covers of those black records were hard to listen to because they didn’t have the same feel. The secret of the success of Elvis was his ability to put so much soul into his recordings. He sang those R&B songs with the same feeling as the black artists.

I remember liking Elvis Presley and that I was in love with 45 rpm records – that's all I lived for. After we moved to the San Fernando Valley, I was nine years old and I ran two paper routes just to get money to buy 45s. I still have those 45s at my ranch in California – I've never parted with them.

I enjoyed rock & roll music, but I really liked the early 1950s doo-wop groups and the way their music impacted the latter part of the 1950s when that music went to mainstream America with artists like Elvis Presley, Ricky Nelson and Pat Boone. I played Jerry Lee Lewis, Johnny Cash and Carl Perkins on Sun Records and I liked all those old Sun 45s, and all that doo-wop and R&B music that came before rock & roll. Maybe the word rock & roll confuses people, but putting the rock & roll rhythm behind music made it bigger. I believe that understanding R&B music is the most important thing anyone can do if he or she wants to be in the total record business. I believe that R&B has influenced every form of music. If people are lucky enough to understand R&B and country, they can learn to appreciate jazz, folk and other music and then they can become part of all the music that was created in America. Rock & roll, jazz, R&B and country music were all created in America, and they all came from one another. The earlier that exposure to music starts in life, the better off you are.

I started forming bands and performing in them when I was in junior high. Those bands were comprised of friends I went to school with and my mother is the only person who thought we were good. She let us practice in our house and always encouraged us. In those days, if I played guitar I tried to sound like Duane Eddy. I formed a folksong trio, and later I had a group that played rock & roll.

When I was in junior high I began playing for junior high events such as an assembly or a school dance. When the school needed music, I was in the band that provided it. We had a small combo – guitar, drums, maybe a saxophone player – and I usually played piano or organ. That was the earliest formation of The Mike Curb Congregation.

In high school I continued to have a band that played wherever we could, especially dances. The core of that band was guitarist Davie Allan and drummer Larry Brown, who became part of later groups when I began recording and producing. Performing in those early junior high and high school groups that played for dances and school functions is how I learned to play all kinds of music.

Even as a ten year old kid, I was like I am now; I played music all day, either on the guitar or the piano or I listened to 45 rpm records. If I had a friend over, we traded 45s or played music – that's all I did. For my first job I wanted to get into the music section of the White Front store, which was a mass merchandiser in California. Since I couldn't get a job in that department, I began as a box boy and waited until there was an opening in the record department. I liked having an elderly lady walk in and say "my grandson wants this record that goes 'whop bop a loo bop'" and I'd say, "Oh, you want 'Tutti Frutti.' Do you want the Pat Boone or the Little Richard version?" I enjoyed helping older people find records for their kids. I had a love affair with the 45 rpm record and spent my whole life collecting them until they stopped making them.

I'm proud to say that I have an original copy of every 45 rpm record that hit the *Billboard* Pop/Rock chart from the start of the rock'n'roll era in the mid-1950s going all the way to the 1990s when 45 rpm records were no longer manufactured.



CHAPTER 3

First Steps in the Music Industry

*The Mike Curb Congregation, Crickets,
Buddies, Bobby Darin, Hondells*

(composing the commercial You Meet The Nicest People On A Honda)

After I graduated from Grant High School in Van Nuys, my father let me borrow his car to drive to Waco, Texas to audition a tape that I had made for Jarrell McCracken, the founder and head of Word Records. I recorded a pop country gospel version of Hank Williams' song "I Saw The Light" while still in high school and felt the song had a Christian message that would fit with Word Records, which was the leading label for gospel music. I drove to Waco and remember that I got lost going through the Baylor University campus. Finally, I found Word Records and met with Jarrell McCracken who listened, then asked, "Could you make a better demo?"

I recorded a new version of that song and, after the session, took it back to Waco and played it for Jarrell, who released a single as "The Mike Curb Congregation." I remember Jarrell saying to me, "You have something and someday I hope you'll do an album for us." I believed then that Jarrell was more or less giving me Christian encouragement

when he said “I know you’ve got something.” Jarrell introduced me to his top executive, Billy Ray Hearn, who I consider to be the first person to understand the Contemporary Christian music movement that was starting to develop. Word shipped my single to radio but nothing really happened. Still, it was the beginning of my relationship with Jarrell McCracken, Billy Ray Hearn and Word Records and eventually led to Word releasing an entire album by The Mike Curb Congregation. Decades later, in 2003, the relationship between Curb and Word came full circle when I became a partner and the Chairman of the Board of Word Records. On March 1, 2016, I purchased all of the remaining outstanding shares of Word from the Warner label and became full owner of Word Entertainment.

In Fall, 1962 I entered San Fernando Valley College – now known as California State University, Northridge – and took some general education courses. My mother enrolled with me; she had graduated from the University of Pittsburgh with a degree in English and always wanted to teach so she enrolled to obtain her teaching credentials. Since my sister was a senior in high school, my mother felt the time was right to do this. San Fernando Valley College was close to our home and we only had one car so my mother and I drove together to the college each day. I still performed with my high school band although we had not yet recorded. I loved the music business but there were no college courses or programs about the music industry like there are today. The only course I could take that came close was “Introduction to Music” in “Music Hall,” which is part of the college that is known today as the Mike Curb College of Arts, Media and Communication. Since I often had to wait for my mother to finish her classes or assignments

in the library, I found myself with time on my hands and there were some very nice people at the college who allowed me to stay at the “Music Hall.” There I wrote songs and recorded them on their tape recorders. Since it was a music school, they also had pianos, organs and guitars, which I used. Some days I stayed for an hour while other days I remained for three hours. On the way home in our car I sang the songs to my mother, who loved everything I wrote. Later, I found out that not everyone loved my music as much as my mother did.

I used the facilities at San Fernando Valley College to write and record songs with my band, then took those tapes to Hollywood – where the offices for the independent record labels were located – and tried to convince them to sign my band and release the recordings. The first song I wrote and recorded which was commercially released was “Speedway” on Titanic Records. In those days record companies wanted to have music group names they could continue to use if the record was a hit. Our band did not want to get locked into a single record company, so we let each company we worked with choose a name. That first record we did was an instrumental that featured Davie Allan’s guitar and a prominent saxophone solo that featured auto racing sounds, ending with a crash at the end of the record. It was released under the name “The Heyburners.” The core members of our band were guitarist Davie Allan, drummer Larry Brown and I played piano and organ. The sounds on that first record captured the sounds of hot rods and surfing that defined a big part of early 1960s West Coast rock & roll.

I used to go into Hollywood every day and walk up and down the Walk Of Fame streets and visit various small record companies. Those labels would have an occasional hit. Era had “The Wayward Wind”

by Gogi Grant, Dore had Jan and Dean with “Baby Talk,” Liberty had the Chipmunks, Imperial had Fats Domino and Dot had Pat Boone. I always felt I was lucky to grow up where I did because Hollywood had all those independent record companies where I could knock on doors and present my music. From late 1962, after I graduated from high school, through most of 1963 that’s what I did every day – try to get my songs released by one of those small labels. I was reading the music and movie trade magazines such as *Billboard*, *The Hollywood Reporter* and *Variety*. I was especially interested in *Billboard*, the major music trade magazine, and often purchased it at a news stand in Hollywood.

During those early years, my college rock & roll band made records that were released by Marc Records under the name The Warriors, American Artists as the Sudells, Dore Records as the Zanies, and Dot Records as the Streamers.

Reprise was a pop label that was originally owned by Frank Sinatra who sold it to Warner Bros. Mo Ostin, who was head of Reprise when Sinatra sold it, became head of the newly merged Warner Bros. Reprise label. I took a recording of an instrumental I made, “Hot Dawg” to Mo Ostin at Reprise and he liked it and wanted to sign me as an artist and release the record. Mo told me that he wanted to have a West Coast Rock & Roll band on Reprise because he had one on Warner Bros. called The Mar-kets. However, the company was in temporary facilities at the time and the merger had not closed. We had to wait, but fortunately Mo kept his commitment to me. This was in the summer of 1963. During this period my parents moved to Houston, Texas because my father was transferred after the company that employed him closed their West Coast office. My sister had just enrolled at the University of California,

Santa Barbara, and I was attending Cal State in the San Fernando Valley, so my father reluctantly made the decision to move to Houston.

There was a lot happening in my life, including records by my band and a recording contract commitment from Warner-Reprise. I had written and recorded other songs, so I decided to drop out of college for a semester. I did not know at the time that my “time off” from my college studies would last 50 plus years and counting! Young people need to think long and hard about taking time off from college before they’ve finished their undergraduate degree because sometimes they never return. It’s one thing to take a year off and get some work experience before going for a Master’s degree because that can often be good in business. However, it is not always a good idea to take a semester or two off as an undergraduate because later there will be regret for not having that important college degree.

On Fridays and Saturdays, my band usually played for fraternity parties or shows. I rented an apartment and, because I needed to earn money, continued working at the White Front store as my “day job.” I was working at the White Front store on November 22, 1963 when I heard the news that President Kennedy had been assassinated. Everyone in my generation remembers where he was on that day and I remember vividly that I had just been promoted from box boy to the music department at the White Front store. The night before, my band played at a fraternity party at UCLA and I had come home late and was very tired.

I usually awake early, but on this day I slept later. I had a radio alarm clock by the bed in my apartment in Los Angeles and remember that I was awakened when the radio alarm sounded but I did not hear

the usual music. I thought perhaps there was an advertisement – my mind was just wandering – then a solemn voice came on saying “We’re waiting for further news about the President.” The voice had not announced that he had died, but that he had been shot. I had to go to work that day at 10 or 11 in the morning but I remember being kind of frozen to my bed, wondering “what is happening?” It was hard to believe the President of the United States could be shot. I worked that day but it seemed like everyone was in a daze.

Dore Records released “Slinky” under the name the Zanies; that label recorded Jan and Dean’s early songs and Dore’s big hit was “To Know Him Is To Love Him” by the Teddy Bears, which was Phil Spector’s group. Lou Bedell, head of Dore, signed us to that label and “Slinky” was an instrumental where I played the organ. Dot Records released “Slipstream” under the name the Streamers. I had loved Dot Records for years because they recorded some of the greatest doo-wop records of all time, like “Come And Go With Me” by the Del Vikings. They also recorded the Hilltoppers, Billy Vaughn and Pat Boone. Randy Wood had moved to Los Angeles from Nashville and had an office above Glenn Wallich’s Music City, the top music store in Los Angeles. I played him “Slipstream” and he signed my group.

Back in the 1960s having a record that was a regional hit was normal. We used to hear our records on the radio in California but very few made their way to New York or the Midwest. Our group primarily recorded instrumentals because I knew that I did not have the talent to be a lead vocalist; however, I recruited three African-American females to be part of our group and they were our vocalists. We recorded “Look To The Stars” for Del-Tone Records, which was

owned by Dick Dale's father. Dale was a legendary surfer guitarist whose pioneering sound influenced a whole generation of guitarists on the West Coast, including the Ventures and the Beach Boys. Dale and his father were impressed with our guitarist, Davie Allan, but did not want to release a record featuring Davie because it would compete with Dick's records.

So they released one with our female singers, which we named "The Ja Detts." That record had a doo-wop sound with street corner harmonies. I wrote "Look To The Stars" because I was influenced by the records produced by Phil Spector and female groups like the Chiffons, the Shangri-La's, Dixie Cups and the Exciters, as well as songs coming from the Brill Building in New York by songwriters like Barry Mann and Cynthia Weil, Jack Keller, Howie Greenfield and Neil Sedaka, Gerry Goffin, Carole King, Mort Shuman and Doc Pomus.

I was always willing to travel anywhere if I felt there was an opportunity. For example, I met Jerry Naylor who was a member of the Crickets, Buddy Holly's former band, and that group was scheduled to record at Norman Petty's studio in Clovis, New Mexico. (Petty is the person who produced Buddy Holly's records.) I drove there with Jerry and he joined them for those sessions. I was recording a new demo of a song that Jerry and I had written entitled "Thoughtless." When Norman Petty played the demo for the Crickets (Joe Mauldin, Sonny Curtis and Jerry Allison), he told me they would be willing to record the song if Jerry and I re-wrote the lyrics. We agreed and this became the first song I wrote that was recorded by a major recording act.

I did not limit myself to small labels; I set my sights on major labels as well. One of the biggest landmarks in Hollywood is the

Capitol Tower, home of Capitol Records. That label was formed just before World War II and in 1956 opened its headquarters, which was built to look like a stack of records. The Capitol Tower had a security person; however, by entering in the back it was sometimes possible to get to the elevator without being challenged, and then walk around in the building. I enjoyed walking around in that building. One day I entered the elevator and there was Bobby Darin, who had moved from the East to the West Coast sometime during the early 1960s. He left Atlantic Records, the label where he recorded “Splish Splash,” “Queen Of The Hop,” “Dream Lover,” “Mack The Knife,” “Beyond The Sea” and all those great records in the late 1950s and early 1960s on their Atco imprint, and moved to California, where he signed with Capitol. The company gave him an office in the Capitol Tower, where he set up his publishing company, TM music.

Bobby was a great artist and a consummate song stylist. He could do rock & roll, such as “Splish Splash,” then follow with “Dream Lover” then record “Mack The Knife” with a big band and make one of the greatest records in the history of the music business. He could even do country songs like “You’re The Reason I’m Living” and “Eighteen Yellow Roses.” Later, when he returned to Atlantic, he brought back the Tim Hardin song, “If I Were A Carpenter,” which was originally written as a folk song. He was incredible; he could take any song and make it his own.

Bobby Darin had been recording in the Capitol Tower when I saw him in the elevator and said to him, “Mr. Darin, I’m a big fan of yours.” He didn’t have any idea who I was, but the fact that I was in the Capitol elevator probably confused him. He said, “Oh, how are you doing?” And I said “Fine” and then he said, “What do you do?” and I replied,

“I write songs, have a band.” Then he asked, “Are you recording for Capitol?” I said, “Hopefully.” He said, “What do you mean by that?” I told him that I wanted my band to record for Capitol so he said, “Well, why don’t you come into my office and play me a couple of your songs.” He had a little piano in his office on the fifth floor of the Capitol Tower.

I played him two or three songs and he said, “You know, I like those songs. They might even fit me.” He told me he was planning to do a couple of movies – he was married to Sandra Dee at the time – and then asked if I had any more songs. I told him I did but didn’t have a tape with me so he invited me over to his house that weekend; he lived by Toluca Lake. He wore a hairpiece and when I arrived at his home he didn’t have his hair on and I almost didn’t recognize him. He was sitting by his pool with a little tape machine and I played him some songs. After I played them he said, “You know, I want to get into the younger music and your songs sound like the surfing type songs that are popular. I’d like to sign you.” Of course, I was over the edge; I signed a contract with TM Music, his publishing firm in 1963. Through the efforts of Bobby Darin, I had three or four songs recorded. The Four Lads had been successful and Bobby knew one of the guys in the group. He got them to record my song “All The Winds.” I remember that he called me personally and said, “Are you a fan of the Four Lads?” I said “yes” and he said, “Well, they’re cutting your song and – stay seated – it’s going to be a single!”

I wrote for Bobby’s publishing firm for several years before he decided to close his companies.

A family friend, Mary Dean, who owned some small publishing companies, advised me to look for a job with a label, using a demo tape as a way to do an interview and audition. Mary helped me get in the

door of those small labels that put out my early records. Her suggestion led me to take a demo of my band to Nick Venet at Mercury Records. Nick was a legendary A&R guy in L.A. who looked for artists to sign to Capitol; he's the person who signed the Beach Boys to Capitol after that group had started on a small label.

During the early 1960s, there were various A&R guys at Capitol, including Voyle Gilmore who handled pop music and big band singers, Ken Nelson did country, Karl Engemann did everything and Nick Venet was in charge of music for "young people." Karl and Nick had signed the Lettermen before Murry Wilson, the father of Beach Boys (Brian, Carl and Dennis Wilson) walked into his office in 1962 with "Surfin' Safari" and "409." Nick Venet knew he had a hit group and was well aware that they could solve the major problem facing Capitol at that time – finding a young hit rock & roll act. Capitol's biggest acts were the Kingston Trio, Frank Sinatra, Nat King Cole and Judy Garland. Nick became the producer for the earliest Beach Boy hits, like "Surfin' Safari" and "409" (he took them into Capitol's studios to re-record those songs after he signed the act).

Since those early Beach Boys and Jan and Dean hits turned the California lifestyle – hot rods and surfing – into hit songs, Capitol decided to do some albums featuring hot rod songs. The first was a sampler called *Shut Down*, compiled by Nick that featured some Beach Boy songs as well as the song Robert Mitchum wrote and recorded, "Ballad Of Thunder Road." Capitol also released albums of surfing songs, drag racers, boat racers and even go-carts. There was a ready demand for those albums, which connected to the lives and fantasies of young people.

Nick was offered a position in A&R for Mercury and moved to that label. That was where he was when I came into his office one day with a tape that had a motorcycle song on it. That song was “Go Little Honda (You Meet The Nicest People On A Honda).” Nick loved the idea of motorcycle songs and invited me to put together an album of motorcycle songs with a studio group. I put together a group called “The Buddies” and we recorded songs I had written or co-written, which were released on two albums on the Wing label, an imprint under Mercury. One of my co-writers was Roger Christian, who wrote songs for the Beach Boys and Jan and Dean. Roger had moved to Los Angeles from Buffalo, New York and became a late night disc jockey on KFWB. Roger loved cars and originally came to L.A. to buy a “little deuce coupe” – a 1932 Ford. Roger met Brian Wilson after playing a Beach Boys single on his radio program. They began writing songs together and wrote “Little Deuce Coupe,” “Don’t Worry Baby,” “Dead Man’s Curve,” “Ride The Wild Surf,” “Sidewalk Surfin,” and “Shut Down.” In addition, Christian wrote “Little Old Lady From Pasadena” with Don Altfield.

Roger Christian and I wrote “Little Iddy Biddy Buddy Rider” and “Sickle Rider’s Rule.” Mary Dean and I wrote “Wanda On Her Honda” and “Mean Little Monza.” On the first Buddies album we recorded a song written by Brian Wilson and Mike Love, “Little Honda,” that was on the Beach Boys album, *All Summer Long*, released in the summer of 1964. That recording led to my first paying job with a record label in the music business.

Nick listened to “Little Honda” and said “that sounds like a single;” then said “I think we need a stronger lead voice” and asked if I knew Chuck Girrard of the Castells, who had the hit “Sacred.” I replied that

I certainly knew of Chuck Girrard and loved “Sacred,” which was a beautiful song. Nick suggested we try Chuck Girrard’s voice because it was stronger and might be more commercial. I vividly remember that I was jolted by his suggestion because I had sung the lead vocal on the recording for The Buddies. Nevertheless, I went ahead and prepared a session for a different singer, which meant erasing my voice because we did not have multiple tracks like we do today. The version of “Little Honda” with my vocal on it was released on The Buddies album; otherwise a copy of that original recording would not even exist today.

In the studio, we put Chuck’s voice on the recording and it turned out great. The next morning, we listened again and Nick said, “That’s a great record – I really like it. And, by the way, I want to show you your office.” I was a bit stunned and said “My office?” “Yes,” he said. There was an office right next to his and he told me to move my electric piano in and “I’m going to try and pay you.” I thanked him and asked “why did you decide to do that?” Nick replied, “Before last night I saw you as a member of a band who wanted to be an artist, but last night you proved to me you are a record producer because you took your voice off a recording and put somebody else’s voice on it. You made the recording very professionally and demonstrated to me that you’re not just an artist, you’re a record producer.” It was a tiny little office but I was absolutely thrilled to be there. Nick named the new studio group “The Hondells” and released the single at the end of the summer of 1964; it was a huge hit and became a top ten song in the Fall.

Although I was not initially thrilled with the decision to take my voice off and put Chuck Girrard’s on the recording, I buried my disappointment in order to be a team player. One of the consolations

would be that my song, “Go Little Honda,” would also be on the Hondells album and, in fact, became the title song on that album.

Then something happened that became a big break for me.

Nick introduced me to Clancy Grass who suggested that I take “Go Little Honda” to the Gray Agency in Los Angeles, an advertising agency which had the Honda account, and I did. The song has a catchy chorus that says “you meet the nicest people on a Honda.” I was 18 when I wrote that song in the spring of 1963 while I was a student at San Fernando Valley College – in fact I wrote it in one of their music rooms. Honda used that song in their commercial for Honda motorcycles; in fact, the commercial was basically that song although I re-wrote some of the lyrics to fit the commercial. That was one of the first rock & roll commercials – rock & roll in a California sense or West Coast rock & roll music.

This was a blessing as well as a problem because The Gray Agency people did not want that song on the Hondells album so we had to take it off, even though the album’s title remained “Go Little Honda.” Since it looked like there would not be any songs I wrote on that first Hondells album, Nick encouraged me to write something quickly as a replacement and I wrote “Rip’s Bike” on the way to the recording session.

After that first album, I wrote more songs that were recorded by the Hondells on their following album, including “The Rebel (Without A Cause),” “The Sidewinder” and “The Lonely Rider.” I was proud they joined a cast of songs written by Brian Wilson, Gary Usher and Roger Christian. The Hondells also recorded “Follow Your Heart,” which was the first song I played for Bobby Darin that led to him signing me to his

publishing company as a songwriter. Darin gave me a “draw” of \$25.00 per week, to be advanced against future royalties, which allowed me to survive while I pursued my dreams of being in the music business. In all, I wrote or co-wrote 18 of the 20 songs on the two albums by the Buddies and wrote or co-wrote ten songs, and produced 14 songs recorded by the Hondells.

Under the direction of Nick Venet, I had the opportunity to work with acts such as the Paris Sisters, the Walker Brothers, Timi Yuro and other acts signed to Mercury. In some cases, I found songs for the acts and produced them; in other cases, I helped Nick find songs and served as his production assistant. The Paris Sisters recorded one of my songs, “Always Waitin.” That group had a successful career and by the time they were signed to Mercury, they were a well-known Las Vegas act.

Phil Spector had produced a hit for them, “I Love How You Love Me.” I also had the opportunity to work with Timi Yuro, an incredibly talented singer who had a hit with “Hurt” in 1961. The challenge was to find a follow-up hit. I wanted to have her record a song that would reach both pop and country radio so I produced “Teardrops Til Dawn” with her. I found Timi Yuro to be one of those artists, like Ray Charles, who has an ageless magnificent soul in her voice. It was uplifting for me to work with her.

The job at Mercury lasted about a year and ended when Nick decided to leave and re-join Capitol. Our friendship remained strong and Nick became a mentor and big help to me as my career progressed.

Meanwhile, under Mo Ostin, I was signed as an artist and Warner Bros./Reprise released “Hot Dawg,” an instrumental I composed. Jimmy Bowen was at Reprise at the time and was positive

about my group. “Hot Dawg” was released the same day as the Dean Martin record, “Everybody Loves Somebody.” The Warner-Reprise label took a full page ad in one of the trades – it was either *Cashbox* or *Billboard* – and I distinctly remember the ad. The top half was “Everybody Loves Somebody” by Dean Martin and the bottom half was “Hot Dawg” by Mike Curb and the Curbstones. Well, Dean’s record was a huge hit in the summer of 1964 but my record was not, so Mo dropped my option for another record. However, he was very nice and said “Mike, we’ve just merged Reprise and Warner Bros. and we have a lot more artists than I thought we had and I really think you’re more of a producer than an artist.”

I didn’t complain when Reprise dropped me and I was fortunate to keep a good relationship with Mo Ostin, who was running the newly merged Warner Reprise company. That was the beginning of a relationship that led me into ventures with Warner Bros. about ten years later and eventually to Warner Bros. distributing Curb Records.



CHAPTER 4

Soundtracks

Composing Movies Themes: SkaterDater, Wild Angels (“Blues’ Theme”)

Composing TV Themes: Cattanooga Cats and Hot Wheels

Composing Commercials: On The Move With Chevrolet

The casual California lifestyle for young people in the 1960s involved surfing in the ocean as well as surfing on sidewalks with skateboards. Because the film industry is centered in Hollywood, movies were made about this California counterculture that influenced the entire country. If I had lived in Nashville, I would have judged my life as a songwriter based on how many of my songs were recorded by country artists, but because I was living in Hollywood when I started my company, success of a songwriter was based on how many music scores or songs were used in motion pictures. I definitely found an area of the music industry where I could work night and day for several years producing and writing music scores and songs for numerous motion pictures. Along the way, we created some hit records and we played a big role in bringing West Coast rock & roll to motion pictures, commercials and televisions.

I was given the opportunity to write the songs and score a short film, *SkaterDater* that was written and directed by Noel Black and produced by Marshall Black. Marshall had heard my commercial “you meet the nicest people on a Honda” and wanted that kind of music – West Coast rock & roll – in the film. Most films at that time had Les Baxter big band type orchestras playing on the soundtrack. This film had kids doing jumps and acrobatic acts on their skateboards and I wanted the music to reflect this excitement and energy. Davie Allan, the guitarist in my high school band, was a real pioneer in the fuzz tone sound of rock guitar. The top guitarist in Southern California was Dick Dale, whose guitar instrumentals served as a soundtrack for surfers; he had captured that whole surfing culture of big waves and daring surfers with his guitar sound. Davie Allan captured the sound of skateboarders and, a little later, hot rods and motorcycles in movies with his guitar sound, which had a lot more fuzz tone than Dick Dale’s records.

In the studio, I had Davie play guitar runs that corresponded to the leaps of skateboarders so you could sense the energy of the skateboarders while sitting in the audience and hearing the sounds of the guitar as it followed the skaters. Instead of a big orchestral build-up, Davie played a fuzz-tone riff that moved with the skateboarders.

SkaterDater was a big breakthrough for me. It was nominated for an Academy Award and the filmmakers took it to the Cannes Film Festival where it was the Grand Prix award winner. That soundtrack opened a lot of doors to produce more soundtracks in the future.

Because of the success of *SkaterDater*, I was hired to do the soundtrack for the movie *The Wild Angels*, which was released in 1966. The film stars Peter Fonda as “Blues,” the leader of a Hell’s Angels

motorcycle gang; co-starring in the film were Nancy Sinatra, Bruce Dern, Diane Ladd and Michael J. Pollard. I wrote “Theme From Wild Angels,” which was recorded by Davie Allan and the Arrows and reached the national pop chart. I also co-wrote and produced “Blues Theme,” which was also recorded by the Arrows and became my first *Billboard* Top 40 song. The great Rock & Roll Hall of Fame guitar group The Ventures recorded “Theme From The Wild Angels” on one of their *Billboard* chart albums and released it as a single.

The Wild Angels was a low-budget film produced by American International Pictures, or A.I.P., a firm that started in 1954 and had become the largest independent producer of films by the time I began scoring films for them. They had been successful with “beach party” movies starring Annette Funicello and Frankie Avalon, but I started composing their music when they began doing motorcycle films. I was only given a couple thousand dollars to do this film, but it opened the door for me to do a number of films for A.I.P. This soundtrack was a big album because, at that time, it was unheard of for West Coast rock & roll soundtracks to be on the charts and this album reached the top 10 in *Record World* and the top 20 in *Billboard* and *Cashbox*. Basically, I did the film music for free in return for my record production company owning the soundtrack recordings.

I remember taking “Blues Theme” to KRLA DJ Casey Kasem, who was always honest with his reaction to songs I produced. When I played him “Blues Theme,” he told me “this is the worst piece of junk I have ever heard.” I said, “Casey, that’s the theme for a Peter Fonda movie.” Casey really hated that record so I went to KFWB and obtained airplay on that station. The record became a big hit in L.A. and reached

the top 40 of the national *Billboard* pop chart. Casey finally started playing it when it looked like a hit from airplay on other stations. That movie was really a trendsetting event. Not only was the soundtrack a hit album, and the single a hit on radio, but that particular movie was the forerunner to Peter Fonda's and Jack Nicholson's *Easy Rider*, a movie that became a classic during that period.

I loved producing and found I had a real interest in working with other people. I never look at others as competition but rather as partners when it comes to making records. I enjoy working with others because it causes me to reach out and that, in turn, has allowed me to do things I would not have been able to do by myself. In addition to soundtracks, I produced artists during the early and mid-1960s which eventually led to me forming my own label.

Bob Summers was a talented guitarist and a member of my group, The Mike Curb Congregation, which performed whenever and wherever we could. Bob and I became partners in a studio in El Monte, near Legion Stadium. A lot of the doo-wop groups used to perform at El Monte Legion Stadium and I liked to go there and hear them perform. Bob and I recorded his sister, Mary Ford, in that studio doing a Patsy Cline song, "Why Can't He Be You." Mary became famous as part of the duo Les Paul and Mary Ford, who had those great hits "How High The Moon," "Lover," "Mocking Bird Hill" and others back in the late 1940s and early to mid-1950s. Mary's real name was Colleen Summers; after she married Les Paul, he changed her name to Mary Ford because Colleen was a well-known country singer in Los Angeles, a member of the group The Sunshine Girls, and Les did not want to have a country image when

he was cutting pop songs. Interestingly, Les taught Bob Summers how to play the guitar.

“Why Can’t He Be You” was a pretty well-known Patsy Cline song, written by Hank Cochran, but had never been a single. Bob and I were inspired to record Mary on this song because we felt it would appeal to the Adult Contemporary market. Mary did a good job on this song but I learned an important lesson: If I’m going to bring back a song, I shouldn’t bring back one that is closely associated with a major artist! Also, I shouldn’t re-make a song if I couldn’t make a better version. Many years later, it is obvious that no one has ever made a better record of a Patsy Cline song other than Patsy Cline.

Casey Kasem was my best friend during the 1960s and 1970s. When I met him, he had just moved to southern California from Detroit, where he had been a disc jockey. In Los Angeles he was on KRLA.

When we met, Casey had heard my commercial “You Meet The Nicest People On A Honda” and we struck up a friendship. I played records for him that I had recorded in the hope that he would give them airplay. Casey was dating my sister, Carole, at the time when I decided to record a single with him, “Forget Him (He’s Gone Forever)” which was a recitation. We released that record on CMC, which was a label name I created because I wanted to see this recording released. However, I wasn’t really committed to being the head of my own label at the time because I was more interested in writing and producing.

So CMC Records became a minor landmark rather than my real beginning as a label owner.

I became involved in a TV cartoon series on ABC, “The Cattanooga Cats,” which was created by William Hanna and Joseph

Barbera, the well-known and widely respected Hanna-Barbera who created a number of top cartoons. I became involved through the recommendation of Michael Eisner, who was the head of daytime programming for ABC Television at the time. Later, he became head of the Walt Disney company and guided that company to incredible success for over twenty years.

Hanna and Barbera needed a theme song for their TV show so we got together and wrote one. I produced the tracks with Michael Lloyd, a young man I met after my close friend Eddie Ray had recommended him to me, telling me that Michael reminded him of me. Michael and I hit it off with that first project and we have been together ever since; Michael Lloyd is still a very close friend and part of the Curb Records family over 50 years later. The year 2017 started on January 1 with Michael and me completing a song we wrote for President Donald Trump's Inauguration. Governor Rick Scott of Florida called me and asked for my help to get The Beach Boys to perform for the Trump Inauguration. Coincidentally, Mike Love (The Beach Boys' lead singer) was recording with Michael Lloyd in our Beverly Hills studio. The Beach Boys agreed to perform for Trump. It was exciting for Michael and me to be involved in producing music for another presidential inauguration. Lee Greenwood played a major role in the Trump Inaugural. I was proud to have Lee as a Curb recording artist and was fortunate to co-produce "God Bless The USA" with Lee and The Fisk Jubilee Singers.

I wrote another TV theme song during those early days for the "Hot Wheels" show, which was created by Peter Dixon to promote a toy car line. Hanna-Barbera produced that show, which was a thrill for

me because I have always been a big fan of car racing. In fact, car racing and music competed for my time and attention when I was young because they were my first loves. A car racing magazine even played a role in my education. My kindergarten teacher told my mother that I was writing backwards and felt that I had problems reading. My mother noticed that I loved to read *Motor Trend* magazine; there was a clipping in one of the *Motor Trends* for *Speed Sport News* so she subscribed to that for a birthday present. After she saw me reading *Speed Sport News* she realized it was not a matter of whether or not I could read because I showed her that if I wanted to read something, I could. If I did not like what I was reading then I wasn't very good at reading, which is probably something a lot of young people experience.

NASCAR was formed in 1947 but the first full year of NASCAR racing for the premier national championship was 1949, the year we moved to California. Compton is very close to Gardena where there were a series of speedways like Gardena Stadium and Carroll Speedway. Those races were promoted primarily by J.C. Agajanian, a successful promoter of motor sports. In 1952, a car owned by J.C. Agajanian and driven by Troy Ruttman won the Indianapolis 500; in 1963 J.C. owned the car driven by Parnelli Jones that won the Indy 500 race.

I used to love to go to those races and often went with a neighbor, Chris Christianson, who loved auto racing. I still remember those great drivers from that time like Marshall Teague, Frank Munday and the Hudson Hornets, which were the most exciting race cars that I had ever seen. As a young boy I could not make up my mind between being a musician and being a race car driver. I loved music but did

not think I was good enough to make it as a singer or a musician. However, I always had this dream of driving race cars – a dream that was never fulfilled.

“Life” was the first song I wrote that reached the Adult Contemporary chart in *Billboard*; I wrote it with Joe Leahy, who was the engineer at the H&R Recording Studios where I did a lot of recording. Joe also played trumpet and one day I suggested we try to make a contemporary sounding instrumental. Herb Alpert and the Tijuana Brass were very popular at that time and “Life” sounds a lot like the Tijuana Brass. I have always loved that Mexican-type sound and this was an attempt to try and capture that sound for the mass market.

The opportunity to do a commercial for a car company came when The Mike Curb Congregation was hired by Pierre Cosette to appear in a TV special sponsored by Chevrolet. After the show was finished, Pierre invited me to dinner with John DeLorean, a major executive with Chevrolet who later left that company and developed the DeLorean car. John asked if I could write an up-tempo rock-oriented commercial for Chevrolet that would appeal to young people. I wrote “On The Move With Chevrolet” which was used in their advertising. I still remember the session when we recorded that ad; the studio was full of advertising executives – there must have been 30 of them in the room. One of the executives was there to make sure the rhythm was right.



CHAPTER 5

Eddie Ray and My First Record Label

Arrows (featuring Davie Allan), Stone Poneys (featuring Linda Ronstadt), Electric Flag (featuring Mike Bloomfield and Buddy Miles)

Eddie Ray was a major figure in rhythm and blues long before I met him. He grew up in the mountains of eastern North Carolina and obtained his first job in the music industry in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where he worked as a stock boy for Decca Records. In the fall of 1945, he moved to Los Angeles and worked in record distribution. He joined Aladdin Records, owned by Eddie and Leo Mesner, which had artists such as Illinois Jacquet, Billie Holliday, Louis Jordan, Clarence “Gatemouth” Brown, Amos Milburn, and Charles Brown on their label. Eddie worked for Aladdin from 1946 to 1949, finished his Associate’s degree from Los Angeles Community College while working for the label and joined Central Distributing Company in 1950. This was the major independent distributor for rhythm and blues records in Southern California. At Central, Eddie handled records from a who’s who of Rhythm and Blues. Some of those acts were John Lee Hooker,

Howlin' Wolf, Little Walter, Johnny Otis, Ruth Brown, B.B. King, Lowell Fulson, Jesse Belvin, Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley, Clyde McPhatter, Sam Cooke, Rufus Thomas, Ernie K-Doe, and the Five Keys. He also co-wrote "Hearts Of Stone" and produced the first recording of that song by the Jewells. After their release, the song was covered by the Charms, the Fontane Sisters, Bill Black and Red Foley, becoming a hit in the R&B, pop and country music fields.

After he left Central, Eddie started work for Imperial Records in February, 1955. Imperial, which was owned by Lew Chudd, had artists such as Fats Domino, Ricky Nelson, and Ernie K-Doe, who had the great hit "Mother-In-Law." Eddie worked in national promotion, getting records on the radio and making sure the distributors had records to sell to retail outlets. After several years of this he moved into A&R and administration, taking care of the day-to-day business of the label.

One day I brought my group into the lobby of Imperial Records and asked to see Eddie Ray. I always studied the 45 rpm records and knew the labels that Eddie had been involved with and really knew about all the releases on Imperial. I did not know it at the time, but Eddie Ray had a policy of not seeing anyone who did not have an appointment; however for some reason, he decided to see me. He asked if I had a tape to play for him but I did not; instead, I invited him to listen to my group in the lobby. Although Eddie also had a policy of no live auditions, he listened to us as we performed several songs I had written. Many years later Eddie told me that he was not terribly impressed with the songs or the group – which he thought were O.K. – but he was impressed with me. I was flattered to hear him say that.

When I walked into Imperial that day, I did not know that Eddie had decided to leave and move to Capitol Records. Imperial had been sold by Lew Chudd and Al Bennett became the new president. After listening to my group, Eddie informed me that he was leaving and would join Capitol on a certain day. On the very first day that Eddie Ray started at Capitol, I was in the lobby, asking the receptionist to let Eddie know I was there and wanted a meeting. Against his usual policy – he granted me one. We hit it off and Eddie, who was the first African-American executive at Capitol, became my mentor and we developed a long relationship that continues today.

After he listened to my group, Eddie told me, “I wouldn’t record the group as they are.” He said “Why don’t you take the instrumentalists and call them something” (they later became The Arrows) “and why don’t you take the black girls in the group and call them something else” (we named them the Starlets) “and record them for the rock & roll marketplace. Let the big group, the Congregation, remain a gospel group.” I followed Eddie’s advice exactly because I respected his knowledge and experience. Unfortunately, today many young executives think that they need to pretend to know everything. I am glad I listened to Eddie and I still listen to him today. Eddie is now in his nineties and we are still very involved with his work with our company and our Foundation.

I wanted to record the song “Apache,” which had been an international hit in 1961 by Jorgen Ingmann, but was not a rock & roll hit. We went in the studio and made what we believed was a rock & roll recording of “Apache.” In those days they all sounded like surfing records – a West Coast rock & roll sound – and we called it “Apache ‘65.” We decided to name the group “The Arrows” after considering

“The Warriors” because of the Native American connection. We used the ‘65 because the Ventures had just released a song, “Walk, Don’t Run, ‘64.”

Eddie Ray and Nick Venet – who had re-joined Capitol – both lobbied the executives with Capitol to sign me as a producer. The legal department worked up a contract for me to sign but, after thinking it over, I decided to turn down the generous offer from Capitol that was engineered by Eddie and Nick because I had made an important decision.

I did not aspire to start a record company when I started making records; I just wanted to be in the record business. However, after the experience at Mercury where I obtained a job through the efforts of Nick and then lost it when Nick moved to Capitol, I was less excited about getting a job at Capitol because I thought I could easily lose a job again. For that reason, I thought I would have more job security if I had my own company.

I had the tape of “Apache ‘65” recorded by my high school band, The Arrows, and asked Eddie what he would do and he replied that he knew what Lew Chudd (the founder of Imperial Records) would do. He said Lew would get some pressings made. I was pretty green, so I asked him “how do you make a pressing?” He told me, “Mike, you love 45s – you know more about 45s than any young man I’ve ever met. I thought you would know this.” Well, I didn’t so he told me to go to Allied Pressing and place an order. In fact, he even gave me a name to see and called him for me.

I could not use the name Curb when I made those first pressings back in 1964 because there was another label called Cub. I picked another name, “Sidewalk,” because that was close to a curb, and I

incorporated Sidewalk Productions.

Allied pressed 300 copies of Sidewalk Records and I paid for them, brought them back to Capitol and asked Eddie if Capitol would distribute them. He said he would check and arranged a lunch with a young lawyer fresh out of law school who was working for Capitol. That turned out to be the best thing that ever happened to Sidewalk Records, because that attorney was Dick Whitehouse, who later became president of Curb Records. We were going to sign contracts for the distribution agreement when Dick asked if I was 21. I was not – I was only 19 at that time. I thought I could get my father to sign for me but he would not do it because he was afraid he would lose everything if it did not work out. Finally, Dick told me “Go ahead and sign the contract and when you become 21, just promise me you’ll come back and re-sign.” So I signed the contract and we put out “Apache ‘65.” It was a big local hit and went to number 64 on the national *Billboard* chart and became my first chart record as a record company owner.

Although that record was originally on Sidewalk, Capitol decided to re-release it on their subsidiary, Tower Records, when it started doing well. Gordon “Bud” Fraser was a vice-president at Capitol but President of their Tower Division, which was the division through which they distributed other labels and my agreement with him was that if something on Sidewalk was really good he could move it over to Tower, which he did in the case of “Blue’s Theme.” Then Bud made a new contract with me, giving me more profits from Sidewalk with the understanding that we would move records over to Tower if they fit certain criteria. Bud and Eddie made it possible for my label to have a hit with “Apache ‘65” when they assigned their national promotion

team to work on this record, which led to us having a Top 40 hit. George Sherlock was the promotion person at Tower who broke that record.

Sidewalk Records then released the very first record by the Stone Poneys, which was comprised of Linda Ronstadt, Kenny Edwards and Bob Kimmel. I met them in Santa Monica and produced their first record, “So Fine” (originally recorded by the Fiestas). That song was written by Johnny Otis who had many great records both as an artist and a writer. He wrote “With Every Beat Of My Heart” for Gladys Knight and the Pips. He had his own TV show in L.A. and was the real deal when it came to performing Rhythm and Blues and merging Big Band with R&B, Bebop and doo-wop. So many artists, like Esther Phillips, owed their start to Johnny Otis; she used to sing with his band. I still remember watching Johnny Otis on TV when I was growing up.

When Nick Venet heard the Stone Poneys he really liked them. Nick said to me “you always said you’d do me a favor – would you mind if I signed the Stone Poneys?” Then he added, “And I’ll do you a favor – I’ll make sure that you participate and that Capitol distributes the records you want to record in the future.”

I had produced two records with the Stone Poneys and Nick assured me that he would get Capitol to promote the recordings if I would let him have the Stone Poneys and I agreed. Then Nick produced “Different Drum,” which was written by Michael Nesmith, who was one of The Monkees. That was released on Capitol in 1967 and went to number 13 on the pop chart. Capitol had another record on the Stone Poneys before Linda Ronstadt left the group and went out on her own. Nevertheless, thanks to the efforts of Eddie Ray and Nick Venet, I now had an independent label distributed by a major label.



CHAPTER 6

Building Amazing Future Relationships

Casey Kasem

Composing the “American Bandstand Theme”

Dick Clark

Co-mastering Pink Floyd

Producing Savage Seven Soundtrack

(Cream, Eric Clapton and Iron Butterfly)

Building Early Relationships with Future Curb Recording Artists

Buck Owens, Merle Haggard and Sonny James

Starting a business is not easy and those first years were tough making ends meet. In fact, I lost my apartment during that time. I made \$3,000 from the commercial “You Meet The Nicest People On A Honda” and then I received \$2,000 for doing the *SkaterDater* movie. I rented an office at 8730 Sunset Strip where my sister worked with me, along with two employees. Carole was invaluable during those early years. During the day she was a student at UCLA, but she regularly came to the office and helped in any way she could to get the label started.

I soon ran out of money but did not want to give up my office, my employees, my phone, and my record player or piano. I decided to give

up my apartment because I had to choose between having an office and an apartment. I was sleeping in the office one night when John Zurlow, who owned the building, saw me. He asked why I was sleeping in the office and I told him that I had to give up my apartment because I signed a lease with him and wanted to honor it. He told me there was a room upstairs on the roof they had built for live-in help but it was empty. He offered it to me and my sister, and that's where we lived for the next year and a half.

Casey Kasem hosted "America's Top 40 Countdown" and became the best known disk jockey in America, telling bits of information about each song and artist as he played the top hits each week on his syndicated radio show. I first met Casey when my sister and I were living in that one room janitor's section. Casey would come up to the room and the three of us played music, laughed and talked. Then we would all go out and get a hamburger or go to a deli. It was a great time and Casey and I became close friends.

I talked Casey into going to an interview with Charles Stern, a Hollywood agent who represented a number of "voices" who provided the voice-overs for commercials. I told Casey that since he had such a unique voice he should do voice-overs. Casey did not feel he had "the right kind of voice." I set up the meeting but he did not go so I telephoned to wake him, then had to pick him up and take him to the meeting. Two years later he was the top person doing voice-over work in Hollywood. I was the first sponsor of Casey Kasem's "American Top 40" Show and bought commercials for my records on that show.

I met Dick Clark through Casey Kasem, who introduced us backstage at an awards show. Later, we sat next to each other on

a plane and spent the entire flight talking rock & roll trivia. Before we got off the plane, Dick said “I’m thinking of having a new theme song for ‘American Bandstand.’” He asked if I wanted to take a shot at writing it and I did, co-writing that song with my very talented good friend Jerry Styner. Dick liked the recording we made and put “The Theme To American Bandstand” on his show and used it for many years. However, Dick did not want to use the name “The Mike Curb Congregation” – he said “you need a more hip name” – so he called us “Mike Curb and Waterfall.”

Those early days were a struggle but exciting. Night and day I lived for music. All I wanted to do was be in a recording studio or at a record company. I did not mind waiting an hour for a meeting because I wanted to write and record songs and I didn’t care whether I was an artist, songwriter, producer, publisher or record company owner. I just wanted to be in the record business and make those 45 rpm records. If there was anything I could do to be around the record business, I took advantage of it and seized the opportunity.

I remember the first time I walked into a recording studio to make a copy of one of the home tape recordings of my group. I accidentally ran into Bill Putnum, the owner of United Recording Studios, in the hallway and he invited me into the big studio where he was recording tracks with Hollywood studio musicians for one of Elvis Presley’s films. I will never forget that moment and how amazed I was by the powerful sounds and the studio equipment and professional musicians and engineers. United Recording later became Ocean Way Studios in Los Angeles, then Ocean Way moved to Nashville and became a top recording studio for artists like Tim McGraw, and is now owned by the

Mike Curb College of Entertainment and Music Business at Belmont University. When Belmont President Bob Fisher approached me with his idea to purchase the studio so our students could experience being in a recording studio, I realized that our students would be able to have the same experience I had over 50 years before.

I always had a band and we played at a lot of fraternity parties. One night some guys who were drunk threw my electric piano out of a second floor window and damaged it. I was upset but managed to fix it except for a funny rasp. I recorded in one of the small studios at Gold Star, at Santa Monica and Vine, and the owner, Stan Gold liked my group. Stan knew that Phil Spector was recording one of his groups at Gold Star and wanted a piano sound so he recommended my piano, which Spector rented. In fact, Spector paid me more by the day to rent the piano than I made playing at fraternity parties, which was \$25 a night!

When I was in my teens and twenties, I was aware of and in awe of people who were better producers than I was. Phil Spector had Philles records and produced groups like the Crystals and the Ronettes. Those great independent record companies were owned either by an entrepreneur or someone who could produce. Sometimes I went to the studio to pick up my piano but it would be needed for three more hours. Phil Spector was the kind of producer who sometimes worked night and day. I would sit in the back of the room, along with Sonny Bono, and watch Phil produce and create his “wall of sound” with sustaining background vocals. Phil was a genius. Sometimes I stayed and watched while at other times he ordered everyone out of the studio so I had to leave.

I also leased my piano to Jimmy Haskell while he made Ricky Nelson's records and was able to watch him work. Later, Eddie Ray worked out a way for me to sit in on some recording sessions for Capitol. Some artists don't like to be watched while they are recording, while other artists enjoy having an audience in the control room because it makes them feel like they are in a live venue. I participated in mastering sessions where you learn how to balance the music levels, including volume and high end-low end sounds. Among other things, thanks to Eddie, I got to participate in the mastering of an *album* titled *The Piper At The Gates Of Dawn* for then unknown group called Pink Floyd. Amazingly, this opened the door a few years later for me to ask Pink Floyd and Jerry Garcia of Grateful Dead to become a significant part of the soundtrack for the movie *Zabriskie Point*. Obviously, this might seem to be a very small involvement in Pink Floyd, and I'm not trying to take credit for Eddie Ray's belief in Pink Floyd. Nevertheless, I try to tell young people all the time that I know people who make a great living from being good at mastering records. You don't need to own a company to be an entrepreneur. You can be an entrepreneur by building your own division of a company or by being great in your area of expertise.

I continued producing soundtracks for the A.I.P. films. After *The Wild Angels*, Sidewalk released the soundtrack for *The Trip*, which also starred Peter Fonda and was directed by Roger Corman and featured the single "Green And Gold." The screenplay was written by Jack Nicholson and featured Susan Strasberg, Bruce Dern and Dennis Hopper in addition to Fonda. The artists on this album included Mike Bloomfield and Buddy Miles, who went on to become major Rock

stars. We released singles by both of these artists and I am proud today of my involvement in promoting their great music through my record company.

Dick Clark was successfully involved in just about everything in every phase of the music business. I believe that both Dick Clark and Casey Kasem looked at the contemporary music business the same way I do – as derivative of rock & roll. That is a basic difference in my outlook from most of the Nashville based companies, who see country music as derivative from the country records that were successful in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. I have come to love those records, but I did not get to hear them when I was growing up unless they crossed over to the pop/rock radio stations. Something else that I had in common with Dick Clark and Casey Kasem was that we all did our business full time; we all lived the business that we were in. I know that Dick Clark lived and breathed his business; he thought about it night and day and that's why he was able to do so much. As for me, even when I am in my bedroom at night I am listening to music. When I am at home, I am usually on the phone talking about the music business and when I have lunch with someone, I talk about the music business or something related to it. Another important trait that Dick Clark, Casey Kasem and I all had in common was that we stayed away from substance abuse and some of the other problems that damaged other people's brains or killed their ambition and drive.

I co-produced the soundtrack to *Killer's Three* with Jerry Styner and Harley Hatcher. Dick Clark acted in the movie in addition to being the producer. On the soundtrack to that film and album was a song that became a country classic, "Mama Tried" by Merle Haggard. Haggard

and his then-wife, Bonnie Owens, also had parts in that movie. Harley had just been discharged from the armed services when I met him and signed him as a songwriter – the first songwriter I signed to my publishing company. He remains with the Curb Records group today. Jerry Styner was a good friend and we wrote many songs together. Jerry did movie work and we worked together on many films because we often had three or four soundtracks that we were working on at one time. Jerry was very good with horns and arranging.

For *Killer's Three*, I asked Harley to work with Merle Haggard on writing the theme song, which ended up being about five minutes long and was inspired by the movie *Bonnie and Clyde*. My record label, Sidewalk, released the soundtrack album.

Killer's Three was an all country soundtrack that gave important exposure to some West Coast country artists. Those artists were rarely seen on national television shows so it was difficult for them to sell albums. We worked with Cliffie Stone on this soundtrack. Cliffie was a legendary country producer who was head of country A&R for Capitol for a number of years. I first met Cliffie through Eddie Ray in the Capitol Tower; Eddie was a friend of Cliffie's, whose offices were around the corner from Capitol. Cliffie was primarily a publisher who told me that Capitol was overlooking some of his really good artists. He offered me Kay Adams and told us about Dick Curless, who was from Maine; later we recorded Dick as a solo artist and on duets with Kay Adams.

Cliffie Stone was responsible for introducing me to many country artists and songwriters, such as Buck Owens, Merle Haggard and Sonny James. He introduced me to his son Steve Stone and arranged for us to produce Tennessee Ernie Ford, who was my father's favorite

artist. Steve and I formed a production company, CurbStone, and Steve produced the Ford project. This was part of our evolution towards country music. Who would believe that Buck Owens, Merle Haggard and Sonny James would later become exclusive recording artists for Curb Records? From a California viewpoint, they were the top three artists in national country music at that time.

I learned what it took to be a great country artist when I became acquainted with Sonny James, who recorded for Capitol. Sonny was an incredible recording artist who always had everything laid out perfectly. He would go into a studio and play his guitar licks live while he sang. Sonny James was the greatest combined artist-record producer ever in country music because he could produce a record as he was singing it. When artists ask “what should I do to get a hit,” I tell them to do what Sonny James did: find the best song, make the best record and then follow-up with visits to radio treating everybody there as a best friend. I think Sonny James was the first country artist who really understood radio. Sonny was a great radio promotion man because he understood the relationship between radio and records. After he released a record he called the stations, maintained that relationship with disc jockeys, and did call-in’s where they interviewed him on the air. He knew what radio was looking for because he asked them what they were playing – or not playing – and why. There were other artists who visited radio but Sonny did it over and over, year after year and decade after decade, and that is a major reason he had so many hits on radio. One of the proudest moments of my career was when Sonny chose my company to be the publisher of his original songs.

Psych-Out was another film produced by Dick Clark that we worked on. That film featured Jack Nicholson, Susan Strasberg, Dean Stockwell, Bruce Dern, Adam Roarke and Garry Marshall. The Strawberry Alarm Clock was on that soundtrack, which was released on Sidewalk Records.

Al Simms, who became head of music at A.I.P. and was in charge of the film scores, hired me to do the movie *Devil's Angels*, which starred John Cassavetes and Beverly Adams. Roger Corman produced that movie and Daniel Haller directed it. That was a biker movie and on that soundtrack we stacked the guitars; in fact, that was the first time we ever stacked the guitars on an album. Davie Allan and the Arrows performed on that soundtrack and I had Davie do harmony with himself over and over. Guy Hemric, Jerry Styner and I wrote the song "Devil's Angels," and both the single and album were on the *Billboard* charts.

Tom Laughlin heard the soundtrack to *The Wild Angels* and asked me to work on *Billy Jack*, a movie he produced and starred in. Since I was in the middle of working on the *Devil's Angels* soundtrack, I asked Bob Summers to help and we co-produced it. We wrote the song "Alone Never To Love Again," which was recorded by Terry Stafford, who had the huge hit, "Suspicion," which Bob produced. Terry Stafford was the songwriter who gave our publishing company its first big hit when he wrote "Big In Dallas," which Buck Owens recorded as "Big In Vegas." That was a top five country hit in 1969. Earlier, Bob Summers and I produced the soundtrack for the film *Dr. Goldfoot and the Girl Bombs* and Terry Stafford sang on that soundtrack as well.

I directed the music for the movie *Thunder Alley*, which was released on Sidewalk. That movie starred Annette Funicello and

Fabian; Annette sang a song on that soundtrack, which was mainly comprised of songs recorded by a studio group. The next movie was *Riot on Sunset Strip*, which featured a cut by our own young rock band, The Mugwumps. I produced that soundtrack and produced the “Theme From Those Fantastic Flying Fools” an instrumental single by our studio group, which we called “The Sidewalk Sounds.” Jerry Styner, Harley Hatcher and I scored the soundtrack to *The Golden Breed*, a surfing movie, and Bob Summers and I produced the soundtrack to *The Wild Racers*, a biker film. We used the Arrows and a studio group on that soundtrack. *Born Losers* was another Billy Jack film starring Tom Laughlin and I produced that soundtrack.

The Savage Seven was a movie I was excited to work on because by this time it had become “in” to be a part of the soundtrack albums for these films. Ahmet Ertegun had the rights to the album for Atlantic Records – Atco was the label it was released on – and he asked me to produce the soundtrack. Ahmet gave us access to his Atlantic artists, which allowed us to use Cream featuring Eric Clapton. I did not produce “Anyone For Tennis,” the song they did for this album, but I did produce the album. Dick Clark, who produced the film, would call and tell me “I want a song like this” and I would communicate that to, in the case of Cream, Robert Stigwood, who was their manager. Stigwood had started his career with Brian Epstein’s management company, which managed the Beatles. Robert Stigwood was British and incredibly bright; I flew to England and met with him about this track. Later, Stigwood managed the Bee Gees and put together the *Saturday Night Fever* soundtrack. Clapton and

Cream wrote “Anyone For Tennis” themselves and it was produced by Felix Cavalierre, who was later a member of the Young Rascals. Ahmet Ertegun was terrific to work with; he could get artists to do anything. Also on this soundtrack was Iron Butterfly, and Duane Eddy had a role in the film.

The Devil’s 8 film starred Christopher George and Fabian; I directed the music, which was scored by Jerry Styner and Michael Lloyd. *The Hellcats* was a biker movie and we used The Arrows on a couple of cuts. *3 In The Attic* starred Yvette Mimieux and Christopher Jones; the soundtrack came out on Sidewalk and featured songs by Chad Stuart of Chad and Jeremy. *The Glory Stompers* starred Dennis Hopper and Jock Mahoney and featured Davie Allan and the Arrows on an album produced by Harley Hatcher, Jerry Styner and me. *The Cycle Savages* soundtrack was produced by Jerry Styner and me; the soundtrack to *Mary Jane* was produced by Lawrence Brown and me and the soundtrack album to *If He Hollers, Let Him Go!* was produced by Bob Summers while I served as Executive Producer. That soundtrack featured songs co-written by Sammy Fain, the great songwriter who co-wrote “April Love,” “Secret Love” “Love Is a Many Splendored Thing” and many others.

The biggest film released by American International Pictures was *Wild in the Streets*, which was released in 1968. That movie starred Shelley Winters, Christopher Jones, Diane Varsi, Hal Holbrook, Millie Perkins, Richard Pryor and Ed Begley, with special appearances by Dick Clark, Melvin Belli and Walter Winchell, who all played themselves. Jim Nicholson, the President of A.I.P. asked me to produce the music for the film, which I did with Harley Hatcher. Barry Mann

and Cynthia Weil, who wrote “You’ve Lost That Lovin’ Feeling,” and many other great songs from the Brill Building in New York, wrote “The Shape Of Things To Come” for that film. Max Frost was the name of the lead character in the film, which is about a rock star who wanted to rule America. The song, recorded by Paul Wyber, was released by “Max Frost and The Troopers” and reached number 22 on the *Billboard* singles chart.

I did not have an agent until I met William Belasco; he offered to represent me for movie scores and I agreed. He told me that I should be doing music for the major film studios – I had only worked with independents at that time – and the first film work he obtained for me was *The Big Bounce*, starring Ryan O’Neal, Leigh Taylor-Young, Van Heflin and Lee Grant, which came out on Warner Bros. Pictures. For the first time, I had the opportunity to work with a large orchestra and The Mike Curb Congregation sang the title song, “When Somebody Cares For You,” which I wrote with Guy Hemric. It was a big thrill to see “The Mike Curb Congregation” displayed prominently on the cover of the Warner-7 Arts soundtrack album.

Doing film soundtracks was an important part of my career and the development of my record label during the 1960s in Los Angeles. Ironically, some of those films became cult classics because they introduced future stars like Jack Nicholson, Peter Fonda, Nancy Sinatra, Bruce Dern and John Cassavetes to film audiences. Those films featured innovative artists like Mike Bloomfield, the Electric Flag, Davie Allan and the Arrows, Strawberry Alarm Clock, Iron Butterfly, Seeds, Buddy Miles, Merle Haggard, Max Frost and the

Troopers, and Eric Clapton and Cream.

During the 1960s California became a center for the drug culture and a lot of artists were into drugs. Although I was around those using drugs and part of a music and film business that seemed, at that time, to be saturated with substance abuse, I never used drugs. I spent most of my time around Sunset Boulevard and Hollywood in Los Angeles and also went to San Francisco a number of times where there wasn't much that I didn't see. I don't fully know how I avoided drugs but I think a lot of it was due to my father, who was a former FBI agent. For him, drugs were illegal and that was reason enough to not get involved with them and I absorbed that belief.

When I entered the record business it was all about finding places where I could take rock & roll where it had not gone before. I remember taking rock & roll to movie soundtracks when I did *SkaterDater* in 1964 and 1965. No one was putting West Coast rock & roll music in films at that time. I know there were films like *Blackboard Jungle* that had "Rock Around The Clock" in it, but the entire music score was not rock & roll because the movie scores at that time were still the big orchestras. However, when I scored *SkaterDater* we did the whole soundtrack with rock & roll guitars and rock & roll drums. After that film won the Cannes Film Festival Grand Prix Award and was nominated for an Academy Award, Roger Corman asked me to compose and produce the music for his *Wild Angels* movie starring Peter Fonda and Nancy Sinatra. Instead of using horns we used fuzz tone guitars that complemented the sound of the motorcycles. I had my first top 40 hit as a producer and writer with "Blues Theme" using those fuzz tone guitars. I was doing the music for those American

International Pictures in the mid-1960s and was involved in over 50 of those films. With all of those movies I believe we were bringing complete rock & roll soundtracks to films.

Someone may say that what I did was motorcycle or surfing music but to me it was southern California rock & roll. Ironically, most of those soundtracks that we produced or composed were recorded by the core band I formed in high school. The group had Davie Allan, who had an incredible talent for coming up with sounds with his distinctive fuzz tone guitar, Larry Brown on drums, Harley Hatcher on acoustic rhythm guitar, and Drew Bennet on bass while I played the keyboards. Davie's creative guitar music still sounds great over 50 years after some of those records were recorded. He deserves a lot more recognition for his guitar work, which really enhanced those visual shots of motorcycles, hot rods and skateboarders on the screen.

During the time we recorded soundtracks, we used other musicians in our group: Wayne Allwine on rhythm guitar, Jaret Hendler on keyboards, Don Manning on drums, Carole Kaye on bass, Hal Blaine on drums, Larry Knechtel on keyboards, Jerry Styner on rhythm guitar, Billy Strange on guitar, Joe Osborne on bass, Jim Horn on horns and Ralph Viot on guitar.

Sidewalk Records started in 1964 and during the next five years – until 1969 – we survived by doing soundtracks for independent film companies and commercials because it was the best thing that we could do. The reason I could do those soundtracks was because we did them inexpensively, for less than \$5,000. Basically, if someone was willing to pay us a thousand dollars to do something, we'd do it.

That's how an entrepreneurial business starts. We scored a soundtrack inexpensively and, in exchange, released the soundtrack on our label and then released singles to radio. We did not have the money to promote them extensively, but we did pretty well. I built my own little studio and our group of musicians played on those soundtracks. Everything we did was based on loving our music and trying to make enough money to survive and get to the next record.

I had persuaded Capitol to sign a five year distribution agreement by promising to give them a steady stream of soundtracks. I never had an investor but I knew that if I could convince a company that I was going to be around for five years, and showed them where I was going, what it would take to get there, and what my revenues would be, then a major label might invest in me. No one wants to distribute a "one off" record, a single record with no follow-up, so when I made a distribution agreement I let Capitol know that I was developing an on-going business. It was not a matter of being creative for a record or two because a company wants to know what the volume will be for the next five years.

The soundtracks were our niche and most of the independent labels that have succeeded have had a niche. Verve had jazz, Vanguard had folk music, and both Atlantic and Chess had Rhythm and Blues. In Hollywood, most of the labels had a pop niche. I discovered there was a need for low cost soundtracks for those West Coast based movies produced by independent film companies who were doing a lot of motorcycle and beach movies.

I believe that having a niche and a five-year plan are essential to succeed with an independent record company. Because I started a

record company with my own money, I soon realized I was going to be working from record to record, living from meal to meal and leasing my office from week to week. I'm not sure that I would recommend this to anyone, but that's what I did. In fact, that's all I did. During the first five years (1964-1968) of my first record distribution agreement, we worked constantly, creating records and soundtracks so that we could justify having our own record company. We worked hard during that period, day after day, and at night I dreamed about the record business.



CHAPTER 7

On TV with Glen Campbell

A real breakthrough for me as a performer came on “The Glen Campbell Goodtime Hour” which was on television from 1968 to 1972. The Mike Curb Congregation was fortunate to become regulars on that show where we did contemporary gospel or rock versions of inspirational songs such as “He’s Got the Whole World In His Hands” or “Put Your Hand In The Hand.”

I first met Glen Campbell when we were doing the Hondells album. Glen was a studio guitarist and the Hondells was a made-up name for a studio group – although a group was formed which did personal appearances. Later, we did several sessions together where I played piano. The Congregation appeared regularly as an opening act in Nevada where I ran into Glen while we were performing on the Ray Price Show – we were closing our engagement and Glen was going to open his show. His TV show had been a summer replacement and was scheduled to be picked up for regular programming during the Fall season. Glen said to me, “You know, you ought to do our show sometime.” I answered, “I’d love to.” That was the answer I always

gave when someone offered me an opportunity. Glen's manager, Nick Savano, told me there was going to be an inspirational song on each show and they were looking at different groups, hoping to find a young group like ours who could sing songs like "Put Your Hand In The Hand" or "He's Got The Whole World In His Hands." We had just recorded our contemporary gospel album for Word Records so I gave him a copy and he said, "This is the kind of group that Middle America will love. I think your group would be perfect for the show." I asked, "How do we do it?" and he said "We'll audition your group." I brought the Congregation in to audition and they invited us to do one of the shows. After that show, they signed us and we became regulars every week on the Glen Campbell Show on CBS television.

It was during the show's run that I became President of MGM, which made my life even more fast paced. I was writing songs and working on movie soundtracks as well as performing with the Congregation in concert and appearing on TV every week with Glen Campbell. I loved it all and thrived on it.

I was fortunate to participate in Glen's induction into the Country Music Hall of Fame and I was thrilled to see him win Country Song of The Year for "I Won't Miss You" in 2015 for a song that made such a positive impact on understanding Alzheimer's Disease.



CHAPTER 8

MGM/Curb and The Osmonds

*Producing Donny and Marie, Writing and Producing Roy Orbison
Signing Eric Burdon and War, Tompall and The Glaser Brothers,
Chicago Transit Authority*

*Strawberry Statement Soundtrack (Crosby Stills, Nash & Young)
The Relationship with Bob Lifton
The Relationship with Karen Carpenter*

By 1968 I had been active in the music business for five years, producing records, writing songs, doing soundtracks and performing with my group. I met an outstanding man, Bob Lifton from New York, who headed a company, Transcontinental Investing Corporation. Transcontinental had purchased many of the top rack jobbers; at that time records were sold to rack jobbers, who distributed the records to jukeboxes and retail outlets. This company was looking for a creative outlet so it could make its own records for distribution. Bob offered me a deal where there was an exchange of stock in Transcontinental for 80 percent of my company, Sidewalk Productions. That deal made me a millionaire – on paper – at the age of 23. Even though the stock

did not do well, I developed a great relationship with Bob and his wife, Loretta. I learned so much from Bob, particularly about Wall Street, entertainment conglomerates and the realities of the New York business world.

Around that same time I developed a business relationship with Jimmy Guercio, who had a production company, Poseidon Productions, where we intended to develop some rock oriented artists. Jimmy and I sold Poseidon Productions to Transcontinental as well and I became the head music person for Transcontinental Entertainment. We decided to create a label and go into the record manufacturing business because we felt we would benefit from the relationship with the rack jobbers Transcontinental owned.

Jim Guercio had found the Chicago Transit Authority, later known simply as Chicago, and had a prior relationship with Columbia Records where he committed the next three acts he signed to that label. It became an uncomfortable situation for me because I met Clive Davis, head of Columbia, for the first time under not the best of circumstances. I was determined that the Chicago Transit Authority would be the first act on the new Transcontinental Label but Clive felt that, based on a prior production contractual relationship with Guercio, that act belonged to Columbia. Clive Davis did not enjoy our meeting; he felt he was entitled to the option on Guercio while Jimmy and I felt that Guercio had already honored his first option. I handled that meeting very poorly and learned an important lesson: Clive Davis not only has good ears, he's a great businessman. I did not bring my attorney, Dick Whitehouse, to the meeting and from that day on, I always brought a lawyer to every meeting I had in New York. That is when I learned

that I should not try to be my own lawyer. Jimmy Guercio and I went into that meeting with Clive Davis and we had our heads handed to us. We ended up agreeing – albeit reluctantly – to allow Chicago to go to Columbia in a production company arrangement. Although Chicago ended up on Columbia, it created a situation where Jimmy Guercio never got along well with Clive. Still, I am proud of the fact that we were part of the early Chicago Transit Authority. It was an incredible experience to work with Jim Guercio during the early years of his career and watch as he became one of the great producers and entrepreneurs in our industry. I was also fortunate to work with Larry Fitzgerald, who managed Chicago. Larry is a talented manager, and Larry and his equally talented partner, Mark Hartley, later worked closely with Curb Records as managers for LeAnn Rimes.

When I realized we would not have Chicago as our first act to start the record company, I looked for other ways to grow the company. Gary Usher and Kurt Boettcher had an idea to take a West Coast rock song and make it awesome; the song was “In My Room,” written by Usher and Brian Wilson which had been the “B” side of the Beach Boys hit “Be True To Your School.” We put together a studio group, which we named Sagittarius, and recorded it as we tried to create that next generation of Beach Boys or Hondells and released it on Together Records.

Terry Melcher, the son of Doris Day, was a successful record producer who assembled a collection of early Byrds recordings called “Pre-Flyte” which was also released on Together. Melcher had been a staff producer for Columbia Records in Los Angeles; he produced the Rip Chords (“Hey Little Cobra”) and Paul Revere and the Raiders

(“Kicks,” “Indian Reservation”) before producing the Byrds, originally known as Jet Set.

During the brief time that I worked for Mercury Records, I had the opportunity on a couple of occasions to participate in national company meetings that included amazing people who all had very different talents. Irving Green was the owner of the company and was a very big person with a very big presence. Irwin Steinberg was the executive vice president who essentially operated the company for many many years. Each of the Mercury divisions was run by people who made a very big impact on the music business; for example, Quincy Jones was head of A&R. At the time he was producing Lesley Gore but later on he produced the major hits by Michael Jackson. Shelby Singleton was running country A&R along with Jerry Kennedy, and they made a tremendous impact on the future of country music. Kenny Myers was the vice president and general manager of Mercury Records, which was the label that released the records I produced by The Hondells, and I established a long-standing relationship and friendship with Kenny.

I was disappointed because I had lost Chicago to Clive Davis and Kenny had decided to leave Mercury, and he wanted to start his own label. Kenny Myers and I formed a label, Ameret, and were looking for an act with a sound like Chicago – a rock band with incredible horns – when we found Crow. Crow’s recording of “Evil Woman” was a great record and a top twenty hit in *Billboard*. We had two more chart records with that group before they disbanded, which is one of the problems with recording groups. It is possible to have big hits with a group, but it is always taking a chance because they have to remain together to obtain long-term success.

Jim Aubrey was a former television executive – he had been President of CBS – who was producing a rock & roll movie with Mae West when I met him. West must have been well into her 70s, but she was an exciting lady who was willing to sing Jerry Lee Lewis songs and other rock & roll hits. I worked with Mae West on the music for that project, helping her learn the songs and The Mike Curb Congregation recorded with her in the studio. During the time I worked on the Mae West movie with Jim Aubrey, he was hired to become President of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Motion Picture Studios (MGM). Kirk Kerkorian had purchased the company from Edgar Bronfman, Sr. and the record division had lost something like \$17 million the year before. Jim knew that I had a small independent company that had been successful and asked if I was interested in becoming the president of the music division and a partner in MGM Records.

I was definitely interested so I went to Bob Lifton and told him about the offer and asked if this fit into his plans. When I talked with Bob, I tried a different approach than I tried with Clive Davis. With Clive, I went into the meeting too confident, like I owned the world and had already signed Chicago. With Bob, I walked in humbly and told him the truth. I told him I had the opportunity to merge my company with MGM and that Jim Aubrey had essentially said that if I brought in my assets I could have 20 percent of the company. This is where Bob made an important decision. He said he would agree that I could accept that offer if Transcontinental became the distributor for MGM. At this time, Transcontinental was probably the largest independent distributor in the country so the deal was a win-win for both of us. Nevertheless, because of these unique circumstances,

at the age of twenty-four I became the youngest president of a major label.

The agreement with Transcontinental was basically my second five-year plan. I believed we could do all the things we dreamed of with a big distribution company, including the creation of a record label that encompassed rhythm and blues, country, adult contemporary and rock & roll music, which was something we could not do with Sidewalk because we did not have the money. Although the situation with Transcontinental did not work out, we came incredibly close to having one of the biggest independent record companies in the music business. I believe that Bob Lifton may be the smartest man I ever met; he could have been the Secretary of State for any President during the last 40 years. He was a brilliant man with a brilliant idea but he was not a product of the record business and when he tried to buy into it, he met with forces of opposition. Transcontinental could have been a successful company, but before it reached that point it began to unravel, a victim of independent distributors who operated with a code of their own.

I was disappointed I had not been able to build a major independent record company myself or with Transcontinental, so the MGM opportunity was very significant. MGM gave me the opportunity to have enough money and enough staff to develop some major acts and at the same time operate as an independent company with independent distribution. The first act I signed to MGM was Eric Burdon and War; Burdon had been the lead singer for The Animals, whose hits during the 1960s included "House Of The Rising Sun," "We Gotta Get Out Of This Place," and "Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood." I heard Eric

with his African American group, War, at the Los Angeles Palladium and approached their managers, Steve Gold and Jerry Goldstein, about signing them. We made the agreement and their first single was “Spill The Wine,” which was a major national hit, reaching the number three position on the *Billboard* pop chart and number one in *Cashbox*.

My stance against drugs, and some of the statements I made during the late 1960s and early 1970s, hurt me a great deal in terms of my ability to communicate with some of the artists I worked with. It really hurt me with Eric Burden and War because they used that as the reason for War to leave the label. I was very young and certainly could have said things far better, but I had strong feelings against drugs and their use by young people.

I met with Jerry Ross, whose label, Heritage, was in litigation with MGM before I arrived. I suggested that Jerry settle the past and form a new label that would be distributed by MGM. Jerry formed Colossus and released “Venus,” which had been a hit in Europe by the Dutch group Shocking Blue. That became a number one record. Jeff Barry brought a tape of “Montego Bay” by Bobby Bloom to me and I liked it so we pressed records and rushed them to radio. It was very similar to “Spill The Wine,” very Latino. Bobby Bloom was a wonderful artist with an awesome voice, much like Bill Medley, a white artist who sounded black. “Montego Bay” went top ten on the charts.

At MGM I was also in charge of the music for MGM Films as the head of their soundtrack division. Jesse Kaye helped me with those soundtracks because he was the guy who made it all happen at MGM in the music department. He was in his mid-70s when I joined MGM and I was supposed to replace him but I met him and, after talking

with him, knew that I was not going to let this man go. There was no way I could be president of MGM Records and vice president in charge of music for films without the help of Jesse Kaye, who was someone who knew everything about the history of everything. Fortunately, Jim Aubrey agreed and Jesse stayed with the company during the time I was there.

One of the first MGM films I worked on was *Tick, Tick, Tick*, which starred Jim Brown, the former football star, and George Kennedy. I was the music supervisor for that film and wrote the liner notes to the album. The album featured Tompall and the Glaser Brothers, an original rock country outlaw group, and was produced by Jack Clement who was the producer of classic Sun recordings by Jerry Lee Lewis.

Roy Orbison, Roger Christian and I wrote “So Young,” which was inspired by the movie *Zabriskie Point*. I had the experience of serving as the executive producer of the soundtrack and working for the film’s producer, Carlo Ponti. The soundtrack featured rock artists such as Jerry Garcia of The Grateful Dead and Pink Floyd. Ironically, I was able to help resolve some of the Pink Floyd issues for the film because I had met their representatives back when Eddie Ray asked me to participate in the mastering of their first album *The Piper At The Gates Of Dawn*. I was the music supervisor for *The Strawberry Statement* and had to pull that soundtrack together, which included great rock acts like Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young. Getting those acts on the soundtrack involved some difficult negotiations to obtain permission for their recordings to be used. David Geffen was managing Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young and had called me about obtaining Janis Ian’s masters from the label. Janis had recorded for MGM and David was managing her.

I agreed to help David get the masters back and he agreed to help acquire the necessary permission to have Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young on the soundtrack. Within an hour of our initial conversation, I called David and told him the masters would be returned; soon after that, we received the necessary permission.

I liked working with David Geffen. I found him very honorable. Obviously, he was not going to do anything that wasn't in his artist's best interest, but when he made a promise, he delivered.

One of my first major goals at MGM was to develop the Osmonds into a major recording act. I first met the Osmonds through Don Williams, Andy's brother, when they were on "The Andy Williams Show" on NBC. Don was managing them and asked me to produce them earlier for Sidewalk Records. I produced a couple of recordings but Andy Williams then started a record label and the situation was that the Osmonds had to be on his label if they wanted to remain on his top rated variety TV show. Nothing ever happened with the recordings I produced on the Osmonds in 1966 or 1967 and they continued performing on "The Andy Williams Show" as a barbershop quartet. About two years later, in late 1968 or early 1969, I attended a wedding where one of the Clingers, a group of girls from Utah who were somewhat like a female Osmonds, was getting married. I had auditioned the Clingers and was considering signing them.

I almost did not go to the wedding but at the last minute decided to attend. At the reception, I was seated at a table with Olive Osmond, the mother of the Osmonds and during our conversation she said, "I wish you had continued working with my boys. They really liked you and you are close to their age." I told her that I wanted to continue

working with them but because of the situation with Andy Williams, could not do so. Mrs. Osmond informed me they were considering moving back to Provo, Utah because the group was no longer on “The Andy Williams Show.” I asked her what the boys were doing and she told me they rehearsed every day at their home, which was in the San Fernando Valley. Mrs. Osmond invited me to their home that weekend and I arrived while the boys were working in their rehearsal room, which was a converted garage. It was obvious they were trying to do music which was more contemporary. I asked about the progress on their instruments and they assured me they were getting better so I asked them to play something as a band.

They sang some contemporary sounding songs and I did not hear a hit but I saw some magic. I also realized again what I already knew: This was the finest vocal group I had ever heard. I do not believe there has ever been a group as talented as the Osmond Brothers. They could sing anything in perfect four or five part harmony. At this point there were four Osmonds performing and they played me a song they had written, “Movin’ Along,” that I liked. I took them into the studio and recorded that song before I signed them. We liked the recording so we drew up contracts and released the record, but it stiffed – no radio airplay, no sales. Then one day the idea came to me to market them as a white Jackson 5. The Jackson 5, featuring Michael Jackson singing lead, had scored number one hits with “I Want You Back” and “ABC” in 1969 and 1970. I knew I needed five Osmonds to do that and, fortunately, there was a younger brother, Donny, who was entering his teen years. The next time I visited them I asked Donny if he ever performed with his brothers and he replied he had. I told them my idea of creating a

white Jackson 5 and asked if they would change their name from the Osmond Brothers to the Osmonds and they agreed. Then I asked if they would record with black musicians and they agreed to that as well.

I liked the records produced by Rick Hall in Muscle Shoals, Alabama. I first met him when he came to L.A. and played me an artist whom I did not sign but I told Rick during that meeting that I wanted to work with him sometime and now I felt the time was right. I called Rick in Muscle Shoals and asked if he was interested in working with the Osmonds. He was not. I told him the group would be performing in Las Vegas and asked if he would come to Vegas to see them. He declined because he had seen them on the “Andy Williams Show” and was not impressed. I kept insisting and offered to fly him to Las Vegas at my expense to see the group. Finally, he agreed.

The Osmonds were starting to include Donny in their show and had worked up a Motown medley. I told the Osmonds about Rick Hall and Muscle Shoals and all the great records coming out of there by Clarence Carter, Wilson Pickett and Dusty Springfield. In Vegas, Rick heard them do their Motown medley and was blown away. They wore white outfits like Elvis. Donny performed with them and they looked terrific.

The group went to Alabama for the recording sessions. At the studio in Muscle Shoals there was a young black songwriter, Charles Jackson, who had written a song, “One Bad Apple.” He played the song on the piano and everyone loved it. I was amazed at the way Rick worked with those musicians to make what sounded like a Jackson 5 record. We shipped “One Bad Apple” to black radio and I put the

writer's name in parenthesis but only used his last name, Jackson. A lot of people thought it was a Jackson 5 record and I have to admit, whether it's right or wrong, that I did not do anything to dispel that belief. "One Bad Apple" was well into the top ten of the R&B chart before people discovered that it was not the Jackson 5 but the Osmonds – a white group. The bottom line is that we accomplished our goal of changing their image from a barbershop quartet on "The Andy Williams Show" to a rock & roll group, and we did it with one record.

"One Bad Apple" broke in 1970 and reached number one on the charts right at the beginning of 1971. After that record hit, Berry Gordy, head of Motown Records, which had the Jackson 5, invited me over to his home for an evening. Berry was a bit upset that I had copied the Jackson 5 but I told him it was because I had always admired his work and thought of it as a compliment to him and the Jackson 5 and so we became friends. After "One Bad Apple" we had a series of hits with the Osmonds, such as "Yo-Yo," "Down By The Lazy River," and "Love Me For A Reason" – all top ten records.

Many believe we copied the Jackson 5 again when we made Donny a solo star; however, it is wrong to think Donny copied Michael Jackson because Donny was a soloist before Michael had a solo career. Donny's first solo record, "Sweet And Innocent," debuted on the *Billboard* pop chart in March, 1971; Michael Jackson's first solo, "I'll Be There," debuted in October of that same year. Donny recorded "Sweet And Innocent," which had originally been recorded by Roy Orbison, then we did "Go Away Little Girl," which had previously been a hit for Steve Lawrence. "Hey Girl" had been a hit for Freddie Scott before we recorded it and then I produced Donny's record of "Puppy

Love,” which was originally a hit for Paul Anka back in 1960. That song reached number one internationally in early 1972 and established Donny Osmond as a superstar.

I produced Donny’s “Puppy Love” with Don Costa, who I always considered to be a great arranger. On that record we tried to make a contemporary recording that had the classic sound of Frank Sinatra’s recordings with an orchestra, which Don had arranged. That was a career record for Donny, although I don’t believe he ever liked it because he preferred doing more contemporary things. Nevertheless, it was a huge hit around the world and when the Osmonds toured England, he sang it for the Queen. It was like Beatlemania when the Osmonds went to England. They had five of the top ten records on the chart. Looking back, that situation probably hurt my relationship with Donny. He razzed me about it, saying “You didn’t even play ‘Puppy Love’ as a demo for me. I walked in the studio and there was the lead sheet already sitting on the music stand.”

The problem was that it simply failed to occur to me that Donny Osmond was not around when Paul Anka sang the original. Sometimes in the record business we forget our age and that time has passed for us but not for these young artists. That was the situation with Donny Osmond; he was just two years old when “Puppy Love” was originally a hit.

The reason I took Donny out of the group and promoted him as a single artist was that there was no young male artist like him at the time and I wanted him to be the Frank Sinatra of his generation. The kids were screaming for Donny at the concerts and, since the Osmonds were a rock & roll group, they could not do a song like “Puppy Love.” The Osmonds were built around Merrill Osmond, who was one of the

greatest rock & roll singers of all time. I wanted them to continue to be an R&B and rock group. I believe that Donny Osmond feels he was typecast as a teen star so he was not able to be recognized for his talent – and he has a lot of talent. I am very proud of “Puppy Love” because I felt that it was one of the best records I ever produced; however, I realize that Donny looks back on that record as something which typecast him as a teen star, and many people still consider him in that light. Any artist who is a teen star has to live with that image for the rest of his life and Donny has felt uncomfortable with the stereotype he received as a young crooner. Nevertheless, Donny has done some great things in recent years, and I’m proud to have launched his career.

Marie Osmond launched her career with a country hit, “Paper Roses,” that reached number one on the country chart in *Billboard*. Marie was a young teenager when I brought her to Nashville with the help of my friend Don Owens and teamed her with country star Sonny James to produce “Paper Roses.” I wanted it to sound country and in those days we could not make a record on the West Coast that sounded country enough for country radio. I also wanted Sonny James’ amazing talent and name on it because that helped obtain airplay on country radio. “Paper Roses” made Marie Osmond a country artist as well as a pop act.

Donny and Marie’s recording career began because Donny’s voice started to change while we were cutting “I’m Leaving It All Up To You.” That song was originally a hit for Don and Dewey-the forerunners to the Righteous Brothers – and later for Dale and Grace back in 1963 before it hit for Donny and Marie in 1974. Don Costa wasn’t involved in the production so we used H.B. Barnum, a great African-American arranger who arranged the records Sam Cooke cut in Los Angeles. I gave Donny

the song to record and intended for him to do the harmony but H.B. Barnum said “Let’s put a black voice on the harmony.” I agreed to give it a try but that voice did not fit. About three months passed before Donny came back to add the harmony part, but he could not reach the high notes because his voice had changed. Marie Osmond, who is probably the nicest, sweetest person that God ever created, was in the studio during that session so I asked Marie if she would sing the harmony part and she agreed. Her part sounded so good that I asked her to sing a couple of the other parts of the song and when we finished the recording I suggested to Donny that we release it as “Donny and Marie.” He did not like the idea but his father, George, was there and told him, “do what Mike says. He’s been right most of the time.” I was not right every time, but this was a group where I had been right a lot of the time; they allowed me to guide them and did what I wanted them to do. In those days, a producer could pick a song for the artist and he or she would record it.

The “suggestion” to release a Donny and Marie record was not a “decision” until the family had confirmed it. George and Olive Osmond had family nights on Wednesdays and they invited me over to be part of that. I brought up the idea of having a “Donny and Marie” record because, at that time, there were no records out by either Donny or Marie, and in the music industry you have to keep active if you want to move ahead. I also liked the idea of having a brother and sister act, although they would not have been the first because the Carpenters – Richard and Karen – were a recording act. The decision was finally made to have “Donny and Marie” as an act and we released that record, which became their first hit in 1974. The follow-up was “Morning Side Of The Mountain,” which also hit in 1974 and had originally been a hit

for Tommy Edwards in 1958. I had the unusual opportunity to produce all of Donny and Marie's singles while America watched them on their weekly national TV show from 1976 to 1978.

In early 1975 I went to the American Music Awards with Karen Carpenter as my date. Donny and Marie were nominated for "Best Country Duo" – which they won – and the Carpenters were nominated for "Best Pop Duo" – and they did not win. That was a bit awkward. We never did understand how Donny and Marie were nominated for the country award. Their record was on the country chart, but it was a much bigger pop record.

The Osmonds had a falling out with their manager, Ed Leffler, and left him for a new manager, Raymond Katz, who was in business with Sandy Gallin and Jim Morey and heavily involved in television. Katz thought Donny and Marie could transfer their successful recording career to television, which they did and their TV career started with a hit record.

Jimmy Osmond was the next Osmond to have a hit record. The Mike Curb Congregation had recorded "Long Haired Lover From Liverpool" but the record did not hit. Olive Osmond heard the song and said to me, "I wish my son Jimmy could record that." Jimmy was the youngest member of the Osmond family so he wasn't part of the Osmonds group and did not have a solo recording career. Perry Botkin, Jr. and I brought Jimmy into the studio and produced "Long Haired Lover From Liverpool" and that song went to number one in England and, at the end of 1972, was declared the number one song for the entire year in the U.K. It was actually a duet with Jimmy Osmond and the Congregation.



CHAPTER 9

The MGM/Curb Merger

Composing “Burning Bridges” for the Clint Eastwood Movie Kelly’s Heroes

Composing the Music for Frank Sinatra’s Dirty Dingus Magee

*Composing the Music for Liza Minelli’s Emmy Award Winning Liza
With A Z (“It Was A Good Time”)*

*Producing Steve & Eydie, Andy Williams, Sammy Davis Jr.
 (“Candy Man”) and “It’s A Small World” for Disney with
The Mike Curb Congregation*

After I composed the soundtrack for Warner’s *The Big Bounce*, I worked on the soundtrack to a TV show on ABC, “Kid Power,” which featured The Curbstones, a group comprised of the four youngsters in The Mike Curb Congregation. The Congregation was appearing on “The Glen Campbell Goodtime Hour” at that time and the animated film featured characters that looked like the actual Curbstones. I enlisted the support of legendary rhythm and blues singer Solomon Burke to write “Everybody’s Got Fingers” for the show because the show’s producers wanted an R&B sound.

Perhaps the most successful soundtrack – in so many ways – was the one to the movie *Kelly’s Heroes*, starring Clint Eastwood. Telly

Savalas, Carroll O'Connor, Gavin MacLeod, Donald Sutherland, and Don Rickles were also in that movie. I believe Clint Eastwood is a shining example of someone who is an incredible actor, an incredible person and an incredible businessman. He can direct a picture, produce a film, act in the film, and pick the music. Clint Eastwood's lawyer, Bruce Ramer, is probably the most successful lawyer in the entertainment industry and he wanted me to meet Clint. I played him the song "Burning Bridges," which I co-wrote with Lalo Schiffrin and asked him to consider including the song in the movie. Clint liked the song so much that he recorded a version of the song himself. The version of "Burning Bridges" recorded by the Congregation was a Top 40 hit on the pop charts as well as the theme song for that movie. In fact, that was the biggest solo hit by The Mike Curb Congregation on the *Billboard* Hot 100.

I had a wonderful opportunity to work with Bette Davis when she was doing the film *Bunny O'Hare*. Don Owens, who did the *Billboard* chart for many years, said to me one day, "I want you to meet Bette Davis because she wants a theme song for her movie." Actually, the movie had a theme song, but she did not like it. Every songwriter has a song they have always wanted to put in a picture but it is often hard to find the right picture. I had a song like that, which was really a melody in my mind. I met Bette Davis and played her that melody and she told me "I want you to play this in the movie." That was an experience I'll never forget – I can still see her eyes as she was conducting the piece while I played it on the piano. The song was "Right Or Wrong" and after I did the instrumental, she said she wanted a vocal version so I had the Congregation record it and we placed that recording at the end

of the movie. It does not get any better than working with Mae West or Bette Davis.

Working with Frank Sinatra was a nice experience as well as being a very pleasant memory. Sinatra was doing a movie, *Dirty Dingus Magee*, which was directed by Burt Kennedy. He had heard “Burning Bridges” and Clint Eastwood had told him about me and the song. Sinatra requested a song for his movie that was like “Burning Bridges.” I wrote “Dirty Dingus Magee” with Mack David and we hoped that Sinatra would sing it, but Frank wanted a more youthful feel in the music and thought it was better for the movie if the Congregation sang it. It was interesting to talk with him and hear what he wanted because he was quite specific. After I played the recording of “Dirty Dingus Magee” for him he asked me to re-mix it and pull the drum up. I was surprised because Frank was the guy who hated rock & roll but he was very open to all of my ideas and very direct in terms of what he wanted.

It was a gratifying experience to work briefly with Frank Sinatra because for most of my life I have asked artists, “Can you do that like Frank Sinatra?” Then to hear Frank Sinatra say “I want something like what you did” – well, that was really nice!

On the movie *No Blade of Grass*, which was an ecological film, I wrote the title song with Cornel Wilde, who directed the movie and the song was sung by Roger Whittaker. The writers on the song are listed as Louis Nelius – an alias for Wilde – and Charles Curb, which was my father’s name. I had to use “Charles Curb” when a song was published by an ASCAP publisher and I used “Mike Stout,” which was my mother’s maiden name, when a song was licensed by SESAC. I could only use my name, Mike Curb, when the song was with a BMI

publisher because I am a BMI writer and you can only sign with one performing rights organization.

I first met Steve Lawrence and Eydie Gorme when the Congregation was scheduled to open for Sammy Davis Jr. at Caesar's Palace in Las Vegas. Sammy had a conflict and they replaced him with Steve and Eydie, so we opened for them. Between shows, Steve and Eydie and I developed a friendship and I played them some songs and then signed them to MGM and we made some great records. This was the start of a special life-time relationship with the greatest and most talented couple ever. Steve Lawrence sang the title song to the movie *The Last Run*, which starred George C. Scott. Jerry Goldsmith, Mack David and I wrote the title song; Jerry composed the score. Mack David, Maurice Jarre and I wrote "It Was A Good Time" for the movie *Ryan's Daughter*, which starred Robert Mitchum, Sarah Miles and Trevor Howard. In the movie, the song is performed as an instrumental, but I produced the full song for Eydie Gorme, which was an Adult Contemporary hit. Meanwhile, Liza Minelli was doing her television special, "Liza With A Z" and had assembled a montage of video clips of her mother, Judy Garland. Minelli heard Gorme's recording of "It Was a Good Time" and decided to sing that song to the video montage at the end of her TV special, which won an Emmy. That song really fit the moment and Minelli then made it part of her concerts.

Roy Orbison and I wrote "It Takes All Kinds Of People" for the movie *The Moonshine Wars*. I remember that we finished the song so quickly that we decided to catch a plane to Las Vegas to see Elvis perform. Roy's wife, Barbara, had never seen Elvis in concert so the three of us flew to Vegas together. When Elvis learned that Roy was in

the audience he invited him backstage to chat after the show so Barbara and I went along and the three of us spent about 45 minutes with Elvis.

Roy sang the title song to the film *Zig Zag*, which Guy Hemric, Bob Enders and I wrote and Roy did a “Pretty Woman” interpretation. Bob Enders was the producer of the movie and had the idea of what he wanted the theme to be so we said “Come on and join us on the song,” and he did! Andy Williams sang “If I Could Only Go Back Again,” which Alan Osmond and I wrote. It was the title song for the movie *Where the Red Fern Grows*. I produced this recording and later Andy asked me to produce his album for Columbia, *The Way We Were*, which was his last top ten album in the international market. “If I Could Only Go Back Again” was also on that album and later I had the opportunity to work on the music for the new version of “*Where The Red Fern Grows*” starring rock star Dave Matthews. The soundtrack included a new version of “If I Could Only Go Back Again” and other songs by Alison Kraus and Curb artists including Wynonna and Steve Holy.

I had recorded “Candy Man” with my group (the Congregation) and released it as a single, but it flopped. I was stunned that this record by my group failed and once again learned that I did not have all the answers. I finally decided to try something different. I had signed Sammy Davis, Jr. to MGM and thought he would be perfect for “Candy Man.” No one in the office agreed; I played the song for a number of people – in promotion, in sales – and nobody thought it was a hit. Still, I believed in the song and scheduled a recording session for Sammy to record the song. I had a strict rule that there was no drinking or smoking in the studio where I recorded; however, before Sammy Davis, Jr. arrived, four very strong, well-built men arrived in the studio

with a portable bar and set it up so Sammy and his friends could enjoy mixed drinks. Sammy arrived smoking a cigarette; and in the control room he dropped ashes on the control board. Someone in the studio looked at me and asked, "Aren't you going to say something?" I replied, very quietly, "No."

Sammy stepped up to the mic in the studio while the engineer turned on the tape for a rehearsal version of the song. Sammy sang the song through and when he finished I said, "That's a great start. Now, let's do another take." Sammy nixed that; "I only do one take," he said. Well, I was desperate at this point so I pleaded, "Sammy, I made some mistakes in here. We really need to do it one more time." Sammy relented and finally did a second take – but he did not sing the song all the way through, then he left the studio. Somehow, I pulled together a record, using the Congregation's vocals along with Sammy's vocals to make a complete song. Sammy could do more in one take of a song than any artist I ever worked with. He was a true genius.

The fact was that Sammy Davis, Jr. did not want to record that song and it was also well known that he disliked rock & roll. On the other hand, I grew up on rock & roll and liked everything about it. I would not be here today if it were not for rock & roll. Sammy did not want a rock drum sound so I pulled the drum out of the mix and said "O.K. Sammy, forget the drum, just sing, and snap your fingers." Then, after he left the studio I mixed the drums back in to go with his finger snapping and turned it into a Motown styled record.

"Candy Man" went all the way to number one in *Billboard* and was the biggest hit Sammy Davis, Jr. and the Congregation ever had.

Anybody with a brain knows that without Sammy Davis, Jr. it would not have been a hit. I know that for a fact because when I put out “Candy Man” with my group, it was a stiff. I learned a valuable lesson about the record business: No matter how great a song is or how great an artist is, there must be the right combination and the right record production. I also believe that I benefited from being a recording artist with my own group because that experience helped me understand how artists feel when their own records sometimes succeed and sometimes fail. Some artists can handle the ups and downs of the music business better than others.

Sammy did the vocal on the soundtrack to the movie *Shaft*, which won an Academy Award. The score was composed by Isaac Hayes although Quincy Jones was originally supposed to do the music for that film. However, Quincy was working on two other movies at the time so my sister, Carole and I contacted our good friend Al Bell, President of Stax Records in Memphis, who recommended Isaac Hayes. Al and I worked with director Gordon Parks and executive producer Jim Aubrey and we jointly released one of the most successful soundtrack albums of all time. The album of the original score was nominated for two Grammys but I knew that members of the Motion Picture Academy were rather conservative in their musical tastes. Sammy Davis had been insistent that he would never do an R&B record, but I approached him, asked about doing a vocal for *Shaft*, and he agreed. This became the version that was sent to members of the Motion Picture Academy, who gave it an Academy Award for “Original Song” from a movie. I am convinced that song would not have won the Academy Award if it had not been for the Sammy Davis vocal version because the Academy

members related better to Sammy, who was part of the Hollywood community.

After “Candy Man,” which came from the movie, *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*, was a big hit, the Disney people wanted to contemporize and popularize Disney music. The first project was “It’s A Small World,” which was a well-known song but had never been a pop hit record.

I made a record of “It’s A Small World” with the Congregation that sounded like “Candy Man” with a big drum sound and the kids going “la la la la la.” We did an album, entitled *Walt Disney’s Greatest Hits*, and then released “It’s A Small World” as a single, which became a top ten single on *Billboard’s* “Adult Contemporary” chart in 1973. The Mike Curb Congregation then became the official Disney group and we performed on both coasts at Disneyland and Disneyworld during the early 1970s. We made numerous other appearances for Disney and recorded material for many of their shows, like the parade and the small world ride. For about three years the Congregation performed for the Disney organization as their “official” act. “It’s A Small World” still gets played about a quarter of a million times each year at the Disney theme parks. This all started because Disney executive Bob Yani wanted contemporary pop/rock versions of the classic Disney songs. Bob also loved the amazing choreographic work of Kevin Carlisle. Representing Disney and having a Top 10 hit with “It’s A Small World” was a wonderful experience for me and the entire group.



CHAPTER 10

The MGM/Verve Years

Eric Burdon and War, Sylvers, Tony Bennett, Sammy Davis Jr., Shaft, Gloria Gaynor, Solomon Burke, Neil Sedaka, Richie Havens, Lou Rawls, Johnny Bristol and The Five Man Electrical Band

One of the most exciting experiences I had when I merged Curb Records with MGM Records was having the opportunity to serve as the President of Verve, which became part of the MGM/Curb venture. Even though Verve had a small number of artists, the catalog of Verve represented the history of jazz music, including be-bop jazz that I enjoyed as a teenager. As President of Verve Records I supervised *The Eulogy Project* by Wes Montgomery, *Groove Drops* by Jimmy Smith, *Alone* by Bill Evans, *Didn't We* by Stan Getz, *Blood, Chet and Tears* by Chet Baker, *The History Of Billie Holiday* by Billie Holiday, and created the Verve Golden Archive Series that featured great artists such as Ella Fitzgerald, Tim Hardin, Judy Garland, Ian and Sylvia, Hugh Masekela, Blues Project, Janis Ian, Count Basie, Velvet Underground, Gene Krupa, Oscar Petersen, Arthur Prysock, Louis Armstrong, George Shearing, Sam "The Man" Taylor, Cal Tjader, Buddy Rich, Lionel Hampton, Benny Goodman, Thelonius Monk, Herbie Hancock, Duke

Of Dixieland, George Benson, Antonio Carlos Jobim, Shelly Mann, Art Blakeley, Charlie Parker, Woody Herman, Harry James, Milt Jackson, Gerry Mulligan, Johnny Hodges, Art Tatum, and Dizzy Gillespie.

The most exciting experience I had at Verve Records was when I signed Tony Bennett with the help of his manager, Derek Bolton. Tony asked me to co-produce the song “Living Together, Growing Together,” which was written by Burt Bacharach and Hal David, and was in Ross Hunter’s film *Lost Horizon*. Tony Bennett was a friend of Sammy Davis and he wanted to have a hit record from a movie like Sammy. This was in 1972 and Tony Bennett had not had a record on the pop charts for five years. His biggest hit, “I Left My Heart In San Francisco,” had been released in 1962 so he needed to get back on radio and on the charts. Another important project we did on Verve was *Rock Requiem* that was created by Lalo Schiffrin. This project was almost a rock opera which featured my Congregation group.

We had some great hit singles while I was president of MGM and Verve Records. Richie Havens recorded two albums for the Verve-Folkways label, owned by MGM, then wanted to form his own label, Stormy Forest, which I agreed to distribute. Havens’ biggest hit single, “Here Comes The Sun,” which was originally a Beatles song written by George Harrison, came from his live album. Bob Webb, the father of songwriter Jimmy Webb (“By the Time I Get To Phoenix”) and Clive Fox, the son of Harry Fox, who founded the Harry Fox Agency, brought the Five Man Electrical Band, a Canadian group, to me and they had a hit single with “Signs.” A number of years later that song was covered by Tesla and became a hit again. Julie Chester, who worked with Paramount’s music publishing company, brought Lou

Rawls to Michael Lloyd and me and I signed him to the label. Bobby Hebb, who had a hit with “Sunny,” a song he wrote, co-wrote “Natural Man” with Sandy Baron. The Mike Curb Congregation backed Rawls on his recording and that record was a crossover hit – on the Adult Contemporary, Rhythm and Blues and Hot 100 charts in *Billboard* – and won a Grammy for “Male Vocalist” in the Rhythm and Blues category.

Trini Lopez and The Mike Curb Congregation recorded “Butterfly,” which was originally a French song for which I wrote English lyrics. I signed Trini Lopez at Merv Griffin’s suggestion because I had a tremendous amount of respect for Merv. I certainly knew about Trini Lopez from his big hit “If I Had A Hammer” and The Mike Curb Congregation had also opened shows for him. Don Costa and I produced Trini Lopez’s “Butterfly.”

Don Costa and I produced “Wedding Song (There Is Love)” for Petula Clark and it became a top ten Adult Contemporary hit. Pierre Cosette, the producer of the Grammy TV show, introduced me to Jud Strunk, who had been a regular on the television program, “Rowan and Martin’s Laugh In.” Don Costa and I produced “Daisy A Day” and that song hit on the Adult Contemporary, Hot 100 and Country Charts in *Billboard*. The New Seekers had the hit “I’d Like To Teach The World To Sing (In Perfect Harmony),” which later became a Coke commercial. I signed them to Verve and their first release was “Come Softly To Me,” a re-make of the hit originally done by the Fleetwoods. Their next single was “Pinball Wizard,” which had been a hit for The Who from their rock opera, “Tommy.” In Atlanta, Bill Lowery and Karl Engemann had a publishing company and wanted a record label, so we formed MGM/

South and signed The Classics IV, led by Dennis Yost who had sung their biggest hits “Spooky,” “Stormy” and “Traces.” On MGM/South they had “What Am I Crying For.” I first met Phil Gernhard in 1973, when he brought me “Spiders and Snakes” by Jim Stafford. Phil was an important part of our company and moved to Nashville when I did in 1992. “Spiders And Snakes” was a big hit for us on the Hot 100, Adult Contemporary and Country charts.

At MGM, I really wanted to get into Rhythm and Blues because it is important for a major label to be “balanced” and represent a wide variety of music from different genres. I even had the opportunity to release a recording by one of my R&B idols, Jerry Butler, and later his *Greatest Hits* album. When Jerry Butler told me about the Sylvers I said to him, “Jerry, I’ll make a deal with you – I’ll sign them if you produce the record.” At the suggestion of Michael Viner, we set up a label at MGM called “Pride,” which we felt was a good name for a label specializing in black acts. The Sylvers were a family group, originally from Memphis and 11-year old Foster Sylvers was the “show-stealer” at their concerts. We released “Misdemeanor,” which was written by Leon Sylvers – the major songwriter in the group – on Foster and that was a top ten R&B record. The Sylvers were the closest thing to the Jackson 5 that came along and we were in the market for a young, African-American male who could appeal to teenagers.

The studio band for the Sylvers, which we named The Incredible Bongo Band, had a hit with “Bongo Rock,” which was the first record used to create the break to break hip hop sound. Then in 1975, the Incredible Bongo Band’s recording of “Apache” became the Bronx national anthem when Kool Herc began using it as an early hip hop

recording. Years later, continuing that tradition, I was the co-writer of “Yeah Yeah Yeah” which was recorded by rap artist Fat Joe and The Terror Squad and became a *Billboard* R&B chart single from their #1 *Billboard* album. Curb Records has had major hits such as “Over And Over,” a duet between Tim McGraw and the rapper Nelly, and I co-produced five number one *Billboard* recordings for “American Idol” finalist Kimberley Locke. I have had an enduring love of rhythm and blues music dating back to my childhood living in the South Los Angeles Compton area. In addition to Kimberley Locke, through the years I have signed R&B artists such as Lou Rawls, The Sylvers, Sammy Davis, Jr., Richie Havens, Solomon Burke, Richard Roundtree (Shaft), Brook Benton, Johnny Bristol, Kool & The Gang, The Bar-Kays, The Hues Corporation, The Fisk Jubilee Singers, Gloria Gaynor and others.

Gloria Gaynor’s version of “Never Can Say Goodbye” may have been the first major dance hit and Gloria actually became the first Disco Diva before Donna Summer took that title away about a year after this song was released. The record was number one on *Billboard*’s first Dance chart and was also on the R&B, Hot 100 and Adult Contemporary charts.

My old friend Eddie Ray had moved to Memphis in the early 1970s where he followed his life-long dream to set up a school to teach young African-Americans about the music business. Eddie found a group there whose lead singer, Louis Williams, sounded remarkably like Sam Cooke, so he contacted me at MGM. The group was signed to a new label we created with Eugene Luchessi called Sounds of Memphis, and we agreed to distribute the label. Later, the group moved over to

MGM and recorded a medley of Sam Cooke songs which reached the top ten.

I signed Neil Sedaka while I was with MGM because I had always loved his amazing talent. He wrote all his early hits in the 1950s, like “Calendar Girl,” “Breaking Up Is Hard to Do,” “Oh, Carol,” “Stairway To Heaven,” “The Diary,” and “Happy Birthday Sweet 16.” He could also write a song like “Where The Boys Are” for Connie Francis. Neil was a writer-artist virtuoso musician, classically trained, a very gifted singer who could sing any kind of song with his beautiful voice and knew how to make hit records. Like everyone else in the 1960s, he got sidelined by the British Invasion. At MGM we put out an album on Neil and had success outside the U.S., particularly in Europe, with the single “Standing On The Inside.” He had a lot of success in England because England tends to remember stars longer than we do. In America we forget our artists too fast, but if an artist has a string of hits in England and becomes part of its popular culture, he usually isn’t forgotten.

Soon after Neil’s album was released, my relationship with MGM ended. One of the people who took over after I left gave Neil his album back and on that album was “Breaking Up Is Hard To Do” and “Laughter In The Rain.” Elton John was just starting Rocket Records and Elton signed him; later they did “Bad Blood” together as a duet.



Early Hits In Country

*Composing and Producing Hank Williams Jr.'s First
#1 Record, "All For The Love Of Sunshine"*

*Producing Eddy Arnold, Signing Mel Tillis, Kenny Rogers, Billy
Walker, Don Gibson and Ray Stevens*

We had a great deal of success with country music before and while I was with MGM, beginning with the son of Hank Williams, whose recordings from the late 1940s and early 1950s are still a valuable part of the MGM catalog.

Hank Williams Jr. had recorded the soundtrack to the movie about his father's life, *Your Cheatin' Heart*, for MGM before I arrived at the company. Hank Jr. did not have an active recording contract with MGM.

But if Hank Jr. and MGM decided to do an album, it was done in about two days and usually consisted of Hank Jr. recording his father's songs or other songs from Nashville songwriters. Clouding the picture were several issues. First, there was a lawsuit, filed by a young attorney, Dick Frank, on behalf of The Hank Williams Estate and Wesley Rose, who was the President of Acuff-Rose Publishing, to remove the Hank

Williams catalog from MGM. Acuff-Rose was founded by Roy Acuff and Fred Rose, Wesley's father, who had signed Hank Williams as a songwriter and produced all his recordings. Other issues involved Hank Jr.'s mother and the State of Tennessee, because Hank Jr. had originally recorded for MGM as a minor in 1964.

I went to Nashville and met with Buddy Lee, who was the booking agent for Hank Jr., Mel Tillis and many other artists and was also serving as the co-manager of Hank Jr. along with Hank's mother Audrey. I told Buddy that I would like to have Hank Jr. recording for MGM/Curb exclusively but Buddy countered that he felt Hank Jr. was better off as a "free agent," shopping his services to the highest bidder and that he knew that Columbia Records would be happy to have Hank Williams Jr. on their label. Fortunately, I was able to develop a friendship with Dick Frank and, with the help of Dick Whitehouse, settle the old Hank Williams Sr. litigation, which opened the door for my first contact with Hank Williams Jr. Buddy Lee finally agreed to let me meet Hank Jr. and I told him of an opportunity to record a song for the movie *Kelly's Heroes* where the movie producers wanted a country song. I had co-written a song with Harley Hatcher, "All For The Love Of Sunshine" for the movie and offered to let Hank record it for the movie. Hank Jr. was excited about this prospect.

There was an offer for Hank Jr. to perform at the Landmark Hotel in Las Vegas that he was considering. When Hank Jr. agreed to sing the song for the movie, Buddy Lee then told him he should accept the date at the Landmark, with The Mike Curb Congregation opening, so that booking was arranged. During our appearances at the Landmark, I got to know Hank Williams Jr. and learned something very important that

influenced our future recording sessions. Between shows he sat at the piano and played R&B songs like “Ain’t That A Shame” and “Raining In My Heart,” songs by Fats Domino and Slim Harpo. I remember saying to Hank Jr. at the time, “Let’s do rock & roll. You’re Hank Williams Jr. and you can do whatever you want.” I asked if he would record “Ain’t That A Shame” and he told me that was the kind of music he wanted to do because he wanted to do things that were different.

I was not the right person to do a country song with Hank Jr. but I knew I could do rock & roll with him and I wanted to be a part of bringing rock & roll to country music. However, when Hank Williams Jr. was in the studio in Nashville recording songs like “Ain’t That A Shame” in the early 1970s, there weren’t too many people in the studio who thought that was going to be a hit record. They looked at it as a rock & roll song, but I did not. I looked at it as a song to which I could relate. Maybe if I had lived in Nashville all my life I may have said, “Don’t do an R&B song,” which is what Hank Jr. was being told in those days. Nevertheless, doing songs that are not supposed to be done in music, as well as doing things that other people are not doing, can lead to success.

I was trying to get a crossover record with Hank Williams Jr. because he was young and I think he wanted that and that’s why we did songs like “Rainin’ In My Heart,” “Ain’t That A Shame” and “All For The Love Of Sunshine.” However, instead of getting crossovers into the rock and pop markets we got big country hits and “All For The Love Of Sunshine” became Hank Jr.’s first number one record on the *Billboard* chart.

I remember watching Hank Williams Jr. evolve – and I do not want to take credit for his evolution because Hank Jr. did not need any

outsiders to help him evolve – but I believe I encouraged him to do as much rock & roll as he wanted.

When he fell off the mountain in Montana on August 8, 1975 during a mountain climbing trip, Hank Jr. took two years to recover. He had shattered every bone in his face and his brain had been exposed; it took nine surgeries to reconstruct his face and many believed he would never work again, much less record and perform. My friend, Merle Kilgore, told me that I should sign Hank Jr. to Curb Records and that it would lift Hank's spirits at this painful time. I believed he would sing again and signed him to Curb Records and he recorded two albums in Muscle Shoals. Neither of those two albums became a hit, but they were part of Hank Jr.'s evolution into a rock & roll star as he moved to Alabama and performed blues and southern rock with rock stars. Finally, Hank Jr. started hitting with records like "Family Tradition" and "All My Rowdy Friends". Those were rock & roll records in the Southern tradition. Hank Williams Jr. always recorded rock & roll music on his albums starting in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In fact, I believe that Hank Williams Jr. is one of the greatest rock & roll singers of our time. I am proud that Hank Williams Jr. was with Curb Records for 40 years and sold over 35 million records.

"All For The Love Of Sunshine" became the first number one record for Hank Williams Jr. and stayed on the *Billboard* chart for many weeks in 1970; this remains the biggest hit of his career in terms of *Billboard* chart activity. When you consider all that Hank has achieved in his career, it's hard for me to believe that I co-wrote and co-produced Hank's first number one record.

I first met Eddy Arnold when The Mike Curb Congregation opened a show for him in San Jose, California at a theater in the round. We had been scheduled to perform with Sammy Davis, Jr. but Sammy had cancelled, so Eddy was then scheduled and we were hired to open for him and then sing with him on his part of the show. During that time, I played him a French song that I'd co-written an English lyric for, "Butterfly."

I was now the President of MGM Records and I talked with him about the company. During our conversations, Eddy told me to call him the next time I was in Nashville because he wanted to talk some more. When I came to Nashville to record "All For The Love Of Sunshine" with Hank Williams Jr., I called, but he was out of town. I worked on the Hank Jr. session, co-producing with Jim Vienneau, and then went back to Los Angeles. Hank Jr.'s record of "All For The Love Of Sunshine" went to number one on the country charts and I received my first BMI Award. That was a great honor and thrill for me as a songwriter, so I went to Nashville to receive my BMI songwriter award at a banquet held at the Richland Country Club. It was a rather small, intimate gathering and I remember seeing Conway Twitty, Mel Tillis and Buddy Killen at the Awards Dinner. This was the start of a long and wonderful relationship with Buddy Killen. It was very rewarding years later when Buddy's widow, Carolyn Killen, asked me to represent the Killen family at the dedication of Buddy Killen Circle on Nashville's Music Row after Buddy died.

When I arrived in Nashville, I called Eddy Arnold again and this time he was in town. He invited me to his house for breakfast the next morning. Eddy's wife, Sally, cooked breakfast for us and we talked

about his career. Eddy knew the Hank Jr. record had reached number one on the *Billboard* chart and asked where I had found the song. I told him that I had co-written and co-produced it and he said, "You played me a song when we were in San Jose but I didn't get a copy of it." He then had me play "Butterfly" for him on the guitar and said "That sounds like something I might do." I asked if he would like The Mike Curb Congregation to back him on the recording and he agreed. Then I told him, "If they ever get tired of you at RCA, I'd like to have you with our company." He replied, "Well, I'm not there yet, but I could be."

I asked Eddy if he was going to be in California anytime soon and he told me he had a performance scheduled and was going to do some interviews. I told him to let me know when he was coming and I would arrange to have a car pick him up and we would go to dinner, which we did. That night at dinner he told me that the RCA executive who signed him, Frank Walker, was the man who had started MGM Records back in the 1940s. Eddy told me that Frank Walker had asked him to join the roster at MGM but Eddy told him "Frank, I really can't do that because RCA has honored their word with me here." That was in 1947 and Eddy Arnold had already had some very big hits with RCA. Frank Walker then signed Hank Williams.

Now, it was 25 years later – this was 1972 – and things were different. He said he was not being treated well at RCA and that if I was serious about my offer he would have his manager, Jerry Purcell, fly to Los Angeles to work out the agreement. I told him "I'm serious." He said he wanted me to produce him and I asked if I could have Don Costa as a co-producer. Don worked with me and also produced Frank Sinatra, including the hit "My Way" and was a great arranger.

Eddy agreed and also said he wanted to record in California – not Nashville – because he wanted a bigger sound.

That's how I ended up signing Eddy Arnold and producing four albums and ten *Billboard* chart singles. We had some good hit records like "Butterfly," "I Wish That I Had Loved You Better" and "If The Whole World Stopped Lovin." Another thing that was interesting about that breakfast with Eddy at his home was that I was scheduled to have lunch with Pat Boone at his parents' home that same day and asked Eddy Arnold for directions. It turned out to be on the same road – just a few miles away!

Buddy Lee was thrilled by the success we had with Hank Jr. on MGM and asked if there was any other country act we would like to sign. I said, "Yes, Mel Tillis." Mel's recording contract with Kapp, part of the Decca family, was scheduled to end in six months and, when it did, we signed Mel. Fortunately, Dick Frank was Mel's attorney and he had recommended me to Mel. When Mel signed with MGM I asked him if he would record "I Ain't Never," a song he had written. He replied that it had already been a hit for Webb Pierce. I reminded him that was back in 1959. I knew that record because it had been a crossover hit and I had heard it on pop radio in Los Angeles.

Mel recorded the song and I encouraged him to do it with a strong beat. I remember saying, "Mel, you know why it crossed over by Webb Pierce? It had a rock & roll rhythm going in it." I don't think there was ever another Webb Pierce record that crossed over. I told him Mel, let's push it – let's put more of a rhythm behind it. Let's emphasize that rhythm." We ended up with a number one record, Mel's first as a country artist.

One of the secrets to the success of MGM with country music and later with Curb Records is that we have not been afraid to use rock & roll in country music. In fact, that's the secret to our successes.

Kenny Rogers told me he wanted to start his own label and I agreed that MGM would be his partner and distribute it. Jolly Rogers Records was actually the idea of Lelann, Kenny's brother. We decided to record "Today I Started Loving You Again," which Merle Haggard had recorded on an album. Kenny was concerned and did not want to do it if Merle was going to release it as a single so I called Merle and asked if he was planning to release that song as a single. He said, "Yes." Then I asked, "If Kenny Rogers records it, would you be willing not to release the single?" and he said, "Yes. I'm a man of my word. There are two guys I like – Glen Campbell and Kenny Rogers – if either of them record the song, I won't put it out as a single." Kenny released his version of "Today I Started Loving You Again" and Merle kept his word. The record became a *Billboard* Country Chart hit.

Kenny had recorded "Ruby, Don't Take Your Love To Town," which had crossed over to country but had never had a record that was just for the country market. "Today I Started Loving You Again" was the first song he recorded strictly as a country record. After I left MGM, he moved over to United Artists, where he recorded a string of hits, such as "Lucille," "The Gambler," and "Coward Of The County". There are certain artists who should have their own label and Kenny Rogers was one of those. He was a complete record man. He knew what song to do, what producer to use, how to do it, so he didn't need to be on another label.

Buddy Lee arranged for us to sign Billy Walker, who had hits such as “When A Man Loves A Woman (The Way That I Love You),” “She Goes Walking Through My Mind,” and “Sing Me A Love Song To Baby” – which were all top ten country records. Billy was not only a great artist, but also a wonderful person.

Because I had pooled my assets with those of MGM, and was now a minority partner in the company, I wanted to make sure that we properly exploited the Hank Williams catalog, which was a major asset for MGM. Dick Frank suggested I develop a relationship with Wesley Rose. I went to Wesley Rose’s office in the Acuff-Rose building on Franklin Road in Nashville. Acuff-Rose had a label, Hickory Records and in their studio I listened as producer Don Gant played some recordings they had just completed. After listening, I asked Wesley if he would consider letting MGM handle the distribution for Hickory and he agreed.

Hickory Records had Don Gibson and I had always enjoyed the Don Gibson records I heard in California, among which were “I Can’t Stop Loving You,” “Oh, Lonesome Me,” “I’d Be A Legend In My Time” – all of which he wrote – and “Sea Of Heartbreak.” I wanted to have Don Gibson on the MGM roster and Wesley Rose agreed to that. During those same conversations that brought our agreement to distribute Hickory and sign Don Gibson to MGM, we developed new concepts to promote the catalogs of Hank Williams and Roy Acuff.

We developed a good country roster at MGM/Curb, signing Hank Williams Jr., Marie Osmond, Eddy Arnold, Kenny Rogers, Tompall and The Glaser Brothers, Don Gibson, Mel Tillis, Ray Stevens, Hank Locklin and Billy Walker.



CHAPTER 12

Producing Recordings

Billboard Producer of the Year

It was a great honor to be named Producer of the Year by *Billboard* magazine in 1972; at that time there was no Grammy for producers so the top honor came from *Billboard*, which based this award on success with chart records. I shared that award with Don Costa, who co-produced a number of acts and recordings with me.

A producer is someone who blends together all the elements that make a record. No record company can exist without a producer and most independent record companies were started by a producer or had a producer significantly involved in the beginning of the company.

I believe that I had success as a producer because I understood the totality of a record. That, to me, is the hardest thing to impart to others and I don't know if everyone can even understand it, but I always think "if I can figure it out, then anybody should be able to figure it out."

Every producer starts the process of recording with a song, an idea or an artist. As a producer, I would wake up in the morning and think about one of those three things. It might be an idea, something I want

to do even though I might not know how I am going to implement the idea. It might be a song that I want to record but I need to find the right person to do it. Third, there's an artist I really believe in and I want to find the song that can be the vehicle for that artist to have a hit record. That is what a producer – or the owner of an independent record company – does every day of his life. In my own career, a good example of this was when I produced “Candy Man” with Sammy Davis, Jr. I was looking for a song for Sammy Davis, Jr., whom I had signed to my label. Second, I was looking for an artist to record a song I loved, “Candy Man.” My group had recorded it but the record failed to hit. I knew why I failed; my group's record was too bland. Third, I had a goal. I believed – and still do – that the record industry is cyclical, and I wanted to bring back the positive message found in “High Hopes” that Frank Sinatra had recorded back in the 1950s.

Certain producers are right for certain times. When I became producer of the year in 1972, it was a time when technology was changing. Recording had moved from two track to three track to four, eight and sixteen tracks during the time I was producing. Still I had to get it right on tape. I could not go back the next day and balance 30 different instruments so I had to do that during the recording process. I remember the first echo chamber I used was set up in the bathroom of a studio we built. We actually put a microphone in the bathroom because the sound reverberated off the walls and that became our echo chamber.

It took a lot of mixes of “Candy Man” by Sammy Davis before I felt that record had the magic. We had to blend the handclaps with the drums, get the right echo sound on Sammy's voice, get the right

mix between the guitar and the bass, make sure the bass did not boom out too much or interfere with the record. We had to master with a high EQ so our record sounded bright. All those techniques that I learned in the 1970s probably meant nothing in the 1980s because at that time there were techno records made by techno-geniuses who did not need artists; instead, they needed someone who could sing the melody because the producer could tune it and run it through machines. During the 1980s many of the great records were made by producers who understood techno-trends and dance club technonics. Quincy Jones, who is a producer for all ages because he understands the big band sound, jazz and pop, could take technosounds of the 1980s and get a young man with the looks and talent of Michael Jackson and produce records that helped Michael Jackson become THE superstar for that period in the 1980s.

A lot of people do not like to admit it, but some of the hip hop records of today are going to last a long time because they are great records. Of course, some of them are “one off” records – here today and gone tomorrow. However, there are artists who will endure and they are making records that sound greater and greater. Even if a lot of people do not like the lyrics or the message, those records are the rock & roll of this generation and those producers are not only benefiting from the techno-sound, they are also learning how to make instrumental sounds out of nowhere. It is an amazing technique for the great producers of today because many of these producers are really a product of the new technologies. Artists and producers have to understand the technology of their day and figure out how to translate that to a record that sounds good when played on a car radio or on a

cell phone.

A record is a combination of an idea, a song, and an artist and it is implemented by arrangers, producers, musicians, recording studio technology and the luck of the draw. If certain musicians are available and they get the right groove in the studio and get the right “feel,” they might create a hit.

I believe producing a recording is an art form because there are not many people who have been able to do it and be consistently successful. There have been many “one off” hits through the years – everything from doo-wop to rock & roll to hip hop and techno – but few producers have a long string of hits to their credit. I am not knocking “one off” hits – I have had some of them myself – but the great producers have produced or overseen records over many years with many hits.

During the 1960s and 1970s, I produced a lot of records and was successful at it. However, I do not know if I could have had a long term career just as a record producer because a lot of others are so much more technically talented than I am. Producing records is very technical today; when I started, it was all about the feel of the record and the delivery of the song by the artist and not so dependent on technology.

It is hard to define what makes a great record – sometimes it is the lyrics, sometimes it is the melody – but they all have what I call a “lilt” in the record or a powerful feeling. When a record is magical I can hear it over and over and over and never get tired of it. It just takes me away from whatever my problems are or inspires me to do something better. I believe music can be an escape, just like a movie can be an escape.

A great record is like a mini-movie because in three or four minutes it takes me away – pulls me in – and I become part of it. That's what causes people to request a record on the radio or buy a recording and that's what makes it a hit.

There is a talent to putting a sound on a record, how it is mastered, how the drum is mastered, and techniques to raise the voice a little bit. Sometimes I wonder if I become too involved because I will sit home at night and listen to seven different mixes when maybe it does not make any difference.

But I have heard a mix where the record sounded sluggish and then I have heard another mix that pushed the record over the top.

Through the years, I have learned and reached different levels of understanding of what a record should sound like and how to make sure that it is properly promoted and marketed. Sometimes I have made a big contribution to a record and my name is not even on it because someone else produced it. Other times I have produced a record and felt like I had just copied the demo and my name should not even have been on the label. When writing a song with someone, sometimes I contribute 90 percent of the idea and sometimes 10 percent but there has always been an understanding between co-writers that once they start writing a song together, they share it equally.

The history of record labels and producers were one and the same until corporate America discovered the opportunity to make profits in the record business and those small, independent labels were sacrificed and had to be sold. The big companies came in with financial offers that many of those owners could not refuse. Many of those small label owners were not businessmen. Sometimes they borrowed money from

those large companies and ended up mortgaging their souls and losing their businesses. Gradually, the major corporations took over most of the smaller record companies. Curb Records is the largest independent, privately owned American record company, still active, that is privately owned by its original owner.

The most important thing about the record business is understanding the difference between a song and a record. It is possible that a great song will not make a great record, and it is possible that a great record is not a great song. It is also possible for a great singer to not be a great recording artist or a great recording artist to not be a great singer. There were great singers before Edison invented the phonograph, but there was no way they could have had a hit record. They could have performed a great concert, or have been great at the local bar or at a church, but there was no such thing as a hit record.

A record company always seeks to find someone who is a great singer and a great recording artist but that rarely happens. There are a number of artists who are great when they are singing live, but when they go into a studio and sing, the magic isn't there. What makes a great recording artist? Someone whose voice sounds great when recorded! When I think of an artist who has the vocal talent, can sing live as well as on tape, and has the ability to write or select a great song to record, I believe that history shows that Marty Robbins and Eddy Arnold come out on top. Eddy Arnold could choose a great song and deliver it as a great singer because Eddy Arnold had the same vocal equipment that Bing Crosby had: He carried his echo chamber in his chest. As a singer, he was a cross between Perry Como and Bing Crosby. In pop music, Bing Crosby had the greatest voice while Perry Como was the greatest

song stylist but Eddy Arnold fulfilled both of those qualities in country music because he understood the value of a song!

Fortunately, Curb Records has had success with artists such as Tim McGraw, LeAnn Rimes, Clay Walker, Steve Holy, Rodney Atkins, Jo Dee Messina, Lee Brice, Dylan Scott and Wynonna who all have wonderful voices, whether live or in the studio. There is no artist who sounds better on a digital record than Tim McGraw. There is something about the way his voice flows with digital instruments that makes him sound better in the digital format than any other artist in country music. Another artist on our label that I believe is the consummate digital artist is Jo Dee Messina, who has a way of blending her voice with digital instruments that is remarkable. I could put the voice of LeAnn Rimes in the middle of a field and her voice would come across like Patsy Cline's or Marty Robbins' did. Wynonna is the Kate Smith of our time. She not only has an awesome vocal instrument, but she carries with her the ability to project her amazing voice. She may be one of the greatest rock & roll singers of our time.

I have been part of finding those great singers, although it is never just one person who finds an act. Many books have been written in Nashville by producers who claimed they have "discovered" or "found" this or that artist. No one finds an artist by himself. Usually somebody has made a recording which demonstrates the talent of a particular artist.

It is important and wonderful to work with talent. On one hand, there is an incredible work ethic in certain artists which has allowed them to build careers when they have not had the greatest voices or the greatest talent. In other cases there are artists, such as Hank Williams,

Sr., who faced every challenge that an artist could possibly face, yet is viewed by many as the greatest talent ever in country music.

An example of the importance of the independent record company and its role in the community can be found with the success that we had with songwriter/artist Lee Brice. While attending Clemson University, Lee played football and learned the importance of teamwork. In the history of our company we never had an artist as effective as Lee and his ability to motivate our employees as well as understand how to motivate radio and the media in a positive way. Lee also proved that he could withstand seven years of not having success as an artist without giving up his goal. During that period he wrote songs, including the first song ever to debut number one on the *Billboard* chart “More Than A Memory” by Garth Brooks, which we were fortunate to publish. He also wrote hit songs for artists such as the Eli Young Band and Tim McGraw. When Lee finally succeeded as an artist, he went on to have five #1 *Billboard* singles as an artist and a number one album in addition to other industry awards, including the ACM 50th Anniversary Record Of The Year “I Don’t Dance” in 2015 that he sang, wrote and produced for Curb Records. The longer it took for Lee to succeed, the harder he worked, and he achieved his dream as an artist and became recognized as a great songwriter and performer.



CHAPTER 13

Analyzing the Music Business

The Importance of the Influence of R&B and Rock & Roll

Distributing Historic Sun Records

We completed a study of the recording labels throughout the history of recorded music and discovered that number exceeds 4,000 record labels, the vast majority of which were independent companies that no longer exist. I believe that my company, Curb Records, is the oldest record company in the industry that is still operating under its original ownership.

There is massive consolidation taking place in the music industry, the publishing industry, the radio industry, the retail industry and virtually every other aspect of the entertainment industry. For this reason, it is a perfect time for independent labels to emerge, particularly if they can find a niche in the industry that the major labels are not pursuing. The major concern is that superstar rock & roll acts, as well as superstars from other musical genres, tend to sign with major labels because major labels can afford to take large financial risks that independent labels cannot take.

I am often asked why Curb Records is still in business after over 50 years and my answer is simple. There are at least 20 different areas of music that can be impacted by rock & roll and the secret is to be involved in as many of them as possible. The Rock & Roll Hall of Fame and The Grammys do a great job of honoring great artists and creators, particularly those who are considered to be cool. Those of us who have been surviving in this business from the inception of rock & roll understand that rock & roll influences virtually every form of music.

The following are examples of rock formats and artists that we either impacted at the start of their career or achieved success with that artist. **East Coast Rock:** Four Seasons; **West Coast Rock:** Stone Poneys featuring Linda Ronstadt, Walker Bros., Mugwumps, Electric Flag featuring Mike Bloomfield and Buddy Miles. The Standells, Strawberry Alarm Clock, Max Frost and The Troopers, Hondells, Buddies and The Righteous Bros.; **Southern Rock:** Delbert McClinton, Burrito Bros., Bellamy Bros. and Hank Williams Jr.; **Midwest Rock:** Chicago and Crow; **Pop Rock:** Osmonds, LeAnn Rimes, Sixpence None The Richer, Pat Boone, Tommy Roe, Jim Stafford, Bobbie Gentry, Paul Anka, Melanie Pfirrmann, Timi Yuro, Ray Stevens and Neil Sedaka; **Country Rock:** Wynonna, Sawyer Brown, Jo Dee Messina, The Hagers, Tompall and the Glaser Bros., Merle Haggard, Dylan Scott, Desert Rose Band, Jackson Michelson, Jerrod Niemann, Ronnie McDowell, Hal Ketchum, The Burrito Bros., Boy Howdy, Buck Owens, Sonny James, Terry Stafford, T.G. Sheppard, Blue County, American Young, Exile, Rodney Atkins, Tim McGraw, Lee Brice, Heidi Newfield and Trick Pony; **R&B Rock:** Sylvers, Johnny Bristol, Lou Rawls, Solomon Burke, Isaac Hayes, Richard Roundtree, Ovations, Mary Griffin, Kimberley Locke, Blanca,

Melinda Doolittle, Larry Gordon, Wayne Starks and Kool and The Gang; **Rap Rock:** KMC KRU, Tracy Edmond, Steven Malcolm, Fat Joe and The Terror Squad; **Mainstream Rock:** Foreigner, Real Life, Presence, Pink Floyd, The Five Man Electrical Band, P.O.D., Andreas Moss, Built By Titan, BTO, Eric Burdon and War (“Spill The Wine”), Jesse Kinch and Just Jinjer; **Rockabilly:** Dorsey Burnett, Billy Burnett and Carl Perkins; **Latino Rock:** Salvador, deSol, Trini Lopez, Fernando Ortega, Jason Castro and Souljahz; **Teen Rock:** Shaun Cassidy, Leif Garrett, Donny Osmond, Donny and Marie, Pure NRG, Mickey Dolenz (Monkees), The Shocking Blue and OBB; **Instrumental Rock:** Davie Allan and The Arrows, The Incredible Bongo Band, Duane Eddy and The Bar-Kays; **Alternative Rock:** Beat Farmers, Lyle Lovett, Junior Brown, Ryan Corn, Marie Miller and Hank III; **Dance Rock:** Gloria Gaynor, Sparks, Whigfield, The Hues Corporation, Fun Factory, Bananarama, Kaci Battaglia and Hubert Kah; **Blues and Jazz Rock:** Jimmy Smith and B.B. King, **Christian Rock:** MercyMe, Second Chapter of Acts, DeGarmo & Key, Larry Norman, Whiteheart, Pocket Full Of Rocks, Francesca Battistelli, Remedy Drive, Mutemath, Stellar Kart, Building 429, Nicol Sponberg (Selah), MIKESCHAIR, Veridia, Petra, Patty Cabrera, 38th Parallel, Plumb, Big Daddy Weave, BarlowGirl, for King and Country, Sidewalk Prophets, Family Force 5; **Gospel Rock:** Shirley Caesar, Kirk Franklin, Nicole C. Mullen, Fisk Jubilee Singers, Natalie Grant and Group 1 Crew; **Motion Picture Rock:** Wild Angels, Coyote Ugly, Savage Seven, The Trip, Devil’s Angels, Psych Out, Zabriskie Point, Shaft, Thunder Alley, Riot On The Sunset Strip, Wild In The Streets, Strawberry Statement, Legally Blonde II, Kelley’s Heroes and Evan Almighty; **TV Rock:** American Bandstand Theme, Baretta’s

Theme and Theme From The Jeffersons; **Rock Music Commercials:** On The Move With Chevrolet, Suzuki, You Meet The Nicest People On A Honda; and **Animation Rock:** Hot Wheels, Cattanooga Cats and Kid Power; and finally, **Rock & Roll:** The Crickets, Roy Orbison, Don and Phil Everly (The Everly Bros.) and Jerry Lee Lewis.

In most all of the above examples, the artist was signed to one of our companies. In other cases we had a participation based upon our contribution with regard to the signing of that artist to another company or the artist participated in a special event, duet, licensing or distribution arrangement. Nevertheless, for over 50 years we have followed the same philosophy which is to be open to releasing great records in any rock format, realizing that the most important thing is making sure that all decisions are based on the impact of the music. In the future, Curb will be open to all forms of music and as we complete this book we are developing a Nashville-based Pop/Rock production factory under the leadership of Bryan Stewart. The artists, writers and producers include Built By Titan, Andreas Moss, Melanie Pfirman and Starx. This is in addition to OBB, Larry Gordon and Jesse Kinch. The future also requires us to protect the past. We are now also distributing the classic recordings of Sun Records, including Elvis Presley, Roy Orbison, Jerry Lee Lewis, Conway Twitty, Charlie Rich, Johnny Cash and Carl Perkins. In addition to Curb Records, we have purchased Fervent Records (for King & Country, Francesca Battistelli, Big Daddy Weave) and Word Records (We Are Messengers, Blanca, Jason Castro) and we currently have over 50,000 master recordings and copyrights. This allows us to also be a major catalog company and allows us to come up with many new and exciting albums that involve the great

artists who have been part of Curb, Fervent, Word and Sun Records for over 50 years. The Sun relationship was made possible because of the good relationship we have with Mary and John Singleton, who now own and operate Sun Records. John and Mary sent me an e-mail on the day that I was completing this book. I asked them if they wanted this to be included in my book and they said “Yes”, because the man quoted is Sun Records founder Sam Phillips who many people believe to be the founder of rock & roll because he signed Elvis Presley, Johnny Cash, Carl Perkins, Jackie Brenston, Ike Turner, Roy Orbison and Jerry Lee Lewis. Sam stated: “Of all people in the music industry, I consider Mike Curb a true magical pioneering spirit. He is the person I have admired the most and would like to have known. His creative ideas are fearless, adventuresome and truly original. I consider Mike a true icon, the real deal, with a lasting legacy.”

I think I’ve reached the point in my life where when someone I admire as much as Sam Phillips says something positive about me or our company, I want to remember it. I actually did meet Sam Phillips when he participated in the filming of a video for our recording artist Ronnie McDowell at The Stockyard Restaurant in Nashville, Tennessee shortly before Sam died. Sam did say very positive things to me at the time, but I was uncomfortable mentioning those until I got this thoughtful e-mail from John and Mary.



CHAPTER 14

The Music Business Lifestyle

The music business is not like a “normal business,” it is a lifestyle. My lifestyle during the MGM/CURB years involved getting up early every morning and spending all day working in the office. At the end of the day I would go into the studio and produce a record. I stayed late into the night to get it mixed before I’d go home and crawl into bed for a little bit of sleep. Sometimes I worked all day in the office, then caught a plane to Las Vegas, where I performed with The Mike Curb Congregation, opening shows for other acts. Early the next morning I’d catch a plane back to L.A. and spend that day in the office.

A lot of good things happened during my MGM/CURB years. During the early part of the 1970s the British Invasion ended, although there were still superstar rock acts arriving from Great Britain as well as evolving in the United States. The early 1970s was a wonderful time for hit records and I was fortunate to be associated with a number of those: “Candy Man” by Sammy Davis Jr., “Burning Bridges” by The Mike Curb Congregation, “Spill The Wine” by Eric Burdon and War, “Montego Bay” by Bobby Bloom, “Here Comes the Sun” by Richie Havens, Signs by the Five Man Electrical Band,

“Natural Man” by Lou Rawls, “One Bad Apple” by the Osmonds, “Puppy Love” by Donny Osmond, “Paper Roses” by Marie Osmond, “I’m Leaving It All Up To You” and “Morning Side Of The Mountain” by Donny and Marie; in country music we had “I Ain’t Never” by Mel Tillis and “All For The Love Of Sunshine” by Hank Williams Jr.

We were taking groups like Cream, who had hits in rock & roll, and putting them in films and on soundtrack albums. I think I might have had the inside track on that trend because I was doing that from the mid-1960s to the end of the 1960s for independent films. At MGM I was in charge of its music and film department where I had the opportunity to supervise many soundtracks, including *Shaft* with Isaac Hayes and Clint Eastwood’s *Kelly’s Heroes*; on the latter, I wrote the title song “Burning Bridges” and won a BMI Pop Songwriter Award. I also worked with Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young on the soundtrack of the movie *Strawberry Statement*. Anytime a person claims he is the first to do something, someone else will say “But I did it earlier.” That may be the case here; however, I do know that I was one of the first to create a business of putting West Coast rock & roll music in movies and to score entire movies with that rock & roll sound.

I caught some flak during my time at MGM because of my public stand against drugs in the music industry. Drugs were a big part in the music business in the late 1960s and early 1970s and some artists pretended to have needle marks on their arms to prove they were involved with drugs so they would be considered “cool.” That was tragic and it bothered me. I spoke out against drugs several times and was castigated every time I did. I believe that some people in the music

industry did not serve those artists well by going along with their drug use; however, this is a business where everyone wants to be cool. It seemed like everything fell into place for me at MGM. It was still the same five-year plan that I intended to do with Transcontinental, but this one really worked. I was incredibly busy, but energized by everything that was happening. Even though I spent my days as an executive at the head of MGM Records and Verve Records, I continued to perform with my group.

In 1974, Kirk Kerkorian sold 80 percent of MGM to Polygram, a major label based in The Netherlands. I enjoyed being at MGM and did not want to sell; in fact I held on to my 20 percent of the company for an additional year. However, Kerkorian had retained the MGM name when he sold the company and we could only use the MGM name for another couple of years. Finally, I came to the conclusion that I needed to sell my 20 percent interest to Polygram as well because, to put it bluntly, when the person who holds 80 percent decides to sell, it is better to go along with that decision. The sale of my stock included a “non-compete” clause that lasted a few years, which meant that I could not run another record label during that time. Still, I could produce records and I continued to produce Donny and Marie Osmond and Eddy Arnold.

I was 24 years old when I merged Curb Records with MGM and I was not smart enough or well enough educated in law to do one thing that would have forever changed my life. When we did the contract I should have included a provision that the names MGM and Verve were assets of the corporation. I did not do that and it was very tough after being so involved in the record business for ten years, working night

and day, to let it go.

Fortunately, I was able to keep the name Curb Records and many of the master recordings, so after the MGM non-compete ended, I was able to continue to build Curb Records. Recently, my distributor Warner Music Group, presented me an award for achieving over a billion dollars of sales during the term of our existing Warner/Curb agreement. As the oldest independent record label still operating with the original owner, we still need to “live the business” with great artists and employees to convince our distributors and the media of our right to exist.



CHAPTER 15

Warner Curb

Five Consecutive #1 Pop Hits, The Four Seasons, Bellamy Brothers, Shaun Cassidy, Debby Boone, Exile, Foreigner, T.G. Sheppard and Berry Gordy Jr.

The non-compete agreement with MGM lapsed in late 1974, which was about ten years after Mo Ostin released me as an artist from Reprise. In 1975, Mo, who was Chairman of Warner Bros., and Joe Smith, president of Warner Bros., invited me to lunch and told me that if I was interested in starting a label, they were interested in distributing it. Warner Bros. wanted to get into the singles business – Warner Bros. was an album label – and knew my track record with hit singles. During our discussion, I suggested we call the new label “Warner Curb” instead of just “Curb” because that would make it easier for me to sign artists. They agreed that I could use the Warner name; therefore, in late 1974 I started Warner Curb Records. The lesson learned from this is also the title of one of my biggest hits as a songwriter, which was “Burning Bridges.” The lyrics to that song are “All the burning bridges that have fallen after me/All the lonely feelings and the burning memories/everyone I left behind each time I closed the door/Burning bridges,

lost forevermore.” The message is that if I had burned a bridge with someone, I could never use it again.

There is an important lesson here. If someone says “No,” today, that person might say “Yes” ten years later. Even the Bible says “turn the other cheek.” None of us is perfect at that and I must admit that I have not been able to do it every time. However, I know that two of my biggest opportunities – with Warner Bros. and Word – came after they told me “no” earlier in my career. Even though I was disappointed when Mo Ostin decided not to pick up my option as an artist when I was 19, he did me a favor. He told me the truth and recommended that I develop my abilities as a producer. With Word, it was my father who told me, “If you finish high school with decent grades, you can take the car to Waco, Texas.” He also did me a favor when he said, “Go to Waco and audition.” If he had said “I don’t care if you finish high school,” I might not have finished high school. If I had been angry with Jarrell McCracken at Word Records because he dropped me after my single did not sell back in the 1960s, could I have had my album released later? If I had been belligerent with Mo Ostin in 1964 when he did not pick up my option, would I have been able to set up Warner Curb in 1974?

The message is simple and clear: If I had not been prepared to turn negatives into positives, then another business would have been better for me than the record business.

I began a new venture for Curb Records with Warner Bros. and began looking for some new artists for the label. I had met Bob Gaudio with the Four Seasons and Gaudio and his wife, Judy, had written a song “Oh, What A Night” – the name was actually “December, 1963 (Oh What A Night).” Bob produced the song with the Four Seasons

without Frankie Valli, the lead singer for the group, because Frankie was signed to another label. Finally, an arrangement was made where Valli could sing on part of the record. We released that record and it became the biggest Four Seasons record they ever had. It came back again during the mid-1990s and became the first record to stay on the *Billboard* Hot 100 “chart” for more than one year – it stayed on for 54 weeks – longer than any other record in the history of the *Billboard* Hot 100 at that time.

In 1976, because I was Co-Chairman of the Ronald Reagan presidential campaign, I was not signing many artists – maybe one or two artists a year to Curb/Warner – but the next act I signed was the Bellamy Brothers. It was actually Phil Gernhard’s idea to sign them; he brought them to me. Phil had worked with them because one of our earlier hit records “Spiders And Snakes” by Jim Stafford had been co-written by David Bellamy and Stafford’s roadie was his brother, Howard Bellamy. Gernhard found the song “Let Your Love Flow” and that went to number one on the *Billboard* Hot 100 “chart”. Then we signed Shaun Cassidy to develop our next Donny Osmond because the Osmonds were still signed to MGM. Working with my friend Michael Lloyd we recorded “Da Doo Ron Ron,” an old Crystal’s song from 1963, originally produced by Phil Spector, and that went to number one in early 1977. I signed Shaun after his manager, Ruth Arons, called and told me “You’ve got to see Shaun – he’s exactly what you’re looking for. He’s your next star!” She was right! Shaun had his first hits in Europe and became a teen idol there and then we released his records in the United States and he became a big star in America. His first album sold something like three million copies. We had two

or three top-selling albums while he was on the TV show “The Hardy Boys.” Shaun was the younger brother of David Cassidy, who starred in “The Partridge Family” show. There was a sound and a look to Shaun that was different and special; he was a talented artist and became a teen idol like Donny Osmond.

Leif Garrett, another teenager, was also signed to us but, because he was so close in age to Shaun Cassidy, I decided to do a venture with Atlantic Records through Tony Scotti, who was my brother-in-law at the time. Leif’s hit, “I Was Made For Dancing,” was released in the Fall of 1978, and hit the charts around the same time I was elected Lieutenant Governor of California. Leif’s first chart record was the year before; he had been in several movies, including *Bob and Carol and Ted and Alice* and the *Walking Tall* films, and had starred in the television series, “Three for the Road.” I must give a lot of credit to my long-time friend, Michael Lloyd, for his production work on both Shaun and Leif. I also have to give a lot of credit to Tony Scotti for creating a relationship with Bud Prager that allowed us to participate in the early years of the rock band Foreigner. We wanted to sign Foreigner to Warner Curb but Warner was concerned that we couldn’t promote them at the same time we were promoting Exile, a new rock & roll band that we had signed. Therefore, Tony and I made an agreement with Atlantic where we had a substantial participation in the group Foreigner during their early albums until we sold our participation to Atlantic Records.

We signed Exile and they had a huge hit with “Kiss You All Over.” Mickey Shapiro had called and said, “I’ve got your next record” and played me that song. I thought it would be a big hit and we released it in the summer of 1978. That song became number one

on the *Billboard* Hot 100 and stayed there for four weeks. The group's songwriters, J.P. Pennington and Mark Gray, wrote "The Closer You Get" and "Take Me Down," which were big hits for Alabama in the country field and Exile later decided to concentrate on country music after their pop success.

The venture with Warner Bros. was not the only venture with which I was involved. When I was with MGM and the Osmonds hit with "One Bad Apple," Berry Gordy called and said he wanted to meet. He lived close to where I lived so he invited me to his home. Berry was not thrilled at the idea that the Osmonds were being mistaken for the Jackson 5; however, we soon became friendly and during our conversation, he said, "Let's do something together." I replied, "Berry, you've already done it all. There isn't anything you haven't done." He replied that he had never done anything in the country music field so we decided to start a label which we first called Melodyland, then changed the name to Hitsville. Our first artist was T.G. Sheppard and the first record we released, "Devil In A Bottle," went to number one on the country charts. Berry and I continued to operate the Hitsville label for several years until I purchased Berry Gordy's interest. We then brought all of that product into our Curb label and, in fact, T.G. Sheppard spent literally the rest of his recording career with Warner/Curb and had 15 number one records.

Berry wanted a family act, like the Osmonds, on Motown and asked if I was aware of any; I suggested Pat Boone's family, which consisted of Pat, his wife Shirley, and their four daughters, who were all talented singers. When I dated Karen Carpenter, we had talked about recording "Please, Mr. Postman," which had been a hit by the Marvelettes in 1961

and was also recorded by the Beatles on one of their albums. I did not believe the Carpenters were interested in recording “Please, Mr. Postman” so I produced that song on the Boone family for Motown.

After we recorded that song, Karen told me the Carpenters had recorded it and planned to release it as a single. Once the Carpenters did that, it didn’t make sense to release our record. We had also recorded “Viva Espana” on that same session and Berry decided to release it after listening and deciding that it had an infectious sound. “Viva Espana” was a Spanish song where I had the opportunity to write an English lyric and I think it may be the only single that was ever released that contained all the members of the Boone family: Pat, Shirley, Charity, Lindy, Debby and Laurie.



CHAPTER 16

Marriage to Linda Dunphy Curb

I loved my work and lived the business day and night but I also knew there was more to life than the music business and politics.

I first met Linda Dunphy while I was at MGM, where I hired Jimmy Webb's father, Bob Webb, to work in our creative department. Bob told me about an artist that his son was developing. At the time, Jimmy Webb was the hottest songwriter in America, writing songs such as "McArthur Park," "By The Time I Get To Phoenix," "Galveston," and "Up, Up And Away." Bob wanted me to see Jimmy's new artist and I agreed to go to a recording session to see the artist. Jimmy asked me to pick up his date on the way to the studio so that evening I picked up Linda Dunphy. After spending a couple of hours at the studio, I was ready to leave but it was obvious that Jimmy was going to stay at the studio for quite a while. I could tell from Linda's eyes that she was concerned about how and when she would get a ride home. I asked Linda and Jimmy if they wanted me to take Linda back to her home. They agreed and the rest is history.

Linda's father, Jerry Dunphy, was a well-known newscaster on television in Los Angeles and her sister, Karen, was married to Bill

Drake, the most powerful man in the music business in the early 1970s. Drake created a type of radio programming called “Boss Radio” at KHJ in Los Angeles.

“Boss Radio” made its debut in May 1965 and was a very smooth, tight, disciplined sound. Drake had a tight playlist and energetic, tightly controlled disc jockeys who were real personalities. Drake’s company was called “Drake-Chennault” and they programmed the top radio stations in the country. Bill Drake controlled the musical direction of those stations, which made him incredibly influential in the record industry. He lived not far from where I lived and, in those days, if you were lucky, he would invite you over to his house to play your new records. One night while I was at his home, his wife Karen and her sister Linda and I spent most of the evening talking about life. The next week Linda came over to my house with her black poodle named Misty. We talked that evening and soon started dating. We dated for about three years in the early 1970s while she was finishing college.

My life in the music industry was hectic and busy, so I was not dating Linda or seeing her as much as she wanted. Her father advised her that he did not feel the relationship was going anywhere because we were not dating enough or making decisions that would lead towards marriage so he advised her to break up with me, which she did.

This was in late 1973 or early 1974 and right after we broke up, MGM was sold, although I did not sell my share right away. In typical Curb form, I did not want to sell. Around that time I began dating Karen Carpenter, who was introduced to me by Frenda Leffler, the wife of the Osmond’s manager. Karen had an older brother, Richard, who was her producer, and I had a younger sister. It was nice to date an

artist whom I was not producing and I was privileged to watch Richard work in the studio. He was a marvelous producer and was perfect for producing and performing with Karen.

Karen had the softest voice and when she sang in the car, she could hardly be heard; however, the microphone loved Karen Carpenter's voice. It's one thing to sound good live, but in the record business it's how it sounds on tape or how a voice reproduces. Karen Carpenter had a perfect voice for the studio.

Karen and I dated for a couple of years and had a wonderful relationship. She was a great person from a small town with a mid-western set of values. She lived with her parents in Downey and did not let the industry get to her. She had a fine relationship with her brother, like I had with my sister but, as time went on, she became extremely busy with her career. The Carpenters would do a world tour – to Europe and Japan – and she would be gone for months at a time, so it reached a point where we were no longer seeing much of each other.

One day I received a call from Linda Dunphy's mother, who told me that Linda was seriously ill. I had often thought of Linda during our time apart and missed her. I went to see her and during the visit I told her that when she felt better we should get together. A short while later she called and said she was better.

It is one thing to live a business; it is another to be married to a business. I love the music business but I also wanted to be married and have a family and I wanted to be married to Linda Dunphy. The more time we spent together the more I was sure of that.

Linda was a stewardess with TWA and she visited my parents, who were living in Pittsburgh. I remember my mother called and said

to me, “you’ll have a hard time finding someone as nice as Linda. She will make a great wife.” My sister was also telling me the same thing and I wholeheartedly agreed with them. One day while Linda and I were having dinner we began to discuss marriage. I proposed and I am very fortunate that she said “yes.” Our wedding was in April, 1978; it was a small wedding with just our parents and sisters.



CHAPTER 17

Government

*Elected Lt. Governor of California
and President of The Senate*

Elected National Chairman of all Lieutenant Governors

It was quite jolting to suddenly no longer be President of MGM, but my father gave me some very good advice. He said “You’ve had ten incredible years. Perhaps you would enjoy speaking about your experiences to charities and Boys Clubs, Boy Scouts or some other organizations.” I took his advice.

One day I was speaking at a Boys Club luncheon and Ronald Reagan was also there. He had just ended his second term as Governor of California and was planning to run for President. (President Nixon was in his second term and could not run again.) At that luncheon, Ronald Reagan asked if I would be interested in helping him get some entertainment to appear during his Presidential campaign. He planned to start running in 1975 for the 1976 nomination. At that point I thought this would be a positive thing to do and I had always liked Ronald Reagan, but I was not a registered voter. I promised Ronald Reagan

that I would work on his Presidential campaign, but then Watergate heated up, Nixon resigned and Gerald Ford became President. All of a sudden we realized that Ford was going to run in 1976 because he did not have the same two-term restriction as Nixon. It became apparent that Reagan and Ford were going to be running against each other in the primaries so many of Reagan's key supporters left and went to work for Ford. My friend, Ken Rietz, told me that I would be receiving a call from Reagan's Press Secretary, Lyn Nofziger. Lyn, who was organizing the Reagan campaign at that time, came to me and said, "Mike, we really need the people who believe in Ronald Reagan to step up. Would you be willing to have lunch with me and Ronald Reagan?" I agreed and during that lunch Ronald Reagan asked me to be the California State Chairman for his campaign. I still had my non-compete restriction from my contract with MGM, but serving as a non-paid Chairman in the Reagan campaign was not a conflict. I accepted the position and served as State Co-Chairman of the Reagan campaign.

I treasured the time that I was able to spend with Ronald Reagan in 1975 and 1976 when we were able to drive in his car, with only one security person, and we were able to talk about everything from government to family. One of the most memorable moments was when he told me how much he missed seeing his son, Mike Reagan, because he had been so busy as a two-term governor of California. I told him that I would like to meet Mike and I was able to meet him at a boat company. Mike was a champion boat racer and a fabulous person who later married a fabulous wife, Colleen, and has great kids.

When I met him, I realized that Mike shared his father's political beliefs more than any of his siblings. I went back to Ronald Reagan and

said we need your son, Mike, to be involved in this campaign because he believes in what you stand for. Mike and his dad had a meeting and we were able to bring Mike into the campaign in a meaningful way and it made me realize with my own family that sometimes parents don't realize how talented their own children are and I know that I have tried to learn from the experience with Ronald and Mike Reagan how to make sure I relate to the progress that my own children are making. Since we lost Ronald Reagan, I think most people would agree that Mike Reagan has made his father proud through his own successes and by standing up for the issues and beliefs of his father.

During the 1976 Republican primary campaign, Ronald Reagan almost dropped out after the third primary because he had run out of money. The fourth primary was in North Carolina and it was important that he win that state; however, he needed money to buy TV time and did not have it. That's when Lyn Nofziger asked me, along with my good friends Joe Rodgers and Jimmy Lyon, if we would lend the Reagan campaign enough money for the TV spots – which we did. In Nofziger's autobiography, published in September, 1992, he recounts that if the three of us had not loaned that money to the Reagan campaign, just before the North Carolina primary, Ronald Reagan would have lost North Carolina and had to drop out. Those TV spots allowed Reagan to win North Carolina and carry his fight for the nomination all the way to the Republican Convention that summer in Kansas City, Missouri. Even though he lost the nomination to Ford, Ronald Reagan spoke at the Convention and gave his famous speech about America being a shining city on the hill. That speech won the hearts of the delegation and eventually created the groundswell that

led to Ronald Reagan becoming the Republican nominee for President in 1980. I am proud to think that I had a part in helping him get to the White House.

California Attorney General Evelle Younger had been the California state chairman of the Ford Campaign while I was the state chairman for the Reagan campaign. After the Convention it became important for the chairmen of the Ford and Reagan campaigns to unite so we became Co-Chairmen in California of the Ford Presidential campaign in 1976. It was my job to convince the Reagan county chairmen in all 58 counties in California to support Gerald Ford in the general election. Since Ronald Reagan engendered a lot of loyalty, it was not an easy job to transfer the passion voters had for Reagan to someone else. The county chairmen cooperated and President Ford did a good job in the campaign. President Ford and his entire family (Betty, Jack, Susan) were a real inspiration to work with. Younger and I also became friends during that time.

Since I had been the California Co-Chairman of the Reagan campaign in California and Reagan had won that state's primary, the 167 delegates pledged to Reagan elected me to be the California representative to the Republican National Committee (California National Committeeman). Sometime during that year I had lunch with Ronald Reagan and he said "I really wish we could elect a Republican Governor." At that time, Reagan had been succeeded as Governor by a Democrat, Jerry Brown, and all those involved in California politics knew that Jerry Brown wanted to run for President in 1980, the same year that Reagan was going to seek the Republican nomination. We knew that if Jerry Brown campaigned throughout America, he would

trash Ronald Reagan's record, even though Reagan had a wonderful record as Governor of California. Jerry Brown did not like what Ronald Reagan had done as Governor; there could not have been two people further apart in their views than Jerry Brown and Ronald Reagan.

Ronald Reagan wanted a Republican who could be elected Governor of California in 1978 but Brown was an incumbent and incumbents are hard to beat. While talking about this during lunch with my friends Ken Rietz and Lyn Nofziger, Lyn said, "If California had a Republican Lieutenant Governor that might keep the Democratic Governor in the State." Ken looked at me and said, "Would you consider running for Lieutenant Governor" because, according to Lyn's line of reasoning, if Jerry Brown was re-elected Governor, he would not leave the state if the Lieutenant Governor was a Republican. It was thought that scenario might even cause Jerry Brown to not run for President and he would take his job as Governor a little more seriously and stay in California. The last thing that Reagan or anybody else in the Republican party wanted was for Jerry Brown to campaign around the country trashing Ronald Reagan's record.

I discussed running for Lieutenant Governor with Ken Reitz, who was one of the top political strategists in the country, and then with Holmes Tuttle, who was the chief fundraiser for Ronald Reagan. Tuttle said to me, "Mike, we've thought about it and want you to run." I told him about my grandmother's strong belief in the Democratic party and that I had basically not made a decision in my twenties whether to register as a Democrat, Independent or Republican. I also told him I had just registered as a Republican two years ago because of the Reagan campaign and I'm really not a politician." He answered, "You're

younger than Jerry Brown, and I know that you can do this. If you run you might win.” Somewhere along the way Ken Reitz and I made the decision in 1977 that I would allow my friends to form an Exploratory Committee to see if it made sense for me to run. The committee was formed by my friends, who held a fund-raising dinner, and a lot of people came, including Mo Ostin, Chairman and CEO of Warner Bros., Karen Carpenter, Mae West and Shaun Cassidy; Casey Kasem was the Master of Ceremonies. Steve Lawrence and Eydie Gorme did an incredible performance and there must have been 1,000 people at The Beverly Hilton who were Democrats, Independents, Republicans, Liberals and Conservatives.

One day my good friend Bob Lifton called. Among his many business endeavors, he was also involved in financing a film, and he initially asked me to listen to the music soundtrack, which included a song tentatively entitled “Baby, You Light Up My Life”. He introduced me to the producer of the film, Joe Brooks. I discussed the music with Joe, and I initially played the song for Karen Carpenter in my car. I called Joe back and told him that Karen did not want to record the song, and I made some suggestions, including removing the word “Baby”, so that the song would accentuate the title better. Later on Bob called me and asked if I would look at the progress of the film. *Sessions*, but they were having problems placing the film with a distribution company. When Bob called he asked, “Mike would you look at this film?” And I quickly answered, “Bob, I’m running for Lieutenant Governor now.” Bob replied, “Well, you’re not Lieutenant Governor yet so would you look at it as a favor for me?” I agreed.

I attended a screening of the film with my sister and Casey with my sister and Casey Kasem and right in the middle of the film the lead actress, Didi Conn, started to lip synch the lyric to “You Light Up My Life,” and even though the lip synch was awkward. The idea was interesting, and after the screening I suggested to Bob that a good recording of “You Light Up My Life” should be made and released on record. Bob and I agreed that the name of the film should be changed from *Sessions* to *You Light Up My Life*.

I ended up working on a new version of the song and owning part of the song copyright. I also owned all the rights to the record but there was a problem between the producer of the film, Joe Brooks, and the artist who was singing, Kasey Cisyk. Joe and Kasey had been dating and they had just broken up so this recording could no longer be released as a single record. Fortunately, at the same time I was working with Debby Boone in the studio when she sang with her sisters, The Boone Girls, and I knew that Debby had a good lead voice and thought the song was in her key so I took it over to Pat and Shirley Boone and asked if they would let Debby record it and they agreed.

In five successive years – 1974 to 1978 – we had five number one records on the *Billboard* Hot 100: “Oh, What A Night” by the Four Seasons, “Let Your Love Flow” by the Bellamy Brothers, “Da Doo Ron Ron” by Shaun Cassidy, “Kiss You All Over” by Exile and “You Light Up My Life.” That song became the first 10 week number one on the *Billboard* Hot 100 chart. There had been other records that stayed number one on that chart for nine weeks, like “Mack The Knife” by Bobby Darin, “Hey Jude” by the Beatles, and “The Theme From A Summer Place” by Percy Faith, but there had never been a ten week

number one on the Hot 100 at that time. In addition, “You Light Up My Life” might have been the first Contemporary Christian song to become a major number one pop record.

“You Light Up My Life” later became the theme song for my campaign. In fact, “You Light Up My Life” by Debby Boone became the number one record for the entire decade of the seventies, according to *Billboard* chart activity, at a time when rock music dominated the music business. It was incredible to be part of a song that won the Academy Award, the Golden Globe Award and a Grammy Award.

Following our incredible experience with “You Light Up My Life,” an even greater moment occurred when I had a meeting in 1977 with Dick Whitehouse. I had met Dick 12 years earlier when Eddie Ray introduced me to Dick, who at the time was a young lawyer with Capitol Records in Hollywood. At that time, Dick elected to leave Capitol’s legal department to establish an independent law practice with emphasis on music and music related matters. I needed an experienced music oriented attorney and he needed a good client, so between that time and the time I decided to run for Lt. Governor, Dick served as our principal attorney for most of our music and music based agreements. As my election campaign intensified and the election neared, less and less of my attention was being devoted to our business and it became clear our company should look for a new president. In discussing that quest with Dick, he said to me words to the effect of “Hey, what about me?” I thought if he would leave his law practice and work exclusively for the company full time, he would be a good fit. He agreed and thus became president of the company in 1978. As

president, Dick became involved in most every aspect of the company's operation – with special emphasis on the country music side of our business – and he continued in that role until he retired in 1993.

My professional life was going great and so was my personal life. My wife and I both wanted children but did not think we were going to create any during our first year of marriage because the campaign for Lieutenant Governor was so hectic. After we voted on Election Day we both went to our doctors for our annual physicals; it was the only free day we had that year. I did not think I was going to win so after I had my physical I met with several of my staff to thank them for the work they had done. When I returned home from that meeting my wife greeted me and said, “Are you sitting down?” I said, “Oh, no, what are you going to tell me? Has something bad happened in the election?” She said, “No, I’m pregnant!”

That put me in a euphoric state and when I found out later that day that I had been elected Lieutenant Governor of California, at 33 years of age. I can't find the words to describe that incredible day. It was the first time in the 20th century that the voters of California had elected a Democratic Governor with a Republican Lieutenant Governor. I was sworn in on January 8, 1979.

That year Linda and I became the parents of a baby girl, Megan, born on June 12, 1979. Our second daughter, Courtney, was born on October 21, 1981. Both of my daughters were born while I was Acting Governor of California.



CHAPTER 18

Acting Governor of California

*At the time California's economy was equivalent in size
to the seventh largest country in the world.*

*Co-Chairman of the Reagan for President Campaign and
Chairman of the National Convention Program*

President Reagan and Motorsports

Richard Petty's Historic 200th Victory at Daytona

Winning Dale Earnhardt's First Championship

Winning Two Historic Indianapolis 500 Races

Now that Linda was pregnant and we were expecting our first child, I took the advice of Ronald Reagan, who told me “Try to have a place where you can get away.” He always loved to go to his ranch near Santa Barbara. My friend David Murdock had bought a ranch half way between Los Angeles and Santa Barbara, in Ventura County, and David told me how wonderful this area was. One day I was with Berry Gordy and he told me he wanted to sell his ranch, which was in that area, so I bought Berry Gordy's ranch. I've always felt this ranch was an historic place, because Berry Gordy is the most successful African American entrepreneur in the history of the music business, and the ranch was built by legendary African American architect, Paul Williams.

Soon after I became Lieutenant Governor, Jerry Brown decided to run for President in the 1980 election, although many felt sure he would not leave the state with a Republican Lieutenant Governor in charge. However, in 1979 Jerry Brown made a trip to Africa with Linda Ronstadt and announced his intention to run for President while he was over there. Because he was constantly out of state, I became Acting Governor of California.

Gray Davis – the same person who later became Governor and was recalled in the election that put Arnold Schwarzenegger in the Governor’s chair – was the chief of staff for Governor Brown at that time. Gray Davis and others in the Brown camp thought that Davis should fill the role of Acting Governor because he was Chief of Staff. However, the Constitution of the state said otherwise and it created a fascinating legal challenge where the Governor challenged my authority to make appointments as Acting Governor. I told Gray Davis back then, “Gray, I understand your position as Chief of Staff to the Governor – you helped get him elected and you’re very bright but you did not stand for election as I did. So why don’t we stick to the Constitution? Why don’t we uphold the laws of this state?”

I liked Gray, but the voters had not voted for Gray Davis and I believed in the Constitution. I had been in Watts in 1965, 14 years earlier, when the riots broke out and I saw what happened when the Governor was out of state and the Lieutenant Governor failed to call out the National Guard. (I drove to Watts in 1965 to pick up the three African-American singers who performed with The Mike Curb Congregation.) In my opinion, Watts and the greater city of Los Angeles have never recovered from that. I had that etched in my memory and believed that if

the Governor was going to spend almost a year out of state, then I needed to know what my responsibilities were to the people of California.

Governor Brown, with the support of Gray Davis, filed a lawsuit saying I should not be the Acting Governor when he was out of state. That lawsuit went all the way to the Supreme Court of California. William French Smith, who later became Attorney General in Ronald Reagan's cabinet, and Ted Olsen, who became Solicitor General for the United States and later argued President George W. Bush's case in the Florida election before the United States Supreme Court where the Presidency of the United States was determined, both represented me before the California Supreme Court. In December, 1979 the Supreme Court made it clear and the victory produced the headline "Curb's Authority as Acting Governor Confirmed."

In California, legislation becomes law if it is not signed or vetoed in 14 days. If the Governor is out of town for over two weeks, it might create a situation where legislation could become law that might not be in the best interests of the state. In addition to legislative issues, there were emergencies and disasters in the state that had to be dealt with. During the time I was Acting Governor there were mudslides, forest fires and a threatened strike by prison guards. My wife and I were awakened many nights with an emergency of some kind. That is not to say I always had to call out the National Guard, but I often had to give orders that required certain counties to be declared emergency or disaster areas so that emergency vehicles could cross lines from different counties. We were certainly busy every day.

It was an amazing experience. I spent approximately a year as Acting Governor of California with full responsibilities for signing bills,

making appointments and all the other responsibilities of Governor of the most populous state in the nation. I made appointments to the State Agricultural Commission, appointed judges and signed a number of pieces of legislation. To this day I don't know whether I should have done more or should have done less. Some people in California thought I should not have made any appointments at all while others thought I should have changed the whole state. There was some controversy, no question about it, but there was never a case where the legality of what I did was questioned. Jimmy Carter was President of the United States while I was Acting Governor and he and his staff were very supportive of California issues and emergency needs. I wish I could have thanked him in person for being such a great human being. We were both born in Georgia, shared Baptist faith and believed in the same social values.

During my term in office I was elected Chairman of the National Conference of Lieutenant Governors, which is comprised of all the Lieutenant Governors in the nation from both political parties. As Lieutenant Governor of California I was Chairman of the State Economic Development Commission, President of the Senate, a Regent for the University of California, and a Trustee of the State College system. I believe all of those duties made the Lieutenant Governor's position a fascinating job. The four years I spent in California government are the most incredible years of my life, particularly the time when I was Acting Governor of the most populous state in our country. It was even more fascinating and unbelievable to me that only a few years before, in 1975 and 1976, I had received my first taste of politics in the Reagan campaign.

One of the greatest moments of my life was when Ronald Reagan asked me to be the National Co-Chair, along with Jack Kemp, for

his 1980 Presidential campaign. Later, in the summer of 1980 the Republican Convention was held in Detroit and Ronald Reagan asked me to write a song for the entire convention to sing. I managed to find time between my duties as Lieutenant Governor and Acting Governor to write “Together A New Beginning,” a song where every state is mentioned. It took me a long time to do that! I enlisted the support of Donny and Marie Osmond and a number of other artists on my label to come to Detroit and sing that song on stage, then the words were put on the big screen behind the group and the entire convention joined in singing this song. In addition to all of this, I served as Chairman for the Program Committee for the entire Republican Convention and that experience alone could be the basis for an entire book.

In 1982, at the end of my term as Lieutenant Governor, I decided to run for Governor of California. My opponent for the Republican nomination was George Deukmajian, who had been the Attorney General while I was Lieutenant Governor. All of the polls told me I was going to win – even the poll taken on Election Day. My father-in-law – Jerry Dunphy – was the number one newscaster in Los Angeles and was on ABC News. On election night he called my wife Linda and told her, “I’m not supposed to do this but you can tell your husband that our exit polls confirm all the other polls. You can tell Mike that we are going to announce on ABC that he is the winner of the election.” In fact, I was so far ahead in the polls that I did not respond to last minute criticisms and allegations made against me because I wanted to stay friendly with my opponent so I could unite our state after the election.

I stayed up very late on election night, waiting for the results. Finally, I went to bed around three in the morning, although we were

still not sure about the outcome of the election. Early the next morning I was in bed when my two daughters – one was three and the other was one and a half years old at this time – came to my bed and said, “Does this mean we have our Daddy back?” That meant that I had lost the election, but my daughters putting it that way was a nice experience.

It is impossible to fully know why you win or lose an election. When I ran for Lieutenant Governor, I honestly never thought that I would win. However, in 1982, four years later, when I ran for Governor I was ahead in every poll, even those conducted on election night, but I lost the election. I believe that in the first election, the press and the opposing party were not as tough on me as they could have been. Those who knew politics told me that if I was ahead to watch out, especially the last four or five days because politics in California can be very dirty. When I ran for Governor of California and was ahead in the polls, I should have been better prepared for the unexpected to be thrown at me during the final week. However, I did not respond to the last minute election tactics of my opponent during the last weeks of the campaign because I thought I had won.

All in all, I may have broken even – I won an election for Lieutenant Governor that I did not think I would win and then lost an election for Governor four years later when I already had been Acting Governor and where all the polls showed that I should have won. Both were good lessons in life. I immediately endorsed my opponent George Deukmejian and I know that uniting the Republican Party was important to Ronald Reagan and all the incredible people who supported me.

After I lost the gubernatorial election Ronald Reagan asked me to move to Washington to be Chairman of the Republican National Finance

Committee. Ronald Reagan did not like fund raising, although he was very good at it. He believed he was elected President to be President and wanted to concentrate on doing that job well. George H. W. Bush, Sr., on the other hand, loved raising money and was the greatest fundraiser I ever met. George Bush, Sr. had an electrifying ability to raise funds.

One of the most exciting trips I took with President Ronald Reagan was on July 4, 1984 when we went to the Daytona Speedway to watch the annual Daytona 500 race. A car I owned, number 43 driven by Richard Petty, was in that race and won that year – the 200th career win for the legendary Richard Petty. Not only was it a great day for President Reagan, Richard Petty, and the Daytona Speedway but it also brought back great memories for me, going back to when our neighbor, Chris Christenson, took me to auto races at Gardena Stadium. When I was young I wanted to be a champion racing car driver and, although that dream was unfulfilled, my love of auto racing turned into active involvement in 1980. I was asked by my friend and former Hall of Fame L.A. Rams player Les Richter to be the Grand Marshal for the NASCAR race held in Riverside, California, which was the first race of the year in the NASCAR circuit and at that race, at the request of Bill France, Jr. I met with Dale Earnhardt. Dale told me he did not think he would be able to race the entire year because his car owner was in the housing development business and it was not a good year for housing. Since Dale needed a sponsor I agreed to sponsor his car, which created a positive relationship that turned out to be incredibly successful.

I also felt that a connection with NASCAR and racing was good for the record business, especially in country music. In a comparative look at the profile of the country music fan and the NASCAR fan, it is pretty

hard to find a difference. If you go to the infield at Daytona, I believe you will find that the audiences for NASCAR and Hank Williams Jr. are one and the same.

In 1980 Dale Earnhardt drove the Mike Curb Productions race car to his first NASCAR Championship; however, after the 1980 season Wrangler wanted to sponsor Dale. That worked out well because I did not have time to attend Dale's races because I needed to concentrate on my new job as Acting Governor. After my term in California government ended in 1983 I became involved with NASCAR as a car owner and by 1984 Richard Petty was driving my car. That was the year of Richard Petty's historic 200th win at Daytona with President Ronald Reagan in attendance.

When I was a kid, I was thrilled to get the autograph of J.C. Agajanian, who won the Indianapolis 500 a couple of times and promoted the California races which I used to attend. Later, while I was Acting Governor, he used to invite me to sit in his box at Ascot Speedway. His son, Cary Agajanian, became my partner in auto racing, and we remain partners in motorsports today. Our racing team, after all these years, has won two Indianapolis 500s, two Indy Lights championships, as well as championships in NASCAR, American Sprint Car Series, World of Outlaws, USAC Silver Crown, Midget and Sprint cars. We've had over 500 victories in over 40 different racing divisions, including the Indianapolis 500, the Indianapolis Grand Prix Lights, the Indianapolis Grand Prix Formula 2000, as well as victories in NASCAR at Daytona with Richard Petty in the premier series and the 24 Hours of Daytona and the 24 Hours of Daytona, the Daytona Great American Truck Race and the Daytona Battle at the Beach. We've

also had victories in the Modified division, including the annual All Star race, and I believe we're the only car owner to have won in all ten of NASCAR's domestic divisions. We've had major victories in World of Outlaws, including the Knoxville Nationals, the Volusia Nationals and Eldora's Kings Royal. Cary and I were both inducted into the West Coast Stock Car Hall of Fame and I was inducted into the Living Legends of Auto Racing Hall of Fame in Daytona and the Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame.

Ronald Reagan was not the only politician who enjoyed NASCAR. While I was Chairman of the Republican National Finance Committee, Vice President George Bush wanted to attend the Daytona 500 in 1985 and invited me to fly with him on Air Force 2 to Daytona because he knew I loved NASCAR and could take him around and introduce him to people. While we were on the plane we talked about him running for President in 1988 and he told me, "I've always believed in having a younger running mate. It's too bad you were not re-elected as Governor of California. It would be great to have a vice-presidential candidate your age from the largest state in the nation." I thought he was saying something to be nice because he is a very nice person. Nevertheless, after he was nominated for President in 1988, he picked Dan Quayle, who was about my age, as his running mate.

For many years after I lost that very close Governor's race in 1982 my wife and I often thought "what if?" What if we had handled the last week of that campaign just a little bit differently? What if I had won? I might have been on the ticket with George Bush Sr. in 1988 and who knows what could have happened from there. In retrospect, however, I believe there are many people who are qualified to be President or

Governor and I feel fortunate to live in a country where we have the possibility of something like this happening.

I have often reflected that in life we receive so many blessings we don't deserve so it is only fair that sometimes we do not get something that we think we do deserve. It is how we handle those situations that determines our character. I did not always receive the greatest press coverage during my time in California politics. I am a Republican and papers like the Los Angeles *Times*, the Sacramento *Bee* and the San Francisco *Chronicle* are not Republican leaning newspapers by any stretch of the imagination. However, I must say, judging from what the media have said about other Republican candidates, that I got off pretty easy.

After I lost that close election for Governor and endorsed my opponent, George Deukmajian, and pledged to support him, I got the best press I had ever received. I realized that although I lost, I had gained strength. Another good and positive thing about losing that election was that I was able to have the experience in Washington under Ronald Reagan's Presidency in 1983, 1984 and 1985. Those were very pivotal years in the history of our country. The Reagan tax cut during that period was probably the most significant legislation that changed the domestic policy of our nation. Of course, his international policy which led to the tearing down of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Soviet Union was the most significant political change from an international standpoint. It was certainly the greatest historical change of my lifetime in terms of changing the world as we now know it. To have been in Washington during that time and work with someone as great as Ronald Reagan and become friends with the Bush family is an experience that is hard to imagine duplicating.



CHAPTER 19

Going to Washington with President Ronald Reagan

*Curb Serving as Chairman of the Presidential Trust, Chairman of the
NRFC, Trade Negotiations Board and National USO Board*

We left Washington in 1985 when my older daughter was ready to enter kindergarten and moved back to California. Although my active involvement in politics began in 1976 when Ronald Reagan sought the Republican nomination for President, my first direct experience with politics and politicians occurred during the 1960s, when I was head of MGM and performing with The Mike Curb Congregation. It came because President Richard Nixon loved my group, The Mike Curb Congregation and the song they sang with Sammy Davis, Jr., “The Candy Man.”

The 1960s were a time of radical politics, revolution in the streets, and the development of a counterculture steeped in drugs and acid rock. I knew all that existed, I could see it every day, but I was never part of it because I was the son of a former FBI agent so those things weren’t for me. I never even considered drugs, touched

a drug, and was not part of any revolutionary or political movement. I suppose President Richard Nixon was aware of that when he called me during the time that “Candy Man” was a hit in 1972 while he was running for re-election. This was also around the time of the Watergate break-in, although I was not aware of Watergate; at that point almost no one knew about Watergate. President Nixon called my office and told me The Mike Curb Congregation was his favorite group, then asked me to help put together a concert in Miami during the 1972 Republican National Convention. I organized that concert and while we were performing “Candy Man” with Sammy Davis, Jr. at the convention, President Nixon walked on stage and Sammy hugged the President. That picture showing Sammy Davis hugging Richard Nixon with me standing next to them and the Curb Congregation in the background was in almost every newspaper in the nation.

I learned a lot about politics and politicians during the brief time I was actively involved. Running for political office, I had to separate myself from my candidacy. The candidate has to be that person over there who happens to share your name. There were things I could do that impacted how I was seen – especially how I handled myself during a press conference. In some cases I did well, in other cases I did not. The way I presented myself on TV and the positions I took on issues were important. In the business world, I can try to be a good businessman, but if I am against groups – because this group is this way or that group is that way – then I am not going to go very far. To be a successful politician, I had to be for all kinds of people and I had to bring people together who were different.

During the time I was active in politics there were things said about me that were totally fictitious, but because reporters have such broad rights when they are writing stories about politicians, it is almost impossible to violate the rights of a politician. I remember that someone wrote a story about me being a horrible businessman, criticized me for things Dick Whitehouse and I had been doing together for years. Dick said to me, "I've got to talk to this guy because this is totally false." Dick called this person and it turned out the guy was a lawyer. Dick asked him, "How can you write those things – you have never met Mike, you have never met me, you don't know any of those things that you are writing about." The guy replied, "I'm a liberal Democrat and I was asked to write a negative story about Mike Curb."

I have been in business and I have been in politics and I can honestly say there is very little correlation between entering politics and entering business. In politics, it is advantageous if a person comes from a family of politicians and does all the correct things, like registering to vote at the right time. A person with this background obtains all the educational and other connections he needs to be trained in politics. In other words, the lives of would-be politicians are structured so that when they enter politics they have all the right credentials.

Now contrast that with Arnold Schwarzenegger, who did not register to vote until he was 30 or Bill Frist who was a heart surgeon before he became a Senator from Tennessee, then Senate Majority Leader but did not register to vote until he was 30. I did not register to vote until I was 29 and the press and critics made a big issue of that when I ran for Governor of California. Nevertheless, I was the last Republican ever elected Lt. Governor of California and was able, due

to the Supreme Court victory, to become Acting Governor of our most populous state.

In many ways, being a businessman made it more difficult to be in politics. If I had never been in business then I would never have had to fire anybody so I could not be criticized for issues of hiring and firing. If I had never been in business, then I would never have made a business mistake and everybody in business makes mistakes, just normal, everyday business mistakes which can be magnified and used against a candidate in a campaign. The result of all this is that the people who do best in politics are people who have come through the political system. There are rare exceptions, like Ronald Reagan, who was not a politician – he was an actor – but was the total package of the right person at the right time and who had a vision for America that was right for that time. Arnold Schwarzenegger and Donald Trump obviously faced similar issues.

As a politician, my life was not my own. Whether someone had problems with plumbing or there was an important piece of legislation – I would get a phone call. When people have a problem, that problem becomes the biggest issue in their life so they are going to seek help and believe they may find it from their Governor or City Councilman or someone from city or local government. In politics you can expect that.

Working for people all day and almost every night giving speeches or attending special events can be exhausting. As a Republican in California, I had to pull together different groups because the issues of the people in Orange County and the issues and attitudes of the people in San Francisco are as different as those of Tennessee and New York.

However, once elected, having had experience in business is a great asset. One of the saddest things in the world today is that many people who are in business are afraid to run for political office because they fear that mistakes they have made will be brought out and put on public display. Perhaps it was something they did when they were young that will be discovered and plastered across the newspapers. That is unavoidable. I once said to Arnold Schwarzenegger when he was running for Governor of California in the recall election, “Arnold, don’t worry about having attended some wild party in the past. If you had not done something like that, somebody would have made it up anyway.”

California’s economy was at that time equal to the seventh largest country in the world. In addition, it was America’s most populous state. Arnold Schwarzenegger said, “Mike made me realize that if he could come from the world of business into government, I could do the same.” He was very helpful to me when I was running for governor, and I tried to be very supportive to him when he later ran for California governor. If I did help pave the way for Arnold, like Reagan did for me, then Arnold may have also paved the way for President Donald Trump. We all have something in common because we all had success in business. In addition, we all experienced the entertainment business through either film, television or music, and ironically, we all four have been honored with our own stars on the Historic Hollywood Walk of Fame. One thing we all learned was that we could not do it alone. In government, we all appointed great people, including people from the private sector. We all spoke about the importance of diversity, and our personal views on most social

issues were more moderate than the views of the Republican party. Like Ronald Reagan, we are all three from big states like California and New York, which obviously influenced our views. When I moved to Tennessee I realized what outstanding political leaders that Tennessee elected, such as Howard Baker, Estes Kefauver, Don Sundquist, Phil Bredesen, Bill Haslam, Lamar Alexander, Bob Corker, Ned McWherter, Bill Brock, Al Gore, Bill Frist, Winfield Dunn, Fred Thompson, Marsha Blackburn, Jim Cooper, Karl Dean, Bill Purcell and Megan Barry. Tennessee political leaders have made great appointments from the private sector such as Bill Hagerty and Butch Spyridon. We were thrilled to see someone with the business and government experience of Bill Hagerty receive the appointment of Ambassador to Japan. I was thrilled to see my friend, Terry Branstad, appointed Ambassador to China and our friend, Governor Rick Perry, appointed as Secretary of Energy and my friend, Elaine Chao, appointed as Secretary of Transportation. Both Elaine and I served together on the board of the Dole Food Company, and I have enjoyed working with her and her husband, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell. I'm so happy that people I worked with many years ago are still very respected leaders in Washington, such as Senator John McCain who is Chair of the Senate Armed Services Committee and Senate President pro tem and Chair of the Senate Finance Committee Orrin Hatch who has been a real friend to the entire music industry.

It's always easy to find differences on certain issues and obviously Tennessee elected officials have to reflect the views of their constituents. Nevertheless, the great elected officials of Tennessee

have led the State forward on numerous issues, including the economy, and Tennessee still can be proud of the fact that there is no state income tax. Memphis and Nashville have both become the most incredible cities for both music history and the future of all genres of music. I've often thought about what California would look like today if the State would have followed the direction that President Reagan, Arnold Schwarzenegger and I all believed in. Memphis and Nashville have both become the most incredible cities for both music history and the future of all genres of music. I've often thought about what California would look like today if the State would have followed the direction that President Reagan, Arnold Schwarzenegger and I all believed in.

No one understood the future direction for California and our country better than Jack Kemp. I had the pleasure of serving as Co-Chairman with Jack for the 1980 Ronald Reagan National Presidential Campaign. Jack Kemp played a major role in helping me support Proposition 13 at a time when almost every major Democrat and Republican in the state did not support the initiative. Even though it wasn't perfect, Prop 13 allowed virtually every homeowner in California at that time to know that the ridiculous increases in property taxes would stop. Jack Kemp also helped me introduce, with Paul Gant, Proposition 4 which put a limit on income taxes in California. Later on, I had the opportunity to work with Jack Kemp at the national level on his Kemp/Roth Bill that essentially was the foundation for the Ronald Reagan historic tax plan that lowered the income tax rate at the national level enormously and allowed me to build a business without outside investment and to build a large charitable foundation. I miss

Jack and I want to share a note that he wrote to me, “There is no public official in the United States of America who has given more public support for incentive-oriented tax policy than Mike Curb. Someone who is right out front with Prop 13 and also out front among public officials at the state level in the country with the Kemp/Roth Bill which was President Reagan’s ultimate tax victory in the Congress.

I am proud of what I was able to accomplish in government with a fantastic team of people that we organized. Ken Rietz and I put our team together by consulting with some of the greatest people in California who helped make it possible for me to win the election. They included General William and Willa Dean Lyon, Ambassador Glen and Gloria Holden, Holmes and Bob Tuttle, Jolly Gissell, Jack Courtemanche, Jerry Weintraub, Ted Cummings and David Murdock. The team included Shel Lytton, Dave Ackerman, Rex Hime, Gary Kern, Jim Beran, Roger Gamst, John Lilly, Burt and Jane Boeckman, Margaret Brock, Virginia Rice, Trudy McDonald, Mack McPhee, Wally Thornhill, Patty Gissell, Carl Dolder, Barbara Benjamin, Kim Bazzell, George Armstrong, and my sister Carole who played a very active and important role in the campaign and in our company. While serving California I made 431 appointments and signed numerous bills and proclamations as Acting Governor. I signed the Rob-A Home/Go-To-Jail bill as Acting Governor with the support of both houses of the state legislature. Prominent Democrats like Los Angeles District Attorney John Van de Kamp and Supervisor Kenneth Hahn attended the press conference when I signed the bill. I signed the bill that prohibits trial courts from ordering any prosecution witness or victim in any sexual assault case, including child molestation cases, to submit to a

psychiatric or psychological examination to test his or her credibility.

As Acting Governor I created the California Agriculture Commission that successfully dealt with a number of key issues, including bringing to the public's attention such important facts and measures to protect workers from being sprayed while working. During the massive gas line crisis, I signed a proclamation as Acting Governor to increase gasoline production. While there was controversy in temporarily increasing the lead content in gasoline, we were able to end the gas lines and ultimately this concept was supported by a majority of the California legislators from both political parties. I created the California Commission on Food and Nutrition to help solve the problem of malnutrition. I also created the California Commission on Citizen participation in government to seek the best qualified persons for government positions. I formed the water task force that did the complicated job of determining the ultimate costs of the water issue that was on the ballot in 1982. I chaired the California Economic Development Commission and worked on public issues relating to economic development, regulatory reform and lowering utility rates. I was one of the first people to publicly endorse Proposition 13 which limited government's rights to increase property taxes and as Acting Governor helped Paul Gann launch the state spending limitation action that voters later approved as Proposition 4. I helped launch the Crime Victims Bill of Rights that was later approved by the voters.

As Chairman of the Commission of the Californias, I worked to build a stronger relationship with Mexico and helped create the second legal border crossing to strengthen legal immigration. I worked with San Francisco County Supervisor Harvey Milk to defeat a statewide

initiative that would have denied gay school teachers their civil rights. My work to defeat this initiative was chronicled in the Academy Award winning motion picture *Milk* starring Sean Penn. I worked with Jerry Brown and future governor Gray Davis to initiate the first executive order prohibiting discrimination against people because of their sexual preference. I brought attention to the need to fill open judicial appointments by appointing Judge Armand Arabian to the California Court of Appeals paving the way for him to be elevated to the California Supreme Court.

As Acting Governor I signed many emergency orders and state of emergency proclamations or otherwise assisted in many emergencies, including fires, floods, mudslides, earthquakes and storms. In order to set an example for other office holders, I reduced the budget of my office and staff and instituted a policy of reimbursing the State for any time spent out of state on non-State business. I nominated the first woman, Carol Hallett, to be elected as a legislative leader and nominated and elected the first Hispanic chairman of the California Republic Party, Tirso del Junco.

The time our family spent in Washington was a pivotal time for me and part of my transition back into the music industry. During the period of 1979 to 1983, I focused on being Lieutenant Governor, then Acting Governor of California, as well as President of the Senate, Chairman of the State Economic Development Commission, a Regent of the University of California, trustee of the state colleges and on numerous other commissions. It was an intense time in my political life. California is a microcosm of the nation; there is not much similarity between San Francisco and Orange County, or between

San Diego and Eureka in Humboldt County, or between the central valley farms and Los Angeles. I had to deal with those differences and a myriad of other issues.

The major reason I liked President Reagan's offer to come to Washington was that it allowed our family to live where no one knew us. We lived in a townhouse in Georgetown and could walk down the street to a restaurant and nobody stopped us. When we walked outside our front door in California, it seemed like somebody had an opinion one way or another on some issue and I had to hear it which, in retrospect, I actually enjoyed.

In Washington, my job was wonderful because we interfaced with the White House and I had the responsibility as Chairman of the Republican Finance Committee to raise money for and serve as Chairman of the Presidential Trust. In the General Election, we had the issues of hard and soft money, so the Party's committees raised the soft money for elections. We had a Chairman in every state and I stayed busy. I was very proud to be able to be part of the Administration of a great President like Ronald Reagan. He was the best communicator and motivator I have ever seen. I felt that serving with his administration was a good way to make an impact and still keep in contact with my friends in government while I segued back into what I loved, which was the music business and motorsports.

In Washington I came home most nights and spent time with my wife and daughters. We felt like a normal family and it was a nice time. My daughters saw snow for the first time while we lived there. I was not paid as Chairman of the Republican Finance Committee or as Chairman of the Presidential Trust, so I was not on a government

salary. I was appointed by President Reagan to the United States Trade Negotiations Board and the National USO Board. It was hard for me to find time to travel to California, where my record company was headquartered, and North Carolina, where my motorsports company was headquartered, while I was also serving my country. I lived up to my commitments to President Reagan and in 1986 we moved back to Los Angeles because my older daughter was enrolled in kindergarten.

My wife and I had an opportunity to talk privately with Ronald Reagan prior to leaving Washington, and I thanked him for all of his support and the many opportunities that he gave me. He said to Linda and me, "I've enjoyed working with you, but most of all I trusted you and you never let me down." He sent me a written note stating, "Please know, also, Mike, how grateful we are for the wonderful job you did as National Vice-Chairman of the campaign."



CHAPTER 20

Back in the Music Business and The Judds

Dick Whitehouse: 35 Incredible Years

In November of 1978, I wanted to continue developing the Warner/Curb label but I had been elected Lieutenant Governor of California. Now it was 1985 and I wanted to be back in the record business full time. Making that transition was difficult because by this time everyone thought of me as a politician in California so I had to work hard not to be seen that way.

The record industry was very different in 1984 than it had been when I left MGM. There were very few independent labels; instead, the industry was dominated by the majors. It was not possible to get distribution agreements because the major labels were beginning to market compact discs – CDs! They wanted to distribute their own product and really had no need or desire to distribute independent labels so that led us to initiate some joint ventures. We believed the introduction of CDs would be a huge transition in the industry and joint ventures would be a major transition for us as an independent label.

During the time I was in politics, Dick Whitehouse did a wonderful job running our record label. I trusted Dick as he made all those day-to-day decisions that are necessary to keep a business going. After my term in government ended, while I was always involved with Dick in the big decisions, such as signing acts, Dick continued to take care of the daily activities that involved the label. I did not talk to Dick every single day, but we talked often and I always looked forward to the evenings when I could go home and listen to the new releases and other music that he sent over.

Dick and I decided that we would develop some joint ventures with major labels and those co-ventures were an important step for Curb Records. During the 1980s we had a number of joint ventures with major labels and were the only company doing that. The rationale behind those joint ventures was (1) we could not obtain distribution in its pure form during the 1980s and (2) as the record business became more complex we benefited from the marketing, promotion and other departments in those larger companies.

Our first joint venture was set to be with MCA. Irving Azoff was the head of MCA and at the time that company needed additional product to produce revenue. In 1984 we began a five year agreement with them for a Curb/MCA label. However, an interesting event happened that altered our plans.

Brent Maher is a well-known producer and engineer who was affiliated with Creative Workshop Studio in the early 1980s. His daughter, Diana, was in the hospital in 1983 in Franklin, just south of Nashville; Naomi Judd was a nurse who helped take care of her. Naomi was looking for an opportunity in the music industry and, when she

learned that Diana's father was a well-known producer and engineer, she gave Diana a tape of The Judds.

During this general time frame, we entered into a relationship with Columbia Records Nashville to release three artists, including The Burrito Bros., on the then newly formed Curb/CBS label. In the course of meeting with the marketing staff in the Nashville offices of Columbia, Dick became acquainted with Woody Bowles, Director of Publicity for the label. Sometime thereafter, Woody left the label and formed a management company. One of his early signings was a mother/daughter duo named The Judds. The two had been around Nashville for a while but had not come up with a record deal to their liking. Woody called Dick in California one day and pitched the act saying the mother was so talented she even made her own soap. Woody said we had to see them to believe how great they were. We weren't able to fly to Nashville to audition an act we hadn't heard, so Woody reluctantly agreed to Federal Express a demo tape put together by Brent Maher. Dick received the cassette the next morning but didn't play it immediately. Later that morning he put the tape on and couldn't believe his ears! Too good to be true! A once in a lifetime solo voice surrounded by stunning harmonies. We asked Woody to give us a minute to get to Nashville and Dick immediately began putting The Judds/Curb deal together.

Now what? Dick had a previously scheduled meeting in Los Angeles with Joe Galante, head of RCA Nashville, to discuss placing Marie Osmond with Curb/RCA. He took The Judds' tape to the meeting but chose not to bring it up until he concluded Marie's deal. As he was leaving Joe's hotel room he casually mentioned The Judds.

Did he even know who they were, etc. He said he happened to have The Judds' tape with him and Joe said let's listen. As Joe listened on a Walkman, he made it clear he wanted to hear more. End result? At Joe's request, Woody arranged for the ladies to audition for the staff of RCA/Nashville and following the meeting, Joe confirmed the obvious. They wanted the group for RCA/Curb but Joe did not want to commit to an album – a commitment both we and The Judds thought important. We compromised and recorded a six song EP which was released on the Curb/RCA label in 1983. Radio loved the first single from the EP ("Had A Dream") which reached #17 on the *Billboard* Country Chart, and paved the way for two important events that followed: completion of four more sides to be added to the songs already out on the EP to comprise the first album ("Why Not Me"), and the release of The Judds' second single from the EP "Mama, He's Crazy." Commencing with that single, The Judds enjoyed 20 Top 10 singles, 14 of which went to #1, with sales of over 20 million albums.

Quite honestly, when I heard The Judds, I did not know if they were a Christian group or a rock group. Actually I thought they were a Christian, country rock or acoustic blues group. They were so talented and so different from anything else on the radio at that time, and that's what we always must look for in a new artist even though oftentimes people in the industry are looking for something that sounds similar to an artist that already exists. Dick had the idea to promote them mainstream country and do a co-venture with RCA because that label had a great country promotion and marketing staff. Dick obtained an audition for them with RCA – Tony Brown and Joe Galante listened to them – and they liked The Judds but

would not commit to do an album. The Judds wanted a commitment for an album.

Meanwhile, my sister was running our company in Europe and had just been through a divorce so she was in a very motivated period in her life. In 1983 she met Bob Summer, who was the president of RCA. Bob loved France and my sister speaks fluent French so they got along well. We had a couple of artists on our label that Bob was interested in internationally so we were working with him for international distribution.

Bob was hosting a charity event in New York but the scheduled performers cancelled the night before the event. Bob was in France, ready to fly back the next day for this event, and was in a bind. He boarded the plane and during the time Bob was in the air flying back to New York, my sister contacted The Judds and they agreed to do the show. Bob Summer watched The Judds perform at that show and was impressed with the act. Bob thanked my sister and asked “Are they on a label?” She told him they had auditioned for RCA but could not get an album deal.

Bob Summer lived in the Dakota in New York, the same building where John Lennon and Yoko Ono lived, and he invited my sister and me over for a meeting. During this same period, we were poised to sign our agreement with MCA for the MCA/Curb venture, which would start at the beginning of 1984 and had planned for our first act to be The Judds. In fact, the same day we had the meeting with Bob Summer in New York, Dick was scheduled to sign the agreement with MCA in Los Angeles.

I flew to New York from Washington and my sister and I met

with Bob Summer, who agreed to an RCA/Curb joint venture. This was almost unheard of for RCA, but was an important agreement for us. Joe Galante, the head of RCA's Nashville office, would never have agreed to this joint venture and I understood Joe's position. He did not want to open a floodgate where every producer wanted his own label. I think Bob Summer saw The Judds as a rock act, because I do not believe he would have overruled Joe on a decision about a country act. Unfortunately, I probably damaged my relationship with Joe Galante because I made The Judds agreement directly with Bob Summer.

After our meeting at the Dakota, Bob took my sister and me to dinner at a French restaurant. There was a telephone in the restroom and I called our L.A. office – it was around 7 p.m. in New York so that meant it was around 4 in the afternoon in L.A. – to talk with Dick Whitehouse. I discovered that Dick was at MCA closing the agreement so I found the name of the attorney he was working with and called that office. I asked Dick if he had included the addendum about what acts would be on MCA/Curb and he replied that it had been typed but not added. I asked if The Judds were on that list of acts and, when he replied they were, I asked him to remove them from the list. Jimmy Bowen had just taken over MCA in Nashville and did not seem excited about The Judds at that time, but Tony Brown at RCA did seem excited.

Dick took The Judds off the MCA addendum at the last minute – but that's how close they came to being on MCA/Curb. That night, we shook hands with Bob Summer over our agreement for an RCA/Curb joint venture with The Judds as the initial act. The compromise we made with the Nashville office of RCA was that the first Judds album had only six songs – it was not a full album. However,

on that album was their first single release, “Had A Dream” and we released “Don’t You Hear Jerusalem Moan” as the “B” side of that record. Brent Maher produced The Judds and they went on to have a string of hits, “Mama, He’s Crazy,” “Why Not Me” – which won the Country Music Association Award for “Single of the Year” in 1985 – “Grandpa (Tell Me ‘Bout the Good Old Days),” “Rockin’ With the Rhythm Of The Rain” and others. It was a great agreement for both RCA and Curb because The Judds became the top-selling act on RCA during the 1980s.

After we signed The Judds to RCA, we had to decide how to start our Curb/MCA label. We had The Whites, who had country hits such as “You Put The Blue In Me” and we had the Bellamys, both with our Warner Bros. agreement. Joe Smith was leaving Elektra and going into a sports arrangement at the time and all of their ventures were being merged back into Warner Bros. We knew we would be able to continue to work with Warner Bros., but only on certain artists. Jim Ed Norman had just joined Warner Bros. in Nashville and we really liked him so we worked out an arrangement where Jim Ed produced Hank Williams Jr. as well as T.G. Sheppard. With all of those ventures, the people who treated us with the most dignity and greatest integrity were the executives with Warner Bros. at that time: Jim Ed Norman, Mo Ostin and Joe Smith.

During the early 1980s we had Lobo on MCA/Curb and Maureen McGovern on Warner/Curb. Later we had Hank Williams Jr. on Curb/Elektra and then on Curb/Warner. In 1984 we signed Sawyer Brown and created a joint venture Curb/Capitol. We had Lyle Lovett and the Desert Rose Band on MCA/Curb. The Desert Rose Band was comprised

of well-known West Coast rock musicians; Rock & Roll Hall of Famer Chris Hillman was formerly with the Byrds while Herb Pedersen and John Jorgenson are excellent musicians. Later, we had Wynonna and the Bellamy Brothers on MCA/Curb.

The way that Wynonna ended up on Curb/MCA was a major turning point for our label and possibly the most important event in the history of our company making the transition to becoming a complete and total record company.

RCA did a good job working with the Curb staff promoting and marketing The Judds and over time The Judds became the biggest act in the RCA system. However, according to RCA, there was a major problem: The Judds were signed directly to Curb instead of the traditional way that RCA signed other artists, which was directly to RCA.

In 1987 a German firm, the Bertelsmann Music Group (BMG) purchased RCA and there was a great deal of pressure on RCA to grow and increase their profits. The Judds were a major act at this time; in 1984 they had two number one records, in 1985 they had three, in 1986 they had three and in 1987 they had two number ones and a top ten. In 1988 and 1989 they had four more number ones, a record that reached number two and another in the top ten. Their growth was exceptional at that time so RCA called a meeting in New York where Michael Dorneman, who was president of BMG/RCA, wanted to meet with me and Dick Whitehouse. Dick and I went to that meeting with Dorneman, Joe Galante and an attorney for BMG/RCA whose name I cannot remember and don't want to remember. If you can imagine a stereotypical music business attorney – brash,

arrogant, forceful and demanding – then you have an accurate picture of this particular attorney.

The meeting was scheduled for early on a Friday morning and Dick and I flew in the night before. We planned to fly back to Los Angeles that night after a full day of meetings so we brought our luggage with us to the BMG/RCA offices.

Dick and I walked into that meeting and were hit right between the eyes with a forceful demand from that attorney who told us RCA had decided to sign The Judds directly to RCA. The attorney claimed they had met with attorneys for The Judds, The Judds managers, and The Judds themselves. The attorney was adamant that this was the way it had to be and was going to be. They had started to draft documents for this signing and were going to give us a small participation in the deal. I sat there totally stunned as I listened to this demand. It was almost surreal and I had trouble believing what I was hearing because The Judds were signed exclusively to Curb Records. We even owned the master recordings that RCA manufactured and distributed. Our contract with The Judds was still in effect; they were committed to more albums under their agreement with Curb.

Dick and I sat and listened while that attorney and Michael Dorneman dictated what was going to happen; Joe Galante was also there but did not say much during the meeting. It was obvious that he was very uncomfortable. Finally, Dorneman and the attorney, who were both extremely rude and condescending to Dick and me, said, “We’ll give you an hour to talk about it and then we’ll return.” They acted like bullies who felt they could force us through intimidation into signing this deal.

We walked out of that office and I asked Dick, "Do you have all your bags packed and with you?" He said, "Yes" so I said, "Well I have mine packed too so let's go!" Dick said, "Shouldn't we say something? Let them know we're leaving?" I said, "No, because if I said what was on my mind, I would probably regret it for the rest of my life so let's go!" He said, "They'll be furious when they come back to resume our meeting!" And I replied, "We need to go because they'll be more furious if I tell them what I think about them and this deal!"

We caught a cab and headed to the New York airport. I served on the Board of Directors for Dole Foods at that time and we had a Board meeting scheduled in Hawaii the next week. It was around 10 or 10:30 in the morning when I called my wife and told her I had booked a flight set to leave at 12 noon so I would arrive in L.A. sometime around 3 that afternoon. I asked Linda if she would like to leave for Hawaii that day instead of waiting; I felt I needed to get away because of the terrible business meeting Dick and I had with RCA. I asked Linda if she would get our daughters out of school and meet me at the airport. She did and when I arrived in Los Angeles she had a flight booked to Honolulu so we left immediately for Hawaii.

On the plane back to Los Angeles I said to Dick "If we lose The Judds, I don't think we'll ever be able to sign another major artist again because the same thing will happen; the major label distributing us will take that act away." This was a critical time for us and the company.

Since I was flying west I gained hours. Although it was a six hour flight, I left New York around noon Eastern time and arrived in L.A. around 3:00 Pacific Coast time, then left right away for a five hour flight and arrived in Honolulu around 6 or 6:30 in the evening. It was

still light outside when we checked into the Kahala Hilton, the hotel where the Board meeting was scheduled to take place, and I wanted to rest because I was tired after that travel. However, my oldest daughter, Megan, insisted we all go swimming so we went down to the pool and within a few minutes my daughters had made friends with two other girls who were their same ages. My family and the two girls were literally the only ones at the pool.

After an hour or so at the pool we were ready to leave but Megan asked, "Can we stay with these two girls?" I replied, "It's probably not a good idea to stay with two people that you've just met." My daughters then said, "But we didn't just meet them. We know them because they're from our school in California!" I was surprised when she told me this so I asked, "Is their father here?" They said, "No." "Well, is their mother here?" They answered, "Yes, but their mother is not feeling very well; she's lying down, because she's been feeling sick. Can we all stay together?" I told them that we would go over and talk to their mother. We walked over and realized their Mom was Shelly Azoff, the wife of Irving Azoff who was president of MCA Records. At that time, MCA was a major distributor for Curb Records; they distributed Lyle Lovett, the Bellamy Brothers, The Whites, Moe Bandy, Ronnie McDowell and The Desert Rose Band. We spoke with Shelly, who did not feel well, and asked if we could take her daughters to dinner with us and she replied "That would be wonderful!"

The next day the girls' dad, Irving Azoff, arrived and called to thank me for taking his daughters to dinner and for letting them stay overnight with us. He then asked, "Would you like to visit a friend of mine who owns a surf shop?" I said, "Sure!" so on the way over he said,

“You know, I’d like to do something big!” I mentioned a couple of newer artists that we were working with but he said, “That’s not big. I want to do something really big.” Finally, I asked “Irving, how would you like to have MCA/Universal distribute The Judds on Curb Records?” He said, “The Judds? How are you going to do that?” I said, “Well, we have at least three or four more albums with The Judds and I was treated extremely rudely by the RCA/BMG people in New York yesterday.” He interrupted, “Yesterday! How’d you get from New York?” I explained the entire story to him and he said, “Let’s move them over and I’ll make sure they’re on Curb Records distributed through our new Universal Group. I’ll work everything out!”

Irving called Myron Roth – his number two person at MCA – at home and I called Dick and they met in L.A. over the weekend and started working on the legal paperwork. Within a matter of days we had moved The Judds from Curb/RCA to Curb/Universal. The entire music industry in Nashville was absolutely stunned and I have to admit that Dick and I and everyone at Curb were also stunned.

We completed the *River Of Time* and *Love Can Build A Bridge* albums for RCA in 1988 and 1990. During the *Love Can Build A Bridge* album we heard that Naomi had been diagnosed with cancer during the time The Judds were doing a benefit concert I had arranged for Ronald Reagan at David Murdock’s ranch. In addition to being the Chairman and major shareholder in Dole, Murdock was one of California’s wealthiest and most successful businessmen and a major supporter of the Mayo Clinic. After their performance, David arranged for Naomi to go to the Mayo Clinic for another diagnosis. We were all relieved to learn that Naomi did not have cancer but instead had

a treatable form of infectious hepatitis. In order to properly treat her illness, Naomi decided to retire in 1991, which led to The Judds' incredible "Farewell Tour."

After this tour Wynonna recorded her first solo album under our new agreement with Curb/Universal. She had her first release on Curb/MCA in early 1992; that debut solo album sold five million albums and Wynonna was voted the Female Vocalist of the Year by the Academy of Country Music.

I must admit that I believe in miracles because when you think of the odds against all that happening, starting in New York on a Friday morning to landing in Hawaii that evening at a hotel with my wife and daughters at the pool where the only two other people in the pool were the daughters of MCA/Universal Chairman Irving Azoff, it is absolutely astounding. I had no idea Irving was going to be there; in fact, I'm not sure he had any idea that he was going to be there! I believe he came over because his wife was ill. It may be one big coincidence but it certainly seemed like a miracle to me.

This was a turning point for our label because when The Judds remained with Curb Records, it gave validity to Curb that I can't really quantify in words. The other acts on our label were important; but at that time The Judds were a multi-platinum selling artist and to have them move from a major label like RCA over to a label venture with Curb/Universal, and for their catalogue to move as well, was quite a feat.

That decision had repercussions. At least two times since then a distributor has tried to steal one of our artists and both times I've been ready to thwart them. I believe it was that moment with The Judds

that gave us a feeling of success and the realization that we could have a successful independent label on our own and didn't have to yield to someone who was trying to dictate our future. It made me realize how and why so many smaller companies have been swallowed up by the major labels because it took an incredible amount of strength on the part of Dick Whitehouse and me to keep The Judds on Curb Records. If someone saw me during that time they probably thought I was handling everything well because I remained calm on the outside but it was quite painful on the inside. Each time a major label has tried to steal one of our artists or refused to pay us or violated our contracts, it's been painful and something I wish that I didn't have to experience over and over again.

As we moved close to the 1990s we realized that it was possible to have one or two artists on MCA Curb or Capitol Curb, but once it went beyond that it was difficult to get the prioritization that was needed. Those companies had product of their own that had a higher priority because they owned a hundred percent of the profits as opposed to maybe half the profits. That's when we began looking at another distribution model. Also, things had changed at MCA; Irving Azoff left the label in 1988 and was replaced by Al Teller. In 1989, Teller moved us into a P&D arrangement – pressing and distribution – but he was not really excited about us. He wanted to focus on MCA and change the label his own way.

Beginning on January 1, 1990, we made a P&D arrangement with EMI's distribution arm, known as CEMA. CEMA stood for "Capitol EMI Music Distribution." Later, it became known simply as EMI Distribution.

The P&D, or Pressing and Distribution agreement is essentially patterned after the independent film distribution arrangements where a record company, such as Curb, rents the distribution system of a label and pays a distribution fee and then pays the major label a manufacturing fee for each record that the major presses. Those agreements are based on a percentage of sales, so if a label sells \$100,000 worth of records, the distributor will reduce that by the discounts given to retailers, subtract the recordings returned and that becomes net sales. A percentage from sales is then paid to the distribution company, which can vary anywhere from 10 percent to 24 percent, depending on the size of the company. Companies with a high volume of sales, like Curb, pay a smaller percentage. By using the distribution system of a major label, we did not have to worry about warehousing and manufacturing our product. We did not have to own trucks or complex inventory systems – we just used their distribution and manufacturing systems.

We entered into that agreement because Joe Smith had joined Capitol by this time and wanted our business. That agreement evolved into a pure distribution arrangement for five years before we moved over to the distribution arm of Warner Bros., known as WEA Distribution at the time. We have been with WEA for our physical U.S. distribution ever since.



CHAPTER 21

Hits and Soundtracks

*Righteous Brothers, Bill Medley, Dirty Dancing,
Coyote Ugly, Real Life and Maureen McGovern*

Curb Records has always been a multi-genre label and, although we concentrated on country music during the 1990s, we continued to release records across a wide musical spectrum.

When I was head of MGM, Bill Lowery and Karl Engemann came to me with the idea of a label and we formed MGM/South. Bill was a well-known publisher in Atlanta and Karl had been a top executive at Capitol and was the manager of Marie Osmond. They went into business together during the 1970s. After I left MGM and moved into a joint venture with Warner Bros., Bill told me he wanted to continue our relationship and I agreed. I never met anyone who did not like Bill Lowery or Karl Engemann and I do not believe Bill or Karl ever said anything negative about anyone in the world. They were definitely two of the most outstanding representatives of our music industry.

Bill had worked with Tommy Roe for a number of years; Tommy had hits like “Sheila,” “Sweet Pea,” “Hooray for Hazel” and “Dizzy.”

We signed him and released “You Better Move On,” which had been a hit for Arthur Alexander. I had always wanted Tommy to record that song. Tommy was from Georgia and his hits had all been pop but this became a country *Billboard* chart version of a pop hit and opened the door for future country singles.

Pink Lady was brought to my attention by Paul Drew, who took over programming the RKO radio chain from Bill Drake in the mid-1970s. Paul left RKO and was doing consulting when he called and said, “Mike, it’s time for a Japanese group and I’ve found one. They are called Pink Lady – two girls – and they are terrific.” They were superstars in Japan when they released “Kiss in the Dark,” which became a worldwide hit. That song was written by Michael Lloyd and our publishing company published it.

We released “Different Worlds” by Maureen McGovern, which was the theme song to the TV series, “Angie.” There’s not a better singer or better person in the world than Maureen McGovern; she had tremendous appeal to almost every audience. “Different Worlds” reached number one on the Adult Contemporary chart in *Billboard*. Phil Gernhard brought Lobo to our company and produced all of his early hits, but Bob Montgomery produced “Where Were You When I Was Falling In Love,” which reached number one on the *Billboard* Adult Contemporary chart. That record continued receiving airplay on the radio because it is the easiest record to listen to again and again. That record is an example of how our country influence was growing at that time because our company realized that we could not do the same records we did in the 1970s. The business was changing so we had to change with it, which is why we promoted Lobo to Adult Contemporary radio.

Phil Everly was living close to where I lived in California. His brother, Don, recorded for Hickory and we distributed that label. I met with Phil and liked where he was headed. Our company was making the transition to becoming a label with an emphasis on country music and Phil was a very important artist in that transition because we were doing this without the advantage of living in Nashville. We had a California perspective and I think that made our company different because a lot of the artists on our label at that time did not want to be with a Nashville-based record company. In those days there were only a few country labels and they each had 75 to 100 artists on their roster. Since we were a West Coast label, we tried to reach the world. We released “Sweet Southern Love” with Phil Everly which put him back on the *Billboard* chart and allowed him to have a solo career. It was always amazing to hear Phil sing harmony with himself because he sounded just like the Everly Brothers.

We released “The Clapping Song” by Pia Zadora because we felt like this song could be a dance hit. Pia Zadora was a really unique artist, willing to work hard to promote a record. Although we thought this record would be a dance hit, it went top 40 on the *Billboard* Hot 100 and was also successful in the international market. We released a duet with Jermaine Jackson doing “When The Rain Begins To Fall.” Jack White, a German record producer, found this song, which was written by Little Peggy March, who had the hit “I Will Follow Him” back in 1963. Since Pia had a hit in the international market while Jermaine was looking for a crossover record and Jack White had achieved success internationally, we put them all together. It was an incredible song and since we were trying to determine how to get Pia

crossed over into Jermaine's area and Jermaine into Pia's market, it was a win-win situation for both artists. We never dreamed it would become one of the biggest international hits we ever had. It sold three million records and went number one all over the world, although it was not as big a hit in the United States as it was everywhere else.

Bobby Goldsboro had a hit with "Goodbye Marie," which was produced by Larry Butler, who had produced "The Gambler" and other hits by Kenny Rogers. That recording came at a time when rock & roll had moved to hard rock and pop artists like Bobby Goldsboro could have hits on the Country and Adult Contemporary charts. We also released a *Greatest Hits* album on Bobby.

The Burrito Brothers were a bit ahead of their time; the sound they created during the 1980s was perfect for the 1990s. We released nine singles that all charted in *Billboard*.

Clint Eastwood did a duet with T.G. Sheppard on "Make My Day." We had a wonderful relationship with Clint from the *Kelly's Heroes* movie and he had recorded my song, "Burning Bridges." "Make My Day" was written by Dewayne Blackwell, who wrote the Garth Brooks hit "Friends In Low Places" and the Fleetwoods hit, "Mr. Blue." Dewayne had the idea of using the "make my day" phrase from the Dirty Harry movies that Clint starred in and T.G. decided to record the song. We approached Clint about a duet and he agreed – he did the line, "Go ahead, punk, and make my day" on this record and it became a country hit and then a crossover.

I signed Neil Sedaka to MGM, then after I left that label, he signed with Elton John's Rocket label. After he left Rocket, I signed him to Curb and he and his daughter, Dara, had a top 20 Adult Contemporary

hit with “Your Precious Love.” We also released Neil’s cover of the Cascade’s hit, “Rhythm Of The Rain” as a dance record because he wanted to try something for the dance market.

Michael Lloyd had the idea to record the song, “Mad About You” with Belinda Carlisle, who had been a member of The Go-Go’s. Belinda was married to Morgan Mason, who was an executive with the Curb film company that my sister Carole and I ran. Morgan had just married Belinda, who was striking out on her own. This was a Curb Production, produced by Michael Lloyd that was released on I.R.S. Records.

Jack White, Mark Spiro and I wrote “Gotcha” one Sunday afternoon for the movie *Gotcha*. The song never made it into the movie but Anne Murray recorded it and this was probably the most rock oriented song she ever recorded.

Sparks is a dance act and our company has always believed in dance music, all the way back to the beginning of dance music and our records like Gloria Gaynor’s “Never Can Say Goodbye” or Frankie Valli and “Swearin’ To God” – a song we published. “Music You Can Dance To” was a good hit for Sparks. We also signed Hubert Kah, who is one of the coolest acts to ever hit dance music. He is a German artist who had four singles on the *Billboard* Dance Chart for us. His song “Military Drums” was on the soundtrack to the film *Gotcha*.

We released a great recording by Roger Williams playing “Phantom Of The Opera” from the Andrew Lloyd Webber hit musical. Roger Williams sold more records than any other popular pianist during the 1950s and his hit, “Autumn Leaves” was a number one single in 1955, right after Bill Haley hit with “Rock Around the Clock.” Roger had been with the Decca family his entire life; he was originally

on Kapp, which was part of Decca, which was sold to MCA. I produced his recording of “God Bless America” for MCA and I knew that the only person who could record the definitive instrumental of “Phantom Of The Opera” was Roger. He allowed us to create a dance record of that song and it is one of the greatest dance records and one of the greatest pop records we ever released by one of the greatest artists. Michael Lloyd produced that recording and then Roger re-recorded all his hits in stereo for Curb Records. Roger was the hardest working guy who ever lived, the best showman and someone who broke through successfully before rock & roll hit. He was able to continue successfully at a time when the Adult Contemporary chart in *Billboard* was discontinued and there was only a Rock & Roll chart to break through on – even though he was an Adult Contemporary act.

I had the opportunity to work with the Righteous Brothers and produce Bill Medley when I was with MGM. Later, Bill did a number of records with Curb for films. There was a duet with Gladys Knight for a Stallone film and others, but none of those records were big hits and he was starting to become discouraged. Then the movie *Dirty Dancing* came along.

The film is a period piece from about 1963 or 1964 and there were songs in it like “Big Girls Don’t Cry” and “Stay.” The music director wanted “You’ve Lost That Loving Feeling” by the Righteous Brothers but that song had been committed to *Top Gun*. When we are involved in a soundtrack, we always want two or three songs that we can promote as singles. After everyone agreed to find a new song that sounded something like “You’ve Lost That Loving Feeling,” we listened to a lot of songs that were submitted. I honestly don’t remember if the song

“(I’ve Had) The Time Of My Life” was submitted to the film company or to Michael Lloyd. All I know is that there were a lot of songs in consideration and “(I’ve Had) The Time Of My Life,” written by three basically unknown writers, emerged and Michael Lloyd figured out a way to record it so it captured the sound and feel of “You’ve Lost That Loving Feeling.”

Bill Medley’s daughter was born the week we were recording “(I’ve Had) The Time Of My Life” and he did not want to do any recording at that time. This was an inexpensive film with no big stars so he would be paid little money. Finally, he agreed to do the session but then we had to find someone to sing the song with him and we tried everybody. Finally, we settled on Jennifer Warnes. So here is a song that Bill Medley did not want to record and it ended up being the biggest hit of his career, selling 25 million records all over the world! Thanks to Michael Lloyd’s great talent and our perseverance, Mike Curb Productions was involved in one of the biggest hits of all time.

We also had a platinum album and single with the Righteous Brothers. The single was “Unchained Melody” and I was concerned about recording it because it is almost impossible to re-create one of the classic Phil Spector productions. That situation was on my mind when we needed this song recorded for the film *Ghost*. I talked about it with Bill Medley, who told me that Spector spent a lot of time producing their singles like “You’ve Lost That Lovin’ Feeling” but would not devote that kind of attention to cuts on an album because albums were not as important in those days. Bill told me that he and Bobby Hatfield actually produced “Unchained Melody” themselves and that he would contact Bobby to re-create this record in the studio.

The two Righteous Brothers went into the studio but things did not click. After they made a few attempts, I called Buddy Killen and asked him to record “Unchained Melody” with Ronnie McDowell. As soon as the McDowell version was finished, I received a phone call from Bill Medley who said “We’ve hooked it!” We issued a long, slow dance version of this song and then re-recorded all the Righteous Brothers hits. That album went double platinum and the single went platinum – the first platinum single and album that the Righteous Brothers ever had. We also released the Ronnie McDowell version of “Unchained Melody” and shipped the record to the country music format, and it became a significant hit for Ronnie.

We released “The Last Rose” by Bobby Vinton, which made the country charts. I had always thought that one of Bobby’s early hits, “Roses Are Red” was about as country a song as it is possible to find. Artists used to be afraid that if they had a country hit then they would be typecast and it was not cool to be country in those days. Later in his career Bobby realized he had a country following, which led him to record several songs for the country market that hit the *Billboard* chart.

We released the soundtrack to *Major League* on Curb Records and, because the original version of “Wild Thing” by the Troggs was not available, we used a recording of the song by X and it is an incredible cut on the soundtrack to that film. That film starred Tom Berenger, Charlie Sheen and Corbin Bernsen in a baseball comedy.

We released a rap record, “The Devil Came Up To Michigan,” by K.M.C. Kru which was a rap version of the Charlie Daniels song “The Devil Went Down To Georgia.” Here are two guys, both African-

Americans from Detroit, who impressed me with this recording because the way they used the fiddle was so clever and innovative. Where did they find someone in Detroit who could play a fiddle like that on a rap record? The group took a country classic and did it right on the money. It is funny but also serious – serious enough to be a real record but funny enough to cause you to smile when you hear it. Every once in a while I hear something that really hits me and I remember hearing this and I could not stop playing it. The record became number one in Nashville but when it was released in 1991 rap was not at the center of the music industry like it later became. It was unable to become a number one record nationally because a number one record nationally means the record has to reach number one everywhere in the country at the same time. That record was like a lot of others – it might have been number one in five markets one month, then number one in another five markets the next month, but never number one in all the markets at the same time. Nevertheless, the record was on the *Billboard* chart for many weeks.

“Send Me An Angel” by Real Life, an Australian group, was a huge international hit twice – in 1984 and 1989. The record came to my attention when Glenn Wheatley, the producer of the record, called one day and said “I’ve got a huge hit for you.” It was! The record was finished when I heard it and was an undeniable hit that lasted on the best seller charts all over the world for almost the entire decade of the 1980s. We had a major hit in the mid-1990s with Fun Factory, based in Hamburg, Germany on “I Wanna B With U,” which was a multi-genre hit in both the American and international markets. The group featured two black rappers and two white female singers.

Dick Whitehouse was able to convince Delbert McClinton – who always preferred to perform before a live audience – to go in the studio with producer Don Was to record a song written by Max D. Barnes and Troy Seals, “Every Time I Roll The Dice.” This was a hit on *Billboard’s* Main Rock Chart and was on Delbert’s biggest album, which included his duet with Bonnie Raitt that won a Grammy.

Curb Records released a number of soundtrack albums and they have always been an important part of our company. We released the soundtrack to *Body Slam*, a film about wrestling, and Michael Lloyd and I produced the soundtrack for *Pom Pom Girls*, which featured the music of Cotton, Lloyd and Christian. The soundtrack to *Voyage of the Rock Aliens*, which featured the song “When The Rain Begins To Fall” by Jermaine Jackson and Pia Zadora, was released on Curb; our label also released the soundtrack to *Once Bitten*, a film which starred Lauren Hutton and Jim Carey. We released the soundtracks to *Gotcha!* which starred Anthony Edwards, and *Rad*, which starred Bill Allen, Lori Loughlin and Talia Shire. I was the executive producer for the soundtracks to *The Garbage Pail Kids* and *Sylvester*, which starred Richard Farnsworth and Melissa Gilbert and both were released on Curb Records. Soundtracks such as *Devils Angels* (starring John Cassavetes), *Psych-Out* (Jack Nicholson), *The Magic Of Lassie* (Jimmy Stewart and Mickey Rooney), *Frankie And Johnny* (Al Pacino and Michelle Pfeiffer), and *Dirty Dingus Magee* (Frank Sinatra) featured either production, supervision, scoring, songwriting or a combination by me. I served as the Executive Producer for the soundtrack to *Teen Wolf II*, starring Jason Bateman, which was released on our label. We also released the soundtracks

to the animated film *All Dogs Go to Heaven* and *All I Want For Christmas*.

The movie, *All Dogs Go to Heaven*, which featured the voices of Burt Reynolds, Dom DeLuise, Judith Barsi and Loni Anderson, included the single “Love Survives” by Irene Cara and Freddie Jackson. Michael Lloyd and I wrote this song with Al Kasha and Joel Hirschorn, two legendary songwriters who won an Academy Award for their song “There’s Got To Be A Morning After.” *Gordy* was a Disney movie about a talking pig and the producers of the film needed an act to sing “Pig Power.” I was in charge of putting together the soundtrack album and contacted Pam Browne, manager of the rap group Tag Team whose hit was “Whoomp! There It Is.” The group agreed to record “Pig Power” for the movie and the soundtrack.

Our film company produced *Family Tree*, released in 1999. My sister Carole, who ran the company, put this film together, which starred Naomi Judd and Cliff Robertson. The title song, “We Can Get There,” was written by Deborah Allen and me. Mary Griffin, who had a good career on *Curb* but never had a really big hit, sang it. Mary Griffin had a frustrating career because she recorded on a lot of soundtracks but her song always managed to get cut out. We would get her onto a soundtrack and then at the last minute someone else would do the song. She had more bad luck than any other artist on our label. She was on the soundtrack album of *Coyote Ugly* but at the last minute they had to cut two minutes out of the film so they cut her song. It seemed like something like this happened every time until finally she said “You know, I’m married and I want to go raise a family.” Fortunately, her recording of “We Can Get There” was

released as a single and it became her biggest hit, a top 40 record on *Billboard*.

The Curb soundtrack albums have often featured significant rock artists such as Eric Clapton and Cream, Strawberry Alarm Clock, Seeds, Iron Butterfly, John Lennon, Howie Day, Aretha Franklin, Lou Reed, Tim McGraw, Jo Dee Messina, Don Henley, Steve Perry, Steven Bishop, Hootie & The Blowfish, Edwin McCain, Yolanda Adams, LeAnn Rimes, Buddy Miles, The Electric Flag, Mike Bloomfield, Roy Orbison, Pink Floyd, Grateful Dead, Eric Burdon and War, Bill Medley (Righteous Brothers), Frankie Valli and The Four Seasons, Joan Jett and The Blackhearts, Los Lobos, Irene Cara, Freddy Jackson, Lyle Lovett, Bachman Turner Overdrive, and Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young. The soundtracks are special to me because that's where we started and also because it enabled our label to not only promote our own artists but also to work with a number of great artists on other labels.



CHAPTER 22

Contemporary Country

*Lyle Lovett, Sawyer Brown, Hal Ketchum, Wynonna, Wayne Newton,
Junior Brown, Gene Watson, Beat Farmers, Ronnie McDowell,
Jeffrey Steele and Shane McAnally*

We have had a great deal of success with contemporary country music, beginning in the mid-1980s. The Judds had an incredible career with us and so many hit records that it is hard to pick out any single favorite songs, but I am convinced that “Grandpa (Tell Me ‘bout The Good Old Days)” is one of the greatest songs ever written. It captures so much of what occurred just a generation or so ago and is one of the most amazing songs I ever heard. In addition to being a great single for the label, this song has deep personal meaning for me because it is the song that was played while my two daughters, Megan and Courtney, and my niece, Caroline, participated at my father’s funeral.

Nothing could be more exciting than sitting in a room with Carl Perkins who had just written, played guitar and performed as the co-artist with The Judds on a recording that was soon to be a number one chart record. I was privileged to witness all of that on the recording

of “Let Me Tell You About Love” by The Judds and Perkins, one of the pioneers of rockabilly and a major part of the birth of rock & roll at Sam Phillip’s Sun Studios in Memphis.

Curb Records has been the label for The Judds for 35 years and continued as the label for Wynonna after The Judds had to stop as an act because of Naomi’s illness. I believe Wynonna Judd is one of the greatest rock & roll, rhythm and blues and country singers today, an incredibly talented vocalist. When Naomi had to quit performing we moved Wynonna from Curb/RCA to Curb/MCA, where she was produced by Tony Brown. Her first release as a solo act, “She Is His Only Need” reached number one on the Country Chart and her first solo album sold over five million copies.

In country music, Dick Whitehouse wanted to sign Ricky Skaggs and it came down to the wire between Columbia and Curb Records before Ricky made the decision to go with Columbia. However, he told us, “I want to do something with you” and about a year later he brought us the Whites. (Ricky is married to Sharon White.) Their first hit with us was “You Put The Blue In Me” and then they had a string of hit singles, which included “Hangin’ Around” and “Pins And Needles.”

There is not a better country singer than Gene Watson, although he has never reached the level of a Merle Haggard or George Jones. MCA was our major distributor during the 1980s and one day I was in a meeting with an MCA attorney who told me “We’re not going to pick up Gene Watson’s option.” I asked if we could take over the contract and he agreed. The first record Gene recorded for us was “Got No Reason Now For Going Home,” which was a top ten country record.

We also released his *Greatest Hits* from his Capitol years. Gene Watson has an incredible voice and we were fortunate to sign him.

We signed Merle Haggard, whom I had first worked with on the soundtrack to *Killer's Three* back in 1968. It was difficult to convince Merle to come to Nashville and record but we were finally able to get him to come and teamed him with producer James Stroud. Merle had recorded with us before in Bakersfield and in his new studio in Northern California, but I wanted him to work with the musicians in Nashville. I remember one of the statements he made when he came here was "It's one thing to go to the circus, but it's another thing to live in the middle of the circus." That was Merle's feeling about Nashville. Actually, I had some of those same feelings about moving to Nashville. I wondered if I would ever have another crossover hit, or another rock & roll hit or another pop hit. Will we ever get another soundtrack? Will a movie producer ever talk to us again? All of those questions were on my mind when we moved from L.A. to Nashville and the answer is "yes".

Dick Whitehouse walked into the office one day and said "I've found a really unique artist. He's an artist that the rest of Nashville doesn't want to sign." My only question about Lyle Lovett was – Is he rock? Is he country? Is he Pop? Is he Blues? Now, after many years, the answer is still "I don't know." He's definitely all of the above. Dick raised the same questions: How do we market this obvious talent? In fact, Dick chose to pass on Lyle initially. Through another source, Lyle came back to the attention of the label. Dick reacted the same way but this time after meeting with Lyle, Dick took a self-produced tape Lyle recorded in Phoenix, to MCA Nashville and found that Tony Brown

was sitting on the same tape, and likewise, Tony didn't know what to do about this one of a kind singer-songwriter. But Bruce Hinton, then head of MCA Nashville loved Lyle. We immediately signed Lyle and Tony put the finishing touches on Lyle's first album for MCA/Curb. Lyle Lovett won four Grammy Awards but until Lyle delivered an album it was impossible to know whether it was a blues album or a country project. He is the kind of artist who makes me proud to be in the record business. Lyle Lovett stayed with our company a long time, making so many great albums and 14 *Billboard* chart singles. It is always a great honor for me when an artist chooses to remain with my company. In 2017, 30 years after his signing, Curb Records released Lyle Lovett's *Greatest Hits* that included all of his *Billboard* chart records.

Buddy Killen introduced me to Ronnie McDowell, who recorded an up tempo version of "It's Only Make Believe" with Conway Twitty singing on the record. That was one of the records that really meant a lot to me because it brought together two of the greatest artists that I have ever had the opportunity to work with. Curb Records goes back over 50 years with rock & roll and that song took us back to our roots. To have Conway Twitty sing on someone else's version of his big rock & roll hit – well, it just had to be good. Ronnie McDowell also recorded a duet with Jerry Lee Lewis on "Never Too Old To Rock & Roll." This was another incredible experience that I had the opportunity to share with Ronnie. Ronnie McDowell is not only talented, but also understands how to motivate everyone he works with, including his record company. Ronnie has two sons, Ronnie Dean and Tyler Dean, who are both extremely talented and hopefully will have successful careers in the future.

We signed Moe Bandy in 1986 after his manager, Woody Bowles, brought him to the label. His second single was “Till I’m Too Old To Die Young.” I have never heard a song that touched me faster than that one. It is one of the greatest songs ever written, and it was a major Top 10 hit.

I first met Wayne Newton in the early 1960s when Bobby Darin produced him – he produced “Danke Shoen” for Wayne – and, at that time I was a songwriter for Darin’s publishing company. When Darin produced him, Wayne’s voice was high. Later, he sang in a lower register so he re-recorded all his hits for Curb Records. We also worked out an agreement to distribute the original recordings of his Greatest Hits so we have that as well as the re-recorded versions of songs like “Daddy Don’t You Walk So Fast,” “Red Roses For A Blue Lady,” “Danke Shoen,” and all those great songs on an album called *Wayne Newton Now*.

Wayne and I used to meet in Las Vegas and one night we agreed to record in Nashville. We brought him to Nashville to perform and while he was here we teamed him with producer Larry Butler who found the song “While The Feeling’s Good.” Wayne had always wanted to record with Tammy Wynette, so we contacted Tammy and she agreed. It was the last chart record she ever made. This was our only connection with the woman who made one of my favorite country records of all time, “Stand By Your Man.” We were able to share in Wayne Newton’s only country chart single and Tammy’s last – all in one duet. Wayne Newton is not only talented, but is also a great person. I will never forget the day that Wayne surprised my daughters with a pony named “Gold” and later with a dog which my daughters named “Newton.”

“Meet Me In Montana” was a duet by Dan Seals and Marie Osmond that won the Country Music Association’s “Vocal Event” award in 1986. Paul Davis wrote the song and also wrote “You’re Still New To Me,” which was a number one duet by Paul singing with Marie. That record was produced by Paul Worley and it was his idea to do this song. Paul produced the Paul Davis and Marie duet and “There’s No Stopping Your Heart,” which was a number one country single for Marie. That record is a good example of our philosophy. Curb Records is not about any one person. Our philosophy is to get the best producer with the best writer and the best artist to create a winning combination.

The Beat Farmers were sort of the Marshall Tucker Band of the West Coast, who bridged the gap between rock and country and were incredible performers. We signed them and cut several albums before their leader and drummer, Country Dick Montana, died of throat cancer.

The demo of “There’s A Tear In My Beer” by Hank Williams had been lost for a number of years and was discovered after the publisher, Acuff-Rose was sold. Through technology we were able to record a duet of Hank Williams Jr. with his father on that song. There’s only one good piece of video footage of Hank Williams Sr. and we used that to compile the video for that song, which won the Country Music Association’s “Video of the Year” award in 1989. I never thought there would be a record by Hank Williams, Sr. on Curb Records but Merle Kilgore and Jim Ed Norman put this together and made it happen. They acquired the video footage and obtained the necessary permissions.

Jack McFadden, the late artist manager who managed Buck Owens, introduced Hank Williams III (whose real name is Shelton)

to me and said, “This is the future of country music.” I think we’ve since learned that Hank III may be the future of rock music. I had worked with Hank Williams Jr. – Shelton’s father – for over 30 years by this time, so it seemed natural that Hank III should also be on Curb Records and he was successful doing music his way.

Dick Whitehouse signed Hal Ketchum to our label and his 1991 hit “Small Town Saturday Night” was the biggest hit on the *Radio & Records* chart for the entire year, also remaining on *Billboard’s* Country chart for five months. He recorded a number of great records for us, like “Past The Point Of Rescue,” “Sure Love,” “Hearts Are Gonna Roll” and “Mama Loves The Highway” – all co-produced by Allen Reynolds (Garth Brooks’ producer) and Jim Rooney (Nanci Griffith’s producer).

Dick was watching “Star Search” when he saw Sawyer Brown. He called me and said “Turn on your television,” which I did, but missed their performance that week. The next week I did not miss their performance. Dick and I both wanted to sign the group; I thought they were a rock & roll band but Dick said “No, I think country is ready for them.” Dick certainly turned out to be right! Randy Scruggs produced them and he did a great job; Randy was young enough and smart enough to let them keep their rock & roll; however, once we decided we were going to go country, it was important to have the name Randy Scruggs on the record. He’s a very gifted producer from a legendary family in country music. “Step That Step” was their first number one on the *Billboard* Country Chart; after that record, Sawyer Brown had 17 records that went top five. Sawyer Brown went on to have 50 chart records with Curb and their leader, Mark Miller, became an important part of the future for Curb Records. Mark has so much talent and he

had the ability to understand the totality of the record business. Mark, and then manager, T.K. Kimbrell, played a major role in developing our promotion department. Mark also understood how to perform live and Sawyer Brown became America's rock & roll band even though most of their hits were country. Most of all, Mark became a close friend, and I always enjoyed working with him. Throughout this book you will find Mark and Sawyer Brown mentioned many times because they set such an outstanding example for the relationship between an artist and their record company.

Phil Gernhard and I were standing backstage at Fan Fair when Jo Dee Messina walked up to Phil and said "You need a red-head on the label." Phil replied "Well, we have Wynonna" but Jo Dee countered, "Oh, no, she's on Curb/MCA. Curb Records needs a red-head." Jo Dee literally stormed onto our label and she was ready to go out and make it. Jo Dee had moved to Nashville from Boston and was signed to a development deal with RCA that did not work out. Byron Gallimore and Tim McGraw liked her and worked with her in the studio. Her first single, "Heads Carolina, Tails California," landed at the number two position on the Country Chart and began a string of chart singles. "I'm Alright" was like a reggae record. The message was "I've had a lot of problems but I've got a big ole dog sitting beside me tonight and I guess I'm doing alright." Double platinum, through the roof, in your face – that's Jo Dee Messina.

We found Boy Howdy in Southern California after they released a local single, "When Johnny Comes Marchin' Home Again." Jeffrey Steele was their lead singer and songwriter. He has written some incredible songs and I played Jeffrey's song, "She'd Give Anything"

which was a big hit for Boy Howdy on Curb Records, for Doug Morris when he was Chairman of Warner Bros. and this led to it becoming a top five Rhythm and Blues song with Gerald Levert. Unfortunately, Boy Howdy disbanded after their drummer, Hugh Wright was hit by a car while helping change a tire for a stranded motorist. Jeffrey Steele went on to become one of the top songwriters in Nashville. After that, ironically we had a similar experience with Shane McAnally, who started out as one of our recording artists, and later became a great songwriter as well as a great person for the entire music industry. During the early and mid-1990s Garth Brooks dominated country music. One day I said to Chuck Howard, one of our producers, “I wish we had a singer who could do Garth Brooks’ type songs because there are so many songs being written for Garth that there must be a lot of great songs that he’s turning down.” Chuck said, “The guy who does all the demos that publishers want to send to Garth is Jeff Herndon because he sounds so much like Garth.”

At first, I thought Chuck meant Ty Herndon, who was an artist on another label but Chuck assured me that Jeff was no relation to Ty, although they had the same last name. I asked if I could hear some of his demos so Chuck played some, including “Not On Your Love.” I also listened to “The Car,” a song that we published and Jeff sang on the demo. At that point, it was a no-brainer. We released “Not On Your Love” and it went to number one on the Country chart, but we had to change his name to avoid confusion with Ty Herndon. I asked if anyone had any suggestions for a name and our head of promotion at the time, Carson Schreiber, said “name him Carson!” That’s how Jeff Carson got his name and how Curb Records signed an artist who

succeeded in both the Country and the Christian Country markets. Carson Schreiber played a big role in that, like he did for so many of our records.

David Kersh was a good looking guy, a great talent from Texas who had some huge hits before he had to stop recording for a while because of vocal problems. He had seven chart singles for us, including “If I Never Stopped Loving You,” which just missed being number one in *Billboard*. “You Have The Right To Remain Silent” by Perfect Stranger was recorded for a small label and we picked it up and it was a big hit. Junior Brown is one of the most unique artists we ever signed because he plays guitar like Jimi Hendrix, but sings like Ernest Tubb. He plays a “guit-steel,” which is a combination electric guitar and steel guitar. Hal Ketchum’s booking agent brought Junior Brown’s music to Dick Whitehouse. Initially, Dick thought Junior might be a novelty act but after sitting through three shows in Austin, Texas, each overflowing with a dedicated group of fans, Dick knew he was the real deal. Junior Brown with his wife, Tanya Rae, went on to have several innovative hit albums and singles, including “Highway Patrol” and “My Wife Thinks You’re Dead” that won awards and critical acclaim.

The multi-genre artists on Curb led us into a very rewarding and successful era that marked the direction our label was heading in future decades.



CHAPTER 23

Contemporary Christian Music

Larry Norman, Second Chapter of Acts, DeGarmo and Key, Debby Boone, Selah, Michael English, Jonathan Pierce, Patty Cabrera, Fernando Ortega, Whiteheart, Plumb, MercyMe, OBB and Natalie Grant, Acquisition of Word Records (for KING & COUNTRY, Francesca Battistelli and Big Daddy Weave)

Rock rhythms have played an important role in the creation of the Contemporary Christian musical genre. Curb Records has had a great deal of success with Contemporary Christian music and Christian rock music and I have been personally involved with Contemporary Christian music dating back to the time when The Mike Curb Congregation performed inspirational songs with rhythmic beats during the 1960s. Those early Contemporary Christian records had drum rhythms and were the kind of records that you could play at certain churches but could not play at other churches because of their resistance to the new sounds. However, we learned from The Mike Curb Congregation's weekly performances on "The Glen Campbell Show" how to do Christian music for a wide audience.

The term “Contemporary Christian music” was not used at that time; in fact, the term “Jesus Music” was one of the terms used to describe the pop-oriented type of gospel music that emerged during the 1960s and 1970s. I believe The Mike Curb Congregation was one of the forerunners of what is now called Contemporary Christian music. Appearing on “The Glen Campbell Show” and owning my own record company, as well as my initial experience as an artist on Word Records, led to my involvement with early Contemporary Christian music and early Contemporary Christian acts.

Amazingly, much of new Contemporary Christian music was developing on the West Coast in California. One day I received a call from Larry Norman, who had been in a group called “People” who had a pop hit with “I Love You (But The Words Won’t Come).” Larry played a song he’d written, “I Wish We’d All Been Ready,” and I was amazed by his talent for writing the Christian message in a contemporary form so we did an entire album with him, *Only Visiting This Planet*, which was released in 1972. We released his second Christian album, *So Long Ago The Garden*, the following year. One day I was leaving Church On The Way, where Jack Hayford preached, and ran into Buck Herring who said “I’ve got a boy in our group who sings better than Donny Osmond. You’ve got to hear him. His name is Matt Ward.” Well, I used to often hear that, but this time it was true.

Buck Herring married Annie Ward, who was the older sister of a family who had lost their mother and father, so Annie became the mother figure in that group. Her sister, Nellie, and brother Matt formed a group called Second Chapter of Acts and the day I met Buck he invited me to hear the group that evening at the church. As I watched

the group I heard their glorious songs of praise so I signed the group and released their first single, “Jesus Is.” Buck Herring was the manager and producer of the group and their voices were amazing. At that time, our company had Larry Norman and Second Chapter of Acts, two of the pioneer acts in Contemporary Christian music as well as Pat Boone and his daughters, The Boone Girls, and released Pat’s record “Glory Train.” We also signed Cotton, Lloyd and Christian, a group comprised of Darryl Cotton, Michael Lloyd and Chris Christian; Chris Christian had moved from his native Texas to Nashville to become a Christian artist. He struggled trying to get a start in Nashville so he moved to California and joined with Darryl Cotton and Michael Lloyd to form Cotton, Lloyd and Christian. That was the beginning of my relationship with Chris Christian, who considers me his mentor, although his later achievements in Contemporary Christian music lead me to believe that I probably learned more from him than he did from me.

One day Pat Boone told me that his daughter Lindy’s boyfriend Doug (they later married), had received a tape of a Christian rock band called “DeGarmo and Key.” Pat said “Why don’t we start a label called Lamb and Lion,” the Lion being for MGM and the Lamb being the Lamb of God, so we formed the Lamb and Lion label and signed DeGarmo and Key. That label also signed The Boone Girls and Dan Peek, former lead singer of the group America, while my company continued to record the Second Chapter of Acts, Larry Norman and Chris Christian. That’s the good news, but the bad news is that I did not realize what was going to happen with this music and there would be an explosion in the popularity of Contemporary Christian music. I just knew that I loved this music.

In addition to our involvement with those other early Contemporary Christian artists, Curb Records recorded what many believe was the first massive hit of the genre, “You Light Up My Life” by Debby Boone in 1977. However, the next year I was elected Lieutenant Governor of California and at that time my friend Billy Ray Hearn had moved to California to set up Sparrow Records, which became the leading Contemporary Christian label and ultimately the home of most of the Contemporary Christian acts that I had been working with.

Word Records, which was started by Jarrell McCracken in 1950 in Waco, Texas, was the first Christian label. Billy Ray Hearn worked for Word, where he started their Myrrh label, dedicated to early Contemporary Christian music. I first met him when I visited Jarrell McCracken in Waco when they signed The Mike Curb Congregation. If you trace Contemporary Christian music from the standpoint of a record company, the key figure is Billy Ray Hearn because not only did he start Myrrh for Word but he later moved to California and started Sparrow Records, which became the leading Contemporary Christian label and ultimately the home of most of the Contemporary Christian acts that I had worked with.

Billy Ray signed Randy Matthews, Ray Hildebrand and the Mike Curb Congregation to Myrrh but after he left Word, The Congregation was moved over to the Word label and the *I Saw The Light* album was released. After I was elected Lieutenant Governor Billy Ray signed many of the acts I had worked with except for Chris Christian, who moved back to Nashville. I suggested to Chris that he talk with Myrrh but they made the mistake of not hiring him. Instead, he made a production deal with Myrrh that had a major impact on the future of

Contemporary Christian music. The first three artists he signed with his production agreement were B.J. Thomas, Whiteheart and Amy Grant, who ultimately became Contemporary Christian music's greatest star.

When John Styll began CCM magazine, which stood for Contemporary Christian Music magazine in 1978, the first cover was the Boone Girls from their Curb album. We helped arrange for that picture to appear on the cover. CCM started the first Contemporary Christian chart and on that first chart five of the top ten positions were held by either the Boone Girls or Debby Boone. John Styll was a visionary who was there at the beginning of Contemporary Christian music and continued as the head of the Gospel Music Association for many years.

Later, we signed an agreement for Michael Lloyd and our company to produce Stryper for Enigma records. Stryper was one of the transitional rock bands of that time and we were fortunate to be involved with their career during the 1980s. We signed Whiteheart to Curb Records after their agreement with Chris Christian ended, then we signed Patty Cabrera, who was a key transitional Hispanic Christian artist who, along with Jaci Velasquez, opened doors to that market. We also signed Fernando Ortega who was with Campus Crusade for Christ headed by Bill Bright.

We were definitely there at the beginning of Contemporary Christian music, particularly when we signed Larry Norman, the Second Chapter of Acts and DeGarmo and Key and released their early recordings. Second Chapter of Acts and Larry Norman are now in the Gospel Music Hall of Fame.

Curb Records continues to be significantly involved in Contemporary Christian music using the same formula that we used

during the early days of that genre. We had major Contemporary Christian hits during the last decade with Michael English, Patty Cabrera, Jonathan Pierce, Fernando Ortega, Nicol Sponberg, Whiteheart, MIKESCHAIR, Nate Sallie, Plumb, Natalie Grant (GMA Female Vocalist of the Year in 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2012) and Selah, five-time Dove Award winners and graduates of the Mike Curb College of Entertainment and Music Business at Belmont University in Nashville. Plumb's recording of "Hang On" became a number one record on the *Billboard* Dance Chart. Selah's incredible music, such as "You Raise Me Up," has sold over four million albums. Natalie Grant is an incredible singer in Christian music and after so many hits, she started 2017 with the hottest record in the industry "King Of The World," number one on the *Billboard* chart.

Curb Records distributed "I Can Only Imagine" by MercyMe, which became the first praise and worship record to cross over to the pop charts, reaching the number one position on *Billboard's* Hot 100 Sales Chart. We were also the publisher of the song "Three Wooden Crosses" that was recorded for the Word/Curb label by Randy Travis. That song became the first Contemporary Christian recording to cross over to the country chart where it reached the number one position in *Billboard* and the album *Rise And Shine* became the first of three Grammy Award winning albums for Randy on Word/Curb Records.

Another example of how we continued to use the same formula throughout our various decades in the Contemporary Christian music industry was when we re-recorded our classic Contemporary Christian recording of "You Light Up My Life" by Debby Boone. We re-recorded the song 20 years later with LeAnn Rimes and her *You Light*

Up My Life album became the first Contemporary Christian album to debut simultaneously at number one on the *Billboard* Contemporary Christian Chart, *Billboard* Country Chart and the *Billboard* Hot 100 Chart. I co-produced “You Light Up My Life” with Chuck Howard and Wilbur Rimes and I will never forget the experience of being a part of bringing this amazing artist to the world. The *You Light Up My Life* album has sold over five million albums, which makes it the top selling Contemporary Christian album of all time.

In 1997 Curb became the top Contemporary Christian imprint in *Billboard* magazine. In addition, it was rewarding to find out that the Word/Curb label was recognized as *Billboard’s* Top Christian Imprint for 2006 and 2007. The Word/Curb success was achieved because of the great work of Jim Van Hook, Rod and Susan Riley, Mark Funderburg, Josh Bailey and our other employees and artists, such as BarlowGirl, Big Daddy Weave, Point of Grace, Francesca Battistelli, Mark Schultz, Nicole C. Mullen, Salvador, Stellar Kart, Love & The Outcome, Sidewalk Prophets, Chris August, Family Force 5, Building 429, Meredith Andrews, pureNRG, Remedy Drive, Group 1 Crew and Curb artists Selah, Plumb, Michael English, Nicol Sponberg, Fernando Ortega, OBB, Ryan Corn, Jamie Slocum, MIKESCHAIR, Mallory Hope and Natalie Grant. It was exciting at the 2015 Grammys to see four nominated artists that we had been involved with, MercyMe, Natalie Grant, Francesca Battistelli and the Grammy winner, for King & Country, with their amazing album that included the hit “Priceless”, which also became a powerful film. The members of this group, Joel and Luke, and their manager/father, David Smallbone, in addition to being incredible performers and writers/artists, are probably the most

focused and complete music group that I have experienced since the years that I worked with Mark Miller (Sawyer Brown), who was also a very gifted artist/performer and able to understand the total record business.

In 2016, Curb purchased the remaining 80 percent of Word Entertainment from Warner Music Group. The company continues to dominate the Contemporary Christian charts with great artists like Francesca Battistelli, Meredith Andrews, Group 1 Crew, Love & The Outcome, Sidewalk Prophets, Chris August, Family Force 5, for King and Country, Big Daddy Weave, We Are Messengers, Sarah Reeves, Zealand Worship, Steven Malcolm, Stars Go Dim and Blanca.

The amazing thing about Contemporary Christian music today is that it has become more like rock, rap, R&B and everything that mainstream American music fans could ever want.



CHAPTER 24

From Los Angeles to Nashville and Tim McGraw

In 1992 we moved to Nashville. When I first discussed the move with my family, my daughters did not like the idea because they would have to leave their friends. However, within months after we moved they were both saying how much they loved living in Nashville. Nashville is a combination of the best of a rural community with access to most of what can be found in larger downtown urban areas of other major cities. It is safer than L.A. and if I desire to see the rural countryside, I can find it by driving a few minutes from my home.

There were a number of factors that led to the decision to relocate to Nashville from Los Angeles. The biggest factor was that my father died in 1990 and, before he died, encouraged me not to rear my daughters in California because he felt the South had a much better social climate for rearing children. Next was the fact that my wife was diagnosed with Crohn's disease and had a major operation in January, 1992. After that operation, we made our decision to leave our home in California and move to Nashville. Both of my daughters were becoming

teenagers – the eldest was turning 13 while the youngest would soon be 12. We lived in Beverly Hills and that is not the perfect place to rear teenagers. I thought we could be a closer family in the South.

Another factor was the business climate in California.

The California legislature is liberal and continues to pass unrealistic laws, laws that I cannot live under if I own a business. Laws have been passed that make it virtually impossible for some industries to exist because they never know the rules or how they might be changed in the future. When I was in government, I used to travel the state talking about the problems with the business climate in California and how businesses were going to leave the state. At that time, I never dreamed that my own business would be one of those leaving.

While I was in government, I used to say the best politicians were people who left their businesses – either as owners or employees – or their professions, and went into government for a period of time and then left government and lived under the laws they had passed. I felt that would lead to a healthy government and business partnership. That is what I believed and that is what I did; I was voted into government and then I was voted back into the private sector.

During my time in politics, I learned a lot about government and I believe I did a number of things that were of value. However, I learned enough about California to know that it has to change. Until the California legislature accepts that fact, there will not be a growing, viable music industry in California; instead, there will be a declining and, ultimately, a very different industry. When I look at where government has put money into the arts, it is embarrassing.

Government money is put into the arts which are not commercial, even though it is the commercial arts that have created American music such as jazz, country music, rock & roll, rhythm and blues and rap music.

In short, the liberal California legislature and the terrible business climate caused me to move to a state and an area where the music business is valued. People come from all over the world to Nashville to be part of a creative community, to get a song recorded, to get a recording contract, to record in our studios, to go to the Grand Ole Opry, to be a part of Music City U.S.A. This is a city where music is valued and where, for the most part, artists still value a recording contract.

Before I moved to Nashville in the early 1990s, I had many hits in the 1970s, then I moved into California government from 1978 to 1983 and then to Washington, D.C. to be with the Reagan Administration until 1986 so I missed about ten years of active day-to-day involvement in the record business. By the time I returned to the music business full time in the 1980s it was a good time for artists because it was not singles driven and we were able to enjoy an album driven era. The acts we had in the 1980s – Hank Williams Jr., The Judds, Lyle Lovett, the Desert Rose Band, Sawyer Brown – were all big album selling artists. During the 1990s, albums were big but they were often driven by singles. It was a wonderful time for artists to make hit singles and for producers and record companies that understood the art of recording and releasing hit singles.

Curb Records five-year distribution agreement with EMI was ending in 1994 and it seemed like EMI was planning to make much

needed executive changes. Meanwhile, at Warner Bros., Doug Morris and Mel Lewinter let us know they wanted our business and sought to make an agreement with us. Since 1994 we have been distributed by WEA, the distribution arm of Warner Bros. Music, in a P&D agreement. Doug and Mel are still an amazing executive team in the record business today. I wish that they were still at Warner because they loved music and they always honored my contract.

A major moment in our history was with someone who had not yet had a hit, but we believed had great potential: Tim McGraw. Tim was brought to the attention of our label by baseball star Tug McGraw, who gave his son's tape to a Capitol Records' employee, who did not feel it fit Capitol, and passed it on to Mike Borchetta, head of promotion for our company. Mike was a huge baseball fan and wanted access to baseball tickets; he believed that if Curb signed the son of Tug McGraw, the great pitcher who used to play for the Philadelphia Phillies and New York Mets, he would gain access to baseball promotions that would benefit all of our artists. He sent the tape of Tim to Dick Whitehouse and me and we approved the signing because we did not have a hat act. A "hat act" was what we called those country acts in the late 1980s and early 1990s like Garth Brooks who all wore big cowboy hats. Dick and I agreed that we needed a great producer and we brought in Doug Johnson, who had been a member of a band that I had signed several years before. The initial sessions didn't work and Doug left the project. Thereafter, Tim's then manager suggested James Stroud. We loved the idea. James brought in Byron Gallimore as co-producer. They completed the album – that was the good news. The bad news was that neither

the album nor singles from the album succeeded. We wanted to try again and we did.

One of our acts, Boy Howdy, had a big hit and the group was on its way to the show. They stopped to change a tire for a lady and the drummer of the group, who was being a good Samaritan by changing the tire, was hit by a car and badly hurt so the group could not perform. Tim was in town with his band so somebody suggested “We can maybe get the McGraw band to play.” Since it was close to the time of the show, and we did not have anyone else, we asked Tim and his band to perform.

By this time Tim McGraw had been on our label for at least three years but I had never seen him perform. During the show he did a song called “Indian Outlaw.” I was hosting the show because something happened to the D.J. who was going to host and I was there and knew the background of all the artists. When I watched Tim McGraw do “Indian Outlaw” I saw the crowd respond like he was a superstar. After the show my daughter Courtney and I went back to Tim’s bus and thanked him, just as I did for all the other artists who were on the show, and we asked him about “Indian Outlaw” and why he had not put that song on his album.

Tim replied, “Well, your people told me not to.” Tim is someone who tells it like it is – he does not mince words. I asked, “What do you mean by ‘my’ people?” And he said, “Well, Dick Whitehouse and James Stroud.” I said, “Dick Whitehouse is the president of our company but James is an independent producer that I thought you liked.” He said, “Well, whatever – but they didn’t want me to put it out.” So I asked, “Do you want to do it on your next album?” and he answered, “Yes, I’d love

to do it on my next album.” Tim was correct. Neither James nor Dick wanted this song on the album since it seemed so “gimmicky.” However, things changed in 1993 when we were at Fan Fair in Nashville and had a show to spotlight our acts. The audience went wild when Tim performed the song. We called James, told him about the audience reaction and Tim’s continued belief in the song. James and I, along with Dick Whitehouse, Phil Gernhard and Dennis Hannon, all agreed Tim was right and we needed to record the song.

We picked up his option and did the next album, which contained the song “Indian Outlaw.” By this time it was 1994 and I remember Phil Gernhard with our company was a huge believer in that record. This was the first time that I realized how professional our entire marketing team was under the leadership of Dennis Hannon. We saw “Indian Outlaw” as a great record and it launched Tim McGraw’s career. We did videos and dance mixes of “Indian Outlaw” that positioned Tim McGraw as a rock star even though he was in the country music format. On the charts “Indian Outlaw” only reached number eight; however, this was the record, along with a great video, that started Tim McGraw on his way to being a superstar.

We never thought there was anything anti-Native American about the song. I admire the Indian culture and Tim is not anti-Native American either. There has been a long tradition of Indian songs in country music, such as Hank Williams doing “Kaw-Liga.” “Indian Outlaw” just seemed like a great record to me. Tim followed “Indian Outlaw” with a string of hits but I had to persuade him to release “It’s Your Love” as a single. He was concerned because his first single release from a new album had always been an up tempo song. “I’ve

never started with a ballad,” he said. I replied, “Tim, that’s why we need to do it.” Faith Hill was singing harmony on that ballad so it was a pretty important moment in music and that video, which was filmed while Faith was pregnant, was incredible! When “It’s Your Love” won the Country Music Association’s “Record of the Year” award, Tim said on national television, “I want to thank Mike Curb for persuading me to put this single out.”

My involvement with Tim McGraw’s music changed from project to project. On the album, *Tim McGraw and the Dance Hall Doctors*, I did absolutely nothing except listen to the finished CD after it had been recorded and made only a few miniscule suggestions.

When he released his *All I Want* album, the follow-up to his multi-platinum album *Not A Moment Too Soon*, it initially sold less than a third of what the previous album had sold. Tim was downcast and concerned about his musical direction, his management, concerned about his life and a possible bankruptcy. That was the period of time when he fell in love with Faith Hill, the most beautiful woman in Nashville. That was good because Faith has been a positive influence on Tim and when they married she wanted their careers to move forward.

Tim brought Faith to the Curb Records Christmas party in 1996 and they played the album for the staff and guests. Faith had a glow along with her beautiful looks and when “It’s Your Love” started playing and her harmony came in, I remember looking over at her and when I caught her eye, wordlessly asked her “is that you?” I did not know she was going to sing the harmony part.

That was pivotal in persuading Tim to make “It’s Your Love” his first single from the album. After that album, Tim McGraw became the

major male star in country music, winning Grammy Awards, *Billboard* Awards, American Music Association Awards, Academy of Country Music Awards and Country Music Association “Entertainer of the Year.” Tim set an all-time record in *Radio & Records* magazine when “Live Like You Were Dying” held the number one position for ten weeks. That record was also voted single of the year for the Academy of Country Music and the Country Music Association.

People often ask, “Why didn’t Tim McGraw say ‘thank you Curb Records’ every time he received an award?” Well, I watched a music awards show recently and only one artist on the entire show thanked his record company. So my answer to people who ask is that “Tim thanked us when we may have deserved it,” such as he did at the *Billboard* Conference when he was leaving Curb Records and stated “I have to thank Curb Records for my career and for giving me the freedom to create hit records.” I maintain that he did not need to thank us for the success of his *Dance Hall Doctors* album because he did that all by himself. He had a vision of doing an album with his band, so he went to a studio in New York and did it and it is one of the greatest albums he ever did in terms of a complete album. Why should he thank Mike Curb or Curb Records? Would our staff have been motivated by it? Yes, but they were going to work Tim McGraw because he was an important artist to us. The artist does not need to pander to his record company, although there is some sensitivity from those working at a record company because many artists do not realize the importance of the many contributions that are made by their record company.

In Tim’s case we were very important to him at the beginning when we signed him to Curb Records. That was an important

decision in his life as well as in ours. When his first single did not hit we decided to put out an album and when the album did not hit, we decided to do another album. Each of those decisions was crucial to Tim McGraw's career.

We played another important role in Tim's career in the promotional campaign for "Indian Outlaw." First, we realized that some stations would not play that song, but we still promoted it. We did a long video with dancers, one of the first country dance videos ever done, and it was embraced by Country Music Television. We also released a long version of "Indian Outlaw" with Indian sounds and long drum and instrumental interludes that was a total, pop rock & roll approach to country.

We also played a major role in Tim's life when he had serious financial issues. His attorneys talked to him about filing for bankruptcy, but we stepped in and paid off all his debts, which added up to millions of dollars. That showed him our support and we entered into a new agreement with him. We are proud that Tim's three contracts with us created an incredible 23-year history that included 24 number one singles in *Billboard* and 11 number one *Billboard* albums. Although we would have liked the relationship to last forever, we are hopeful that he continues to be successful because it allows us to continue marketing his incredible catalog of hits on Curb.

In 1994 we made the decision to concentrate on country music and the period 1989 to 1998 was a time when country music had incredible growth. Curb Records was positioned to benefit from that growth because we had Hank Williams Jr., Sawyer Brown, Boy Howdy, and Hal Ketchum on the label before Tim McGraw hit. After Tim's big

hit “Indian Outlaw” launched him as a star, our next big act was Jo Dee Messina. Jo Dee had hits like “Bye Bye,” “I’m Alright” and “Heads Carolina, Tails California” and became a multi-platinum album artist, the first female artist to have three consecutive multi-week number one records in *Billboard*.



CHAPTER 25

LeAnn Rimes

In 1995, my cousin's son, Benson Curb, who is vice president of sales for our label, left a tape with my assistant, Becky Judd (no, not related to The Judds), who is such an asset to our company. Becky has people skills, legal training and is a native of Nashville. Every night she sends the new music that we have received that day to me. It was a Friday and my wife and two daughters and I were on our way to the Smoky Mountains for the weekend. I had a briefcase full of tapes and CDs that I needed to hear but my daughters wanted to listen to the radio and hear their own kind of music. I had always wanted to teach them about the record business so during the car ride I said that I would appreciate it if we could listen to some of the songs which had been submitted to the company. When I'm listening to new songs and new artists, I sometimes only need to hear about a third of a song before I realize that the artist or song is not what I am looking for. We listened to three or four tapes like that, which they did not enjoy, and then they wanted to hear some more of their own music. After a while, I tried to segue back into some of the music that I had with me so I told them, "Benson mentioned that there's a young girl about your age

who sang the National Anthem at the Dallas Cowboys game whom everybody said was really great.” I put on the LeAnn Rimes recording and the very first song was “Blue.”

I had always wanted to teach my girls about my earlier experiences with the Osmond Family but it was impossible to describe to my family because the Osmonds were successful before my daughters were born. I always thought that if we could find an artist their age and they could be a part of that experience, it would be exciting for them. I never dreamed we would find a teenager like that again, even though we had success with teenagers like Debby Boone and Shaun Cassidy as well as Donny and Marie Osmond in the past.

When I heard “Blue” I did not believe the singer was a teenage artist – I thought I had taken the wrong tape because it sounded like a much older artist. The singer was excellent; however, my next thought was that sometimes people forget to record over a tape and that maybe somebody had sent me a tape of Patsy Cline! We listened to two or three songs and really liked them, then went back to listening to some of my daughter’s music. A little later my younger daughter said “Boy, she was good – we ought to listen to her again” but we did not do it.

On Sunday, as we drove back to Nashville, one of my daughters said “We ought to play that girl again.” It took me awhile to find the tape before I could play it. We all quickly realized that here was an amazing singer. That night after we got home I called LeAnn’s father – they lived in Dallas – and he agreed to drive up and meet us the next night at a Cracker Barrel restaurant. When he said they would like to meet at a Cracker Barrel, I told him, “Wilbur, the only problem with that is you can’t get reservations. If we meet at dinner time we might be

standing there an hour.” He replied, “That’s all right, it’s worth it.” We did stand there in that Cracker Barrel and wait to be seated because we all love their food and it’s worth the wait.

By the time we were seated and started talking about LeAnn, my older daughter had discovered that LeAnn liked horses so she asked if LeAnn would like to see our horses or perhaps go to a movie. The next thing I knew, LeAnn, my two daughters and LeAnn’s manager, Lyle Walker, went off to see the horses and a movie. My wife and I sat and talked with LeAnn’s parents, Wilbur and Belinda Rimes, and we made our agreement for LeAnn to join Curb Records right there. I was absolutely sure that signing LeAnn to Curb Records was the right thing to do.

Not only was I sure of her, but I was sure that we would release “Blue” as her first single. The problem was that I felt the recording she had done needed a better, heavier drum sound and was afraid we could not duplicate that performance so we kept trying to fix the recording with different mixes. Finally, after mixing the recording about forty times, LeAnn and her father went back into the studio in Texas and re-cut it. It was awesome so we put it out quickly. I loved working with LeAnn and Wilbur because they are both so talented.

A number of people listened to the recording and told us that the other side of the record, “Light In Your Eyes,” should be the single but as soon as four or five radio stations started playing “Blue,” it exploded. That was one of those amazing moments in music where everything clicked and a singer quickly became a huge artist.

From the moment she started, LeAnn Rimes was an artist who confounded all the other artists. On her first single, “Blue,” she did

something far more country than other artists would have been allowed to do on their labels and sold six million albums. Then, a year later, she released a gospel/Christian album, *You Light Up My Life*, something that contemporary country music artists rarely do. We knew the power of the song “You Light Up My Life,” which I had the privilege to co-produce with Wilbur, because we had recorded the original version by Debby Boone and it had been the first song that stayed number one for ten weeks on the *Billboard* Hot 100 chart, 25 years before LeAnn’s recording. LeAnn’s *You Light Up My Life* gospel album ultimately sold about five million copies, becoming the top selling Contemporary Christian album of the year and perhaps the top selling album of all time in that genre. It is the only album to debut number one on the *Billboard* charts for Pop, Country and Christian.

LeAnn then recorded “How Do I Live,” which I was fortunate to co-produce and which some considered too pop for the country market. That song was covered by Trisha Yearwood, who had a big country hit with it, which hurt LeAnn’s feelings very badly. However, at my daughter Courtney’s suggestion, we turned a negative into a positive when LeAnn’s version of that song was released to the pop market and became the longest running pop chart single in the history of the *Billboard* chart (69 weeks) for the entire 20th century.

The story behind this record is an interesting one. Jerry Bruckheimer had produced a movie, *Con Air*, and LeAnn’s agent, Rod Essig, heard about the movie and informed LeAnn because she was looking to do a song for a movie. Bruckheimer wanted Diane Warren to write the song for the film so Diane had three or four songs that she had written for consideration and played them for LeAnn. One of

those songs was “How Do I Live,” which LeAnn loved. LeAnn recorded a demo of that song, which was played for Jerry Bruckheimer, who liked it and authorized us to record it. We worked with Kathy Nelson, who was the music director for the film. We recorded it in Nashville at our Curb Studio and at Reba McEntire’s studio, Starstruck, on Music Row. We used Starstruck because it has soundtrack synchronization equipment and because it is next door to our Curb Studio.

I co-produced the song with LeAnn’s father, Wilbur Rimes, because I had a lot of experience with soundtracks from my years in L.A. During the session, I was on the phone with the film people, making sure of the requirements for the length of the song, where they wanted to begin the fade ending – all the things I do when I am doing music for a film. After we recorded the song, we stayed up all night mixing, then rushed it out to the West Coast. We then started getting mixed signals from the West Coast. We heard the film people were not sure whether or not they liked the record and we also heard there was a concern that LeAnn was too young to be singing the theme for an “R” rated movie. We also heard that it sounded “too pop,” as well as some other things that led us to feel that the movie people did not like LeAnn’s recording.

We discovered that some of the same musicians who played on LeAnn’s recording were going into the studio to cut the song with Trisha Yearwood. This was a couple of weeks after LeAnn’s session and Trisha is one of Nashville’s most talented artists, a nice person who is well respected. Trisha’s label, MCA, and her manager at the time, Ken Kragan, went to work for her. Because time was critical, they streamed Trisha’s recording to radio – one of the first times that a country label

had sent a recording over the internet to radio – then the staff at MCA and Ken Kragan told the country radio programmers that LeAnn was going pop. Meanwhile, Trisha had a good image with country radio and the country audience. The irony was that LeAnn’s only hits up to that point had either been country or gospel, and no recording could have been more country than “Blue.” Ironically, 18 months after her first hit, the artist who had been criticized for being too country with “Blue,” then too Christian for *You Light Up My Life* was now being criticized for being too pop and leaving the country format. LeAnn was upset because she loved the song and I was bothered by what was happening to her. Nobody knew quite what to do, but then a chance encounter occurred that started us moving in a new direction.

Our family took a vacation in Italy to see the areas outside of Rome that my older daughter had studied in school; we had promised that if she received good grades we would do that. Our family does not fly together so I flew with my younger daughter, Courtney, to LaGuardia airport where we took a taxi to Kennedy Airport to meet my wife and older daughter who had flown directly to Kennedy. When Courtney and I got off the plane we ran into LeAnn and her mother, who were waiting to board that same plane for its return flight to Dallas. LeAnn was literally in tears because of what was going on with “How Do I Live” because, by this point, it was obvious that Trisha Yearwood was going to have the big country hit with that song.

During our conversation, my daughter Courtney said “I like LeAnn’s record better as a pop record – we should send it to pop radio stations.” Now, my younger daughter is very shy so it was unusual for her to make a statement like that right in front of LeAnn. LeAnn

replied, “I agree with you Courtney. I think we should just go pop with it. Everybody is accusing me of being pop anyway.” I began thinking about this idea and told LeAnn, “We’re going to Rome for a little over a week and I’m coming back through L.A. to meet with our pop people.” We had a pop mix of “It’s Your Love” by Tim McGraw and Faith Hill, which was the number one country record at the time, and were considering taking it pop. I had planned to fly back from Rome to L.A. to meet with our pop staff to discuss the McGraw-Hill pop promotion possibilities.

During our vacation in Italy all I talked about with my family was the pop promotion of LeAnn’s record. I remembered that we had tried to take another record to pop, “Unchained Melody” by LeAnn, but the pop radio programmers said, “We don’t want to play it because country is already playing it.” All of a sudden, in the middle of the night before we came back it just hit me. Our pop promotion staff could tell the pop radio programmers “your biggest concern is not there because country radio is not playing ‘How Do I Live’ by LeAnn Rimes. Here is a record you can have for your very own. For pop, for AC, for Top Forty and CHR (Contemporary Hit Radio).” That was our promotion theme. In Los Angeles I played the record for our pop people and they embraced it and the record started with airplay on a radio station in Houston, much like we started “You Light Up My Life” by Debby Boone 25 years before. In the end, “How Do I Live” was number one for 11 weeks on the Adult Contemporary chart in *Billboard* – and the longest running record in the history of the *Billboard* Hot 100 singles chart and sold three and a half million copies – the biggest selling single ever by a female country artist. I don’t believe there has ever been a bigger selling

single by a female artist in the SoundScan era except perhaps “I Will Always Love You” by Whitney Houston, which was also originally a country song. By turning a negative into a positive, LeAnn had a huge pop hit.

There was another result of that situation which was not very positive. Because of this situation, LeAnn was not exactly enchanted with the country music industry at that time and I understood her feelings. This occurred during a period when there were resentments from country radio if an artist went pop and vice versa. That does not exist now because the same companies own most of the pop and country stations.

Going back to the origins of the Country Music Association (CMA) in 1958 it can be found that organization started because those in the country music establishment in Nashville were upset and angry about the invasion into country by acts such as Carl Perkins, Jerry Lee Lewis, Brenda Lee, Elvis Presley and others who became pop acts. That same feeling from the mid-1950s was prevalent during the mid-1990s and the result was that LeAnn Rimes was getting the same cold shoulder from the country community that Brenda Lee and Elvis Presley received 40 years earlier. Ironically, during the mid-1990s, Elvis and Brenda Lee were inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame.

It is not unusual for an artist who is not embraced by the CMA to feel ostracized. The CMA was originally formed because country artists at that time were being replaced by artists such as Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis and Brenda Lee. There are encouraging signs that the new CMA leadership team realizes the mistakes of their past and under the leadership of Sarah Trahern, the CMA is taking major steps to represent

all of the country artists and companies, regardless of whether they are majors or independents. In addition, the CMA donates funds from their annual festival to the Nashville public school system, which has been a major step toward bringing the music industry closer to the Nashville business community.

We could not move to Nashville and become the label of the year, as we were in 2001, by doing the same thing that everybody else was doing. To succeed we had to do something different. We came to Nashville with the attitude that we were going to cut hit records and if we got rejected, fine. That is still our attitude and we are determined to continue to find ways for radio to embrace our artists. In my opinion, everyone who has brought something new to country or pop music has had a different attitude and direction.

LeAnn Rimes saw all of this while she was a teenager. At that point she was sixteen and developing strong feelings about a number of issues, including issues with her parents that many teenagers have. That led her to move to California because when she was in Los Angeles the people loved her record of “How Do I Live” and looked at her as a pop artist. When she was in Nashville, she was criticized or people kept re-fighting the battle between Trisha and LeAnn. I cannot criticize LeAnn because I felt some of the same anger that she felt. In fact, it was that anger that spawned our efforts to make “How Do I Live” a pop hit. We also don’t blame Trisha Yearwood because we believe she made a great record and we’re happy that at the end of the day both records were successful in different formats.

In California, LeAnn met a number of people, including a young man with whom she fell in love. During the year or two when she was

in that relationship a lot of things happened. For instance, she sued her father (her mother and father had divorced by this time) and challenged the court to tell her whether her recording contract was valid now that she was 18 and of legal age. She hired L.A. lawyers, a Los Angeles manager and L.A. accountants. Meanwhile, I had moved to Nashville in large part because I wanted my daughters to be raised away from the problems that young people face in L.A. Now our big star, LeAnn Rimes, the same age as my daughters, was leaving Nashville to move to California. Obviously, that was not an ideal situation. Having said that, I was certainly in a good position to understand what was going on and what she was going through because I had lived there.

Later, I was told by LeAnn that she felt the need to re-visit the various issues involving the break-up of her family. She finished an album entitled *The Family* and co-wrote with her husband, Dean, almost all of the songs on the album. Her family situation must have been difficult on LeAnn, but it was also difficult for all her employees and all of the Curb employees. We do not publicly disclose the royalties we pay to artists. LeAnn's attorneys disclosed that she had received over 21 million dollars from Curb during the initial year of her contract. LeAnn was upset at the way money was divided between her father, mother, agents and manager. Obviously, the record company is not involved in those decisions. One of the top artists in the industry, who records for another major company, told me that she had not received 21 million dollars in royalties during her entire career. She was surprised that LeAnn had received so much royalty income from Curb.

LeAnn's manager, Lyle Walker, had negotiated one of the highest royalty rates (with automatic escalations) that Curb Records had ever

paid a new artist. The other thing that bothered LeAnn was having to do a gospel album in each period. Normally, an adult pop or country recording artist is not required to do a gospel album unless the artist requests one. Unfortunately, when the artist is under 18, it requires court approval and the Texas court required a gospel album for every other album because LeAnn was 13 at that time. Even though LeAnn's contract was court approved in both Texas and Tennessee, I agreed with LeAnn that we should not have had to include the gospel provision. Although her first gospel album was a huge success, LeAnn's lifestyle changes and her move to Los Angeles made the gospel albums irrelevant so LeAnn did not have to do any more gospel albums. The gospel record stores are very sensitive about only selling records by artists who reflect the values of the Christian Booksellers Association.

For those reasons, I told LeAnn's manager, Lyle Walker, that I would remove the gospel provision from her contract, and agreed to other provisions, including raising her royalty. Unfortunately, when LeAnn's parents divorced and LeAnn moved to Los Angeles, Lyle was removed from management and litigation involving Lyle and her family was initiated. Fortunately, everything was resolved and I was thrilled that LeAnn re-signed with Curb Records as an adult, using the attorney, agents and managers of her choice. I still believe that someday in the future LeAnn will make a great gospel album, but now it will be her choice because she is an adult and we can easily document her album without needing court approval. I learned an important lesson from this because it gave the appearance of an artist being required to do too many albums. We were able to turn this into a positive result and don't include gospel clauses in young artists' contracts, even if the

artists or Court request it.

That was the situation that created controversy when LeAnn criticized us, and particularly her father, publicly. The experience in Los Angeles culminated in the Academy of Country Music Show where LeAnn spoke her mind on national television about her father, her record company, and whatever else was on her mind. It was a pivotal show for LeAnn and a lot of people were surprised that I said how much I understood what she said on the show. I thought her poise was awesome. Obviously, I would have preferred that she said something other than what she said, but I understood what she was doing and that there were a lot of changes going on in her life.

On the show that night she sang “Can’t Fight The Moonlight” because she was in effect saying “O.K., I’m on this show and I’m going to do my thing.” That record had come out but was not being played on country radio. I watched her performance and watched the dancers behind her and she was doing a Britney Spears type dance to that song and it was wild – I knew she was doing it to shock everybody. It was really “Hollywood” and a lot of her country audience did not like her performance or what she said. The fall-out from that show put her relationship with country music at rock bottom because when a young lady sues her Dad and speaks ill of others on national television it does not play well with the country music audience.

I was not there, thank goodness, but the story I heard is that her boyfriend said something critical to her after the show that upset her and caused her to decide to get out of that destructive relationship. In that same Country Music show was a young man named Dean Sheremet,

a great dancer, handsome, talented and a good person whom she met and worked with while she was doing the show. The relationship with Dean started to grow and not long after that she married him.

“Can’t Fight The Moonlight” came from the movie *Coyote Ugly* and it seemed to me that the movie was a re-visitation of *The Wild Angels*, a movie I had written the soundtrack for 40 years before. The film was wall-to-wall music produced by Hollywood Pictures, which is Disney. I looked at the film initially because there was a possibility for LeAnn Rimes to sing the title song at the end of the film and I wanted to see if it was the right kind of film for her. During my conversations with the people at Disney, I asked who was releasing the soundtrack album and they replied there was not going to be a soundtrack album because they did not believe they could get the rights to use all the songs. They wanted to use a wide variety of acts from different labels, which made it extremely difficult to get permissions. For example, they wanted to use the Charlie Daniels recording of “The Devil Went Down To Georgia,” which was owned by Sony but they did not believe they could obtain those rights.

I had a couple of Sawyer Brown tracks that were similar to that recording, but when all was said and done, what they really wanted was the Charlie Daniels record and various other records. I told them they should use the Charlie Daniels song and allow me the opportunity to clear the rights for all the songs for a soundtrack album on Curb Records.

Since we are an independent label, Curb Records is only going to get what the major labels don’t want. The Disney organization is not going to put the soundtrack to a major Disney film on Curb Records

if they could put it on their own label. The only time they are going to put a soundtrack on Curb Records is if their record company thinks the project is impossible and cannot be done. One of the secrets to this world is doing what others think can't be done. The *Coyote Ugly* soundtrack is a good example of that maxim. I became the Executive Producer of the *Coyote Ugly* soundtrack and worked with the Disney people and honestly believe there was nothing essentially different about the *Coyote Ugly* soundtrack in the 21st century and *The Wild Angels* soundtrack project in the mid-1960s. In both cases, it involved taking the best rock & roll music – and I do not believe in a narrow definition of rock & roll – and putting it in a movie.

Originally, I wanted to work with Disney on the music because I thought there might be four or five places where LeAnn could sing and they wanted someone to do the voice of the girl in the movie. I was certain we could do what was done in the *You Light Up My Life* movie where the actress lip synched a song that a singer was singing. In this case, I thought LeAnn could sing while the actress in *Coyote Ugly* lip synched.

At first, I wondered if LeAnn would consent to this but she agreed to record all the songs in the movie for the actress to lip synch. LeAnn did such a good job on this project that Diane Warren wrote another song called “Can’t Fight The Moonlight.” LeAnn recorded that for the film and the movie’s producer and director liked it so much that they created a place in the film where LeAnn sang it on camera.

We put “Can’t Fight The Moonlight” out as a single but it did not hit. That was the version that LeAnn sang on the Academy of Country Music show. Bryan Stewart, Vice President of A&R, came up with the

idea of creating a dance mix of the song in England. Bryan thought we should send “Can’t Fight The Moonlight” over to Brian Rawlings and Graham Stack, who had done the dance mix on the Cher record that became a big hit. They agreed to try something new and different and created a Latino dance mix, which we loved. We edited it down and re-issued it as a single – two years after the initial version had been released – and it became a huge hit during a time when rap and hip-hop music dominated the pop charts. Because that single became a huge hit, the *Coyote Ugly* soundtrack went on to sell seven million copies and we had a Volume 1 and a Volume 2 on Curb Records.

The *Coyote Ugly* soundtrack represented our company using the lessons we learned from being in business for over 50 years. We are always looking for a rock & roll soundtrack! We went from the 1960s with *The Wild Angels* and the hit single there, “Blues Theme,” to the 1970s with the soundtrack for the movie *Kelly’s Heroes* starring Clint Eastwood and Telly Savalas, in which The Mike Curb Congregation had a hit with the title song “Burning Bridges” to the *You Light Up My Life* film, which gave us the hit single for Debby Boone.

The lesson of turning a negative into a positive was part of the *Coyote Ugly* story. That was also the story of “Candy Man,” a song from the movie *Willie Wonka and the Chocolate Factory* that was an initial flop as a single when released by The Mike Curb Congregation but became a big hit when we added Sammy Davis, Jr.’s voice to the record.

As her relationship with Dean Sheremet developed, LeAnn started re-thinking her life and came to the decision to re-sign with us and move back to Nashville. I don’t know why she made this decision but I learned of her decision when she called me late one night. I was almost

asleep when I answered the phone and initially thought it was one of my daughters when the young female voice said “Mike, this is LeAnn.” After realizing that it was not my daughter, I listened to her tell me of her decision to re-sign with Curb Records. I was happy for her, for Curb Records and for the world. I had not expected her to make that important decision at that time. Later, LeAnn Rimes and her husband lived a short distance from me, on the same road, and she returned to country music with an album that reflected her vision. The first three singles from that album “Nothing ‘Bout Love Makes Sense,” “Probably Wouldn’t Be This Way” and “Something’s Gotta Give” became hit records. LeAnn has now married Eddie Cibrian, and I believe that she will have many successes in the future because she is so talented and I’m excited to imagine all the things she will achieve. Eddie and LeAnn have now been together for a long time and re-connected with LeAnn’s parents, Belinda and Wilbur. The music LeAnn made with Curb will last forever and LeAnn will continue to have hits long after I’m gone.



CHAPTER 26

Jo Dee Messina

Another one of our artists, Jo Dee Messina, taught me that sometimes the answer to a current problem in the music business can be found in the history of how other record companies have handled similar situations. The problem occurred when Jo Dee was upset in 2004 about a single after the recording had been released.

Jo Dee spent time in an alcohol rehab program, which she made public, and was ready to resume her career. That time in rehab was a difficult time for her but it was something she felt she needed to do. In addition to a change in her personal life, she also made a big change in her professional life when she left her long-time manager, Stuart Dill and signed with Jim Mazza, who also worked with Kenny Rogers. Both Stuart and Jim are fabulous managers and great friends of mine, but those decisions are always made by the artists.

Stuart was one of the best managers that Nashville has ever had because he understood how to bring artists and record companies together while at the same time representing the best interests of his artists.

Jim Mazza and I go back a long way. We first met in 1964 when he worked for Capitol Records in their manufacturing plant in Glendale.

I went to that plant to pick up copies of the first record released on my label, Sidewalk Records. I did not see Jim again for twenty years; in the meantime, he became president of Capitol Records. In 1984, thanks to Dick Whitehouse watching “Star Search,” we were able to sign Sawyer Brown. We were based in Los Angeles at the time and working with the Osmond Family, Marie Osmond and Donny Osmond, who were all signed to our label. At that time we did not have a single distributor for all of our product; The Judds were on Curb/RCA, Hank Jr. was on Curb/Warner and the Whites were on Curb/MCA. Dick had the idea to play the Sawyer Brown recordings for Capitol. Jim Fogelsong and Lynn Shults were in the Nashville office while Jim Mazza and Don Zimmerman were in the West Coast office. Initially, Capitol was interested in Sawyer Brown for both country and pop.

Because of that interest from Capitol, we signed a five year agreement in 1984 with Jim Mazza and Jim Fogelsong at Capitol to have a joint venture with Sawyer Brown. That agreement ended in 1989 and, by that time, Joe Smith had taken over as president of Capitol and told us, “We’re ready to join forces with you in a P&D (pressing and distribution) agreement or you can be a full-scale record company.” That was one of the defining moments in the history of Curb Records. It meant that at the end of 1989, Dick Whitehouse and I spent the whole Christmas holiday working on a contract with Joe Smith and Capitol, which was the genesis of Curb becoming a full-scale independent label. After that agreement, we brought the artists signed to joint venture agreements onto the Curb label when the term of those venture agreements ended.

In 2004, twenty years after that 1984 agreement with Jim Mazza, and forty years after first meeting him at a Capitol manufacturing

plant, I found myself working with him again when he became Jo Dee Messina's manager. This was a great thrill because Jim is a great manager. Jo Dee had already had a career on Curb with many number one hits, and our first single leading off the new album was "My Give A Damn's Busted," which we pressed and shipped in late November 2004.

A problem arose during the Thanksgiving holiday when Jo Dee was with her family and played the song for them and her mother and aunt were upset with the lyric. By the time I found out about this, it was early December and we had shipped the record to radio. I did not want to pull the record back but I did not want to let down Jo Dee or Jim Mazza, who had both called and asked if we could release a different single.

This was a dilemma: the artist did not want the record out but the record had already been released. Also, I know it is potentially damaging to an artist if we pull a record back from radio once they have played it. I'm not sure it is possible to stop a record if radio wants to play it because a record has its own life. In most cases, the label does everything it can to get radio airplay for a record but every once in a while a "natural hit" comes along and, once radio plays it, it can't be pulled back nor can radio be ordered to stop playing it. I believe if we had called radio and asked them to stop playing "My Give A Damn's Busted" it would have been construed that we had something up our sleeve or that we had given an exclusive to someone else.

That was the problem I was dealing with when a solution emerged from out of the blue. I am constantly surprised about how things connect in life; in this case, I was surprised to discover that Jo Dee

Messina connected with Johnny Cash through Curb Records in a way I could never have dreamed of happening until it did!

During 2004 we purchased a number of items that had belonged to Johnny and June Carter Cash and moved the Johnny Cash Museum to Music Row, into an office building that we own. My assistant, Becky Judd, was having conversations with Marshall Grant, the last surviving member of the Tennessee Two, the original group that first recorded with Cash for Sun Records and Sam Phillips. We wanted to collect as many stories as possible about Johnny Cash. My assistant Becky Judd played a major role in our relationship with Johnny Cash and the Cash family because Becky had worked for Bob Sullivan, Cash's attorney, before she worked for us. Bob and Cathy Sullivan were Johnny and June Carter Cash's attorney and accountant, respectively, and Becky had dealt with the Cashes during her time there.

Jo Dee called Becky late in the day – it was probably after 6 p.m. – while Becky was on the phone with Marshall Grant. Becky put both of them on hold and contacted me. I wanted to talk with Marshall, so Becky suggested I talk with him while she talked with Jo Dee. I listened to Marshall's fascinating stories about the early years touring with Johnny Cash and how he and Luther Perkins, the other member of the Tennessee Two, were both mechanics and had to fix the car they drove in order to get to shows or the stories about their first recording session for Sun. I told Marshall that I was intrigued by the way Sun Records, which had artists like Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis, Roy Orbison, Carl Perkins, Carl Mann, Charlie Rich and Johnny Cash, created records that weren't really country but weren't really pop either, yet used the best of Tennessee's rich musical heritage together. Those

Sun singles fused the best of that state's urban tradition in Memphis and the country roots of the rural areas.

I told Marshall that it must have been amazing to work with Sun's owner, Sam Phillips. Marshall replied, "Actually, Sam never really helped us that much. In fact, we had some big problems with Sam along the way." I asked what kind of problems and Marshall related the story of "I Walk The Line," which Johnny Cash wrote for his first wife. The heartfelt love song is a song of commitment that says

I keep a close watch on this heart of mine
I keep my eyes wide open all the time
I keep the ends out for the ties that bind
Because you're mine, I walk the line.

"When we recorded that song," said Marshall, "we recorded it as a ballad. But Sam came into the studio and said 'Hey, guys, would you do that up tempo?' We told him 'no' but he insisted we do it just for him, so we did. Well, not more than two weeks later we were out on the road coming back from a show and listening to a Sunday night program when we heard the up tempo version of 'I Walk the Line' on the radio."

"What did you do?" I asked.

Marshall said "We were absolutely furious so the next morning all three of us – Johnny Cash, Luther Perkins and I – greeted Sam Phillips at the door of the Sun Studio in Memphis. We were mad so Sam invited us into his office and said, 'Guys, I'll tell you what, the record is already out but if it isn't a hit in two weeks, I'll take it off the market.'"

"Well," said Marshall. "That record became a huge hit during those two weeks."

That story proved to me what a great impact a record company can have and it also gave me an idea. I asked Marshall if I could put him on hold for a few minutes and then dialed Becky Judd, who was still talking with Jo Dee Messina. I asked Becky how things were going and she said “not so well – Jo Dee is very upset and it seems heartfelt. It’s not about money or getting a hit, it’s about doing the right thing.” I related to Becky the story that Marshall Grant had just told me and then suggested we make the same commitment to Jo Dee that Sam Phillips made to Johnny Cash and the Tennessee Two.

It was almost Christmas so I told Becky to relay to Jo Dee that I promised that if this record was not a hit by Christmas, we would take it back and put out the song that she wanted released. The next morning, I told our promotion people about this situation and asked them to “give it all we’ve got for the next two weeks” and if “My Give A Damn’s Busted” is not showing the signs of a hit by then, we would switch to “Delicious Surprise,” which was the record that Jo Dee wanted as her single.

During the two weeks before Christmas, the record exploded, just like “I Walk The Line” had done fifty years earlier and “My Give A Damn’s Busted” became a number one record for two weeks in a row on both trade charts, *Billboard* and *R&R*. Her album was also number one. That’s the first time I can remember when a female artist had the number one single and album in multiple trades during multiple weeks at the same time. At the party we had later to celebrate the fact we had reached number one, Jo Dee gave me a really big hug and when she spoke to the crowd assembled she thanked me for sticking with her during the ups and downs of her life. That was a wonderful feeling

and it made me realize that record companies are undoubtedly one of the most misunderstood businesses. Sometimes artists really need us but we may not be there properly while at other times artists may think they do not need us and yet we make critical decisions that help their careers.

It is almost like parenting because a record company needs to do what needs to be done but also must be aware when they have done enough. A label must be very careful when it goes against an artist's wishes in picking a single. In a situation like that, we usually try to let the artist pick the following single. We definitely released "Delicious Surprise" as her follow-up single to "My Give A Damn's Busted." We also let her name the album *Delicious Surprise* and select everything about that album – the picture on the cover, the cover design and the line-up of songs on the album. We had done the same thing with Tim McGraw. In the two or three times during his career when we have disagreed about a single, we have made sure that most future issues went his way. It is very important that the record company is not constantly thwarting what an artist wants to do. That is never a good situation because artists are the most important asset of a record company.



CHAPTER 27

Inside a Record Company

In order for a record company to generate revenue, it is important to have a catalog of recordings, which is a backlog of previous releases that continue to sell to consumers. Major labels have been in business a long time and through that longevity, and the purchase of a number of smaller labels, they have a large catalog of material to market. That is important because there are some years when the new albums released do not sell well, or there are no new acts that become best sellers. During those years, the sale of catalog items is essential to assure there is a strong, steady cash flow into the label. Curb Records did not have a deep catalog when it began, so I decided to build a catalog by leasing masters from other labels for “Greatest Hits” packages and developing our own catalog of albums that we own.

Some artists have had hits for a number of different companies, so it is not possible for a single label to compile a “greatest hits” package that contains all of their big hits. That has provided an opportunity for Curb Records. For example, Kenny Rogers recorded his early hits like “Ruby, Don’t Take Your Love To Town” for Reprise, then recorded for MGM, then United Artists where he had his hit, “Lucille,” then to

Capitol where he had “Lady,” then RCA where he had “Islands In The Stream” then to Magnatone and finally his own label, Dreamcatcher, where he had “Buy Me A Rose.” None of those companies could release a *Greatest Hits Of Kenny Rogers* that contained all his hits, but an independent label like Curb could license those hits from the various labels and compile a *Greatest Hits* album.

It would be difficult to license an artist who remained on one label during his or her entire career. For example, Elvis Presley’s entire catalog is owned by RCA, so Curb Records could not put together a Greatest Hits package because RCA would not allow it – they would do it themselves.

Sometimes we will release two “greatest hits” albums, one that might have 11 or 12 of the very biggest hits and the other might have 18 or 20 tracks. Then we offer the album with 10 or 11 tracks at a lower price, generally mid-line pricing, depending on how many tracks are on the album.

The real advantage of a greatest hits package is that we don’t have to guess what people want – the hits are all proven. This is different from a regular album where we do not know if the singles will hit or people will like the songs on the album. They may like a few and dislike others. A greatest hits album is a sure thing.

We generally license tracks for a “life of package” term so we can continue to sell the album as long as there is a demand. If we only make the agreement for a certain period of time, and there are 12 tracks on the album with one or two tracks expiring in five years, then we have to break up the entire album and re-do all the artwork. That’s expensive.

In addition to licensing tracks from other labels, we acquire the rights to old masters in a variety of ways. It is rare for an artist to own his own masters because the record business is a copyright business and the publishers own the songs while the labels own the recordings. However, there are examples of an artist, or an artist's estate, who own their masters because of litigation with a label; we have bought some of those. In other cases, an artist or an investor may have paid for some recordings and will sell them to us.

Licensing hits from other labels is difficult for a new label, but we have been in business for over 50 years now and have a catalog of our own hits, which makes it easier. For example, one of the major companies may be doing a compilation album and want a track from one of our acts, such as The Judds. We can say, "We'll be glad to license the Judd's recording and, by the way, you have a Kenny Rogers recording that we would like to license for our package." The business is reciprocal so we are willing to license to them and they are willing to license to us.

We price our catalog full-price, mid-line and budget. A full-price catalog item might be Tim McGraw's *Greatest Hits*, or the Eagles *Greatest Hits* because there is no reason to discount those artists. Mid-line would be an album that has been out for a period of time so the price is lowered in order to induce the consumer to buy. Budget priced items are usually deeper catalog that has been out for a period of years by an artist who perhaps has recorded for four or five labels so there is a lot of inexpensive product available.

In the case of marketing a new album from a country artist, the pattern for many years has been for an artist to have three or four hit singles on every album. After those three or four singles, the artist

releases the next album. Today, because of changes in the music industry, that has changed.

During the 1950s and 1960s you could have four singles released during a one year period so the artist could have a new album each year. In the 1980s and 1990s, it was possible to release three singles a year, particularly as we got into the 1990s, so an album might last for a year and a half because it took 18 months for four singles to hit. By the end of the 1990s we were lucky if a label released two singles in a year by an artist because singles took 24 to 26 weeks to run their full cycle. That was because of the change in radio programming; before then radio did not stay on a single for a long period of time so there was a large turnover on a station's airplay chart. Most radio stations during the 1990s continued playing a record for a much longer period of time because they felt consumers did not tire easily of hearing a hit recording. That meant most major artists delivered an album every two years and a label was fortunate to release four singles in two years.

The basic pattern for marketing country music during those times remained the same. A label released an album and on that album were four singles; at least the label hoped to release four singles. Some artists did not get there because, after two singles, the album started to see decreasing sales because it lost its appeal to consumers. For successful country artists like Tim McGraw, Toby Keith, Alan Jackson, or Kenny Chesney, the goal was to get four singles out and for those four singles to run their course over a two year period. Every now and then an artist might get lucky and release a fifth single from an album.

With the release of each single, the intention was for the sales of the album to increase proportionately every time a single hit, depending on

how big a hit the record was. Some records are “turntable hits,” which means they are played heavily at radio but the airplay does not translate into sales. There are other times when a recording is played sparsely by radio but that limited airplay generates a lot of sales. However, there is generally a strong correlation between the amount of airplay a record receives at radio and how well an album sells.

The debut of an album was the most important event in an album’s release so it was important for the artist to support the debut. For example, an artist could go on the Letterman or Leno show or Jimmy Fallon’s show, do some events with the major retailers, plan an event with Wal-Mart, do a satellite radio debut that beamed out to thousands of stations, do major concerts, have major in-store promotions, do interviews in the print media like *USA Today* or in local newspapers and participate on TV and internet promotions. That gave the album a good start because how it debuted pretty much defined what momentum the album would have. We considered ourselves lucky if we received one album every two years from an artist, so we needed to make the most of it.

A lot of this changed in the 21st century. We now sell fewer physical albums and the internet is a major player in our marketing efforts. Radio is still important for promoting music but we now have to factor in YouTube, Facebook, the mobile world, in addition to iTunes, Amazon, and the companies that download music and the companies that stream music, such as Spotify. Still, the basic structure of a record label has remained the same.

In many ways, a record company is like any other business: We have a marketing department, an accounting department, an A&R

department, a sales department, a promotion department and a legal department. We have the same dynamics in our business that any other business has but we do not have the same product consistency. If we do our job, we will have hits every year but we do not control the minds and souls of artists. Sometimes artists deliver their records on time but sometimes they do not. Sometimes their voices get hoarse and sometimes they get angry. Sometimes there is an issue they have with their manager or with the record company. Sometimes they are right and sometimes they are wrong!

Curb Records is an independent label, which means that we are not owned by a multi-national corporation, like the major labels, and do not have our own distribution system. Still, our label is structured basically like the major labels. The core of our record label is comprised of several departments: A&R, promotion, marketing, publicity, distribution, finance and legal.

A&R stands for “Artist and Repertoire.” This is the division of a label that looks for new talent and signs them to the label. After an act is signed, the A&R person works to make sure the artist finds good songs to record – either from the artist writing his or her own material, linking the artist with songwriters or obtaining material from outside songwriters. The A&R person also wants to team the artist with a producer who can bring out the best in that artist through a good working relationship in the studio.

A good A&R person may be a producer, but sometimes a good A&R person is someone who knows the best producers. The best A&R people I have known are the ones who can produce, and have produced but have the ability to recognize that there are other people who might

be better than they are for certain projects. The secret of a good A&R person can also be someone who has never produced but is able to find the right song and the right producer for each artist.

I believe a good A&R person is the best product development person, which means guiding that album from conception to release, through pre-production, recording, mixing, getting artwork approved and a release schedule for the album and singles. I believe strongly that what you put on that record – how you mix that record – can drastically change it. A little more echo, a little more of the lead voice or a little more drum can sometimes make a huge difference.

The interface between publishers and the label is through the A&R person and is one of the most important elements in the development of a great record. The publisher plays a vital role because there are only so many great songs every year. An A&R department that is open and receptive to great songs from publishers is able to obtain great songs for its artists. This relationship between A&R at the record company and publishers is a very key part of the record business.

It is also important to have Artist and Repertoire people who are smart enough to take a song and convince the artist to do that song. All of us who have been in the record business know of artists and songs that we turned down which later became hits. We have all heard the great stories of Bing Crosby turning down “Rudolph The Red-Nosed Reindeer” and then Gene Autry having the hit, so we want to make sure we do not miss a big record.

A promotion department has two functions. One is to take the music recorded by an artist and present it to radio, television and other

media outlets so the recording gets enough exposure in the electronic media to pass public scrutiny. If the recording passes this public “test,” then it will be purchased. The other job for a promotion person is to listen, to keep his ears open in case there is something out in the world that the label is missing. Perhaps a record on a small label is developing in Monroe, Louisiana or Fayetteville, North Carolina that might be new and different. It is important to bring that to the company so it does not run the risk of missing the next wave. If I stay at home where the cluster of companies are and if my only barometer is what everyone else is doing, then I am liable to miss a major opportunity. If a record company employee is open to whatever is happening anywhere in the world, then his company has a much better chance of finding something fresh and new.

As the head of a label, I have to inspire the promotion people to promote the records I want them to promote and be open to the records they may prefer to promote. The records which are the biggest hits tend to be the ones that are the most different and this means they are often the most difficult to promote because most people relate to what they have already heard.

Once a recording is completed and the promotion of that recording is in motion, the marketing people determine how to present the finished product to the public in the best possible way. Television advertising, radio advertising and in-store point of purchase advertising were all ways to get the public’s attention; today social media is essential. This is how we inform the world that the record they heard somewhere is available for purchase. It does not make any sense to make a great record and promote that record if the consumer

cannot find it to purchase. In the simplest form, the marketing person's job is to make it easy for the consumer to find that recording.

The positioning of a record in a retail establishment is the focus of every marketing person. The dream of every marketing person is to have a recording displayed in a retail outlet as close to the point of purchase as possible. Ideally, there will be recordings available at the cashier; that is the best position. The next best position is an "end cap," which is at the end of the bin where the recordings are bought. There may be a large display or a poster drawing the consumer to that recording, reminding people that the recording has just been released and is now available. Unfortunately, many record stores have gone out of business and major retailers like Wal-Mart carry fewer recordings.

A new wave of marketing recordings is to tie-in with an existing product, such as tying in with restaurant chains like Cracker Barrel, which has recordings that tend to reflect the tastes of their customers. Starbucks also has its own line of recordings that reflect its market and NASCAR has tie-ins with artists whose fans are in the audience at a NASCAR event. There are also special marketing tie-ins with internet download companies like iTunes or streaming such as Spotify where a recording is displayed on their promotional pages. All of these efforts cost money, but if it is done with the right recordings, it is an effective way to market the product.

Another trend has been for major artists to go directly to a big retailer such as Wal-Mart for an exclusive marketing agreement. This evolved because there are some artists who reach a point in their career where they prefer to make the music they want to make and are successful enough to where they can command the attention of

a major mass merchandiser and sell the product. They may have the right to do that and the mass merchandiser has the right to buy the product, but in the long term, how long will it be before the mass merchandiser wants another artist? We have to remember that there's only a handful of artists who are big enough to do that at any given point. Many times it's an artist at the end of his or her career. In other cases, it's an artist who enjoys doing the promotions and marketing. A good example of an artist who enjoys that type of thing and is very good at it is Garth Brooks. Garth Brooks is the kind of guy who has made a lot of things work that other artists haven't been able to do. The other thing to remember about Garth Brooks is that he's the biggest artist in our industry and maybe the biggest male artist of all time, in terms of his sales. Unlike many artists, Garth understands how to package his catalog and how to market his various greatest hits packages.

There are a handful of artists who are big enough and successful enough to market their records directly through special accounts and that will always be the case, but through most of their careers those artists needed a record company. They may have reached a point now where they're so successful that they can sell directly to one or two accounts but those major accounts like Wal-Mart have historically not wanted to manage their own inventory; they've always wanted to have an effective distributor in between who will manage their inventories and choose the product. Not only are there a handful of artists who are big enough to sell directly to a single account, I believe you'll find that most of the individual accounts have a history of not wanting to buy their records from a thousand different recording artists. They may buy from one or two or five, and that's already taking place, but

those are artists who are well developed, have come through the record companies and have the ability to deal one-on-one with an account. Unless the artist is really big and sustains at a certain level, the major retailers, particularly the mass merchandisers, have not wanted to buy from numerous artists. Instead, they prefer to buy through a smaller group of distributors and obtain their product through a company where the inventory is managed by experts.

Videos are part of the promotion and marketing of a recording but videos are a two edged sword. On one hand, consumers like them and they allow an artist to present a visual image. As a promotional tool, videos are very expensive and the three or four minute videos of a song are not used the way they used to be. If a video is made for every record, the cost of marketing that recording increases because a video can cost anywhere from \$20,000 to \$50,000 to \$300,000 or \$400,000. Some may be more and others may be less. As labels become involved with internet marketing through YouTube, in addition to marketing on TV, the promotional value of videos, combined with being able to sell them, creates an important asset.

The DVD market for music has not evolved, but it is my hope that someday the costs of a video will decrease because there will be more mass production of videos. In Europe there are DVDs in the same section as the CDs. They look alike and can be packaged the same way. In this country the music DVD, except in rare instances, has yet to catch on with consumers. I believe that is because there are so many concerts, so much on television, so many video games, and so many movies available on DVD that people do not feel the need to buy an album and have a visual performance of the songs. Having said that,

as the costs come down for DVDs, it is possible that every recording purchased will be a combination CD and DVD. The technology is now available where it is possible to put the CD on one side of a disc and a DVD on the other side. The advantage of downloading video or audio is that the company does not need to maintain costly inventory.

An ideal situation would be for an album to be released that will include the videos. If some people do not want to watch the videos, then they do not have to, but others might want to see them. The music DVD will become part of the CD someday, but that is dependent on lower production costs. It is important that we find a commercial use for the videos that we are making; otherwise it is difficult to justify the cost. People like to make their own videos for YouTube and other outlets, and this competes with the company's videos, but it may have promotional value.

The future of downloading includes videos. I was talking to the head of one of the major publishing companies about how frustrating it is that sometimes we can't get our music or videos on our iPhones. Well, that's not the fault of iTunes or others. The problem is that record companies and music publishers have not been able to cooperate to decide on a statutory fee that would allow this. Imagine if every video that's ever been made was available on the video iPhone now. The record companies will have to pay a little more than they want and maybe the publishers will receive a little less than they want but to me it is such an embarrassment that the heads of these companies – and we've got really bright people in those publishing and record industry associations – haven't been able to get some kind of a rate to do this. The net effect is that for years now videos have not been

available to be downloaded. Since I'm in the record business I have to take some of the blame. We haven't been able to strike a compromise and this results in everybody getting hurt: the songwriters, artists, record companies and the publishers. A lot of the loss of control is our own fault because if we don't offer something to the consumer legally and then make the experience easy and the price fair, then we are contributing to our own demise.

The publicity department has the responsibility of contacting newspapers and magazines to set up opportunities for our artists to get exposure through stories in the media. Publicity is also the art of making the world aware of what all the other departments are doing while participating in the overall marketing strategy. A good publicity department works in tandem with the marketing and sales department and presents the message the artist or the record company wants to communicate.

Distribution is an ever-changing system of getting the finished recordings into the hands of retailers in the most efficient way. Historically, it has been important to have an efficient manufacturing and warehouse system that allows people working for distributors to pick, pack and ship those records over the rails, through the air or on trucks to the various outlets around the country that sell recordings. Although this system has been in place for a number of years, it is possible that future distribution may no longer be warehouse intensive and may no longer involve trucks or shipments of any kind. If some of the forecasts about the internet are correct, there may be no inventory to store in warehouses. In fact, there may be nothing more than a central file of recordings that are available to numerous stores or individuals.

Legal downloading services like iTunes or streaming services like Spotify can go directly to customers. Even retail stores may have kiosks that allow listeners to hear recordings and then purchase them in some downloaded form from a central source that controls those recordings. Today, many people only obtain their music from mobile devices and some music is not available in the physical format.



CHAPTER 28

The Future

At the beginning of the 21st century, the conventional record business model was a distributor with a manufacturing facility, warehouses for storage, sophisticated ordering procedures and methods of getting those records to stores. In the case of smaller stores, we had middle men, called rack jobbers, who racked recordings in mass merchandisers or took them to independently owned retailers, known as Mom and Pop stores. Today, there are sophisticated buying centers or distribution units. The most significant is Anderson, now known as AEC, located in Knoxville, Tennessee, which supplies the bulk of the Wal-Mart stores in America. AEC has been transporting those recordings to all the Wal-Mart stores, because AEC envisioned a day when there will be a synergy between a customer going to a Wal-Mart store, buying a record and then, as a bonus, being able to download something additional from home.

Through the years, the music industry has become more of a business. In the early days a lot of people got into it because they loved what they were doing. There are still people in the music business who love what they do.

But as this industry has increasingly become owned and controlled by multi-national corporations, it has progressively become a business defined by return on investment and earnings increases that impact stock prices and other things that do not always lend themselves to creativity and the creative cycles of artists.

That creates an inherent conflict in running a record label – how to balance hard-nosed business decisions with the fact that we are dealing with creative people engaged in creative endeavors. Running a record company involves dealing with this conflict on a daily basis. While other business executives may concern themselves primarily with managing a large organization, creating a structure that maximizes profits and cutting costs through downsizing and effective management, the record company executive must concern himself or herself first and foremost with signing and developing artists, because the profits of a record label ultimately depend on artists who can sell large numbers of recordings.

Every record company has learned that each year its biggest artist(s) account for a disproportionately large share of its earnings. Each year there will be one, two or perhaps three artists who create the bulk of the company's profits. Obviously a bigger catalog of previous recordings which have sold well meant that a company could be less dependent on a superstar artist. However, when all is said and done, the successful independent companies almost always had two or three artists who were responsible for the bulk of their volume.

In the past, a label could thrive on the album sales of superstar acts; however, with the sharp decline in physical sales because of downloading and streaming, labels have to examine other types of

contracts other than those where the only income a label receives comes from the sale of recordings. Labels have looked at the business structure of managers, who receive a percentage of income from every revenue stream created by the artist. Since a label provides the promotion and marketing for an artist to become successful, it is natural that labels look at participating in the entire income pool of an artist because the label, to a large extent, has made it possible for the artist to have a large income. These contracts are called “360 contracts” because the label is involved in all revenue streams of an artist instead of just one.

Record companies already perform a major part of the management function with many artists. When an artist succeeds, there are numerous people willing to provide the management services for that artist. However, during the years prior to an artist succeeding, much of that responsibility falls on the record company and the personnel within the record company. When the artist goes through three or four records that don't hit, it is necessary to try something new. The artist must try something different or maybe the artist has a better idea than those at the record company. When an artist succeeds, there are many people willing to provide that function until they are almost tripping over one another. The question is, should the record company participate in some of those other areas outside of record sales? Well, everyone agrees that record sales have dropped substantially and it will be impossible for a record company to succeed in the future unless they are also involved in the merchandising, perhaps the concert revenues or some percentage of that, and music publishing revenues. The day will come when it won't make sense to invest in a recording artist if the company isn't in a position to participate in the merchandising and the

concerts. There is a tremendous move at present time within most of the record companies to utilize the 360 contract that allows the record company investing in an artist to participate in all of the revenues, rather than just record sales.

The first step in running a successful record company is to find artists who have the potential to generate sales and sign them to the company. Labels sign acts for what they hope will be a mutually beneficial endeavor: If the act sells well, both the artist and the label make money and the act's "value" increases, creating a demand for their personal appearances and other revenue generating endeavors.

However, we have to acknowledge the fact that when we sign an artist, none of us know if we will get a hit record.

Then, if we do get a radio hit, whether that will translate into huge record sales, average sales or in some cases no sales at all. Sometimes a record goes into the top five or even all the way to the top of the singles chart but sells nothing. At other times a record comes along and barely hits the top 20, but it launches the career of an artist. "Gentle On My Mind" by Glen Campbell barely reached the top 30 – it was released twice – so it was never a big hit on the charts, but it launched an album selling career for an artist who sold millions of albums. On the other hand, I can name numerous records that went to number one but the artists were never heard of again.

This process of signing an artist to a label begins with an artist contract negotiated between the label and the artist. I have always believed that the most important provision in an artist's contract is the royalty rate, or the percentage they will earn from the sale of their recordings. When I signed my first contract as a recording artist back

in the 1960s, I received three percent of 90 percent and I am not sure I ever understood what the 90 was for. Later, I understood that the label paid me on 90 percent of the records sold to account for things like breakage, packaging costs, free goods and returns. The artist's contract has evolved and now most artists are getting four to five times what I received when I signed my first contract. I can assure you that recording artists make a lot of money when they have big selling albums.

Other important elements in an artist's contract are commitments to do an album – or multiple albums – provisions for videos, commitments for advertising, participation of the label in the artist's merchandising, concert income and income from sponsorships, which are all important to an artist. The most successful artists I signed began with simple contracts; conversely, some of the artists that I felt had the potential for future success were not signed because their representatives wanted contracts that were too complicated or too risky for us. We need to be able to see success at some level with an artist before we want to commit to spending more money on an act.

Because of the economic issues in the current music industry, we recently signed an artist and made only a commitment to record a single. However, less than 60 days after we signed that contract, we did a video on the act and started on an album, although those commitments were not in the original contract. There was another act, which we intended to sign but did not because negotiations broke down after their attorney required so many commitments in their contract that we did not know if we would be able to honor all of them. It is difficult to decide what commitments to make to an unproven act which has the potential, but no guarantee, of future success. One

of our biggest artists did not have a provision requiring any videos in his initial contract, but we have since made about 20 videos where we fronted the costs. Those payments for videos came after the artist had proven himself with successful singles on radio. There is no guarantee that past success assures future success for a recording artist.

We had an artist who had success in the past with a contract that required us to make multiple videos if we executed his option. Artist contracts are generally structured so that at the end of a year, or perhaps at the end of fulfilling certain commitments such as releasing an album, the label has an option for renewing that agreement for another term. When we looked at the commitment in this artist's contract for multiple videos, we had to face the fact that the video channels on television no longer aired many individual videos by artists because the TV channel's programmers were doing more special programming. This made the video commitments too expensive to be cost effective so we did not renew the option.

Through the years, we have learned a valuable lesson about contract options. If the price of those options is too high because the artist's representatives have put too many goodies in there – video commitments and other requirements – then the label may reach the point where they cannot exercise the option to continue working with this artist because it will cost the record company too much. This affects the ability of the record label to make a profit and that, in turn, may cost a recording artist his or her opportunity to have a label contract.

From the record label's perspective, an artist's contract must contain the right to copyright and own the master; this is done through a work for hire provision and/or an assignment or sale of the rights.

One of the reasons I wonder if record companies as we know them are going to be around in ten years is because there is a movement where some artists want their masters back from the label. The music industry is a copyright industry – the record companies own the recordings and the publishers own the songs. Without record companies, artists would never have a chance to record and be marketed on a national scale. This means that if we gave artists a release from their contract every time they succeed, we would have no future business from catalog sales and thus no income to fund the new artists who are coming along.

The most important factor in negotiating a contract with an artist is to have the goodwill and cooperation of the artist. In many ways, it is like being a family. I have a lot of friends who have good relationships with their children and some who do not. I have friends who have two children and they have a great relationship with one but not with the other. Over time, some of those relationships heal and some do not. Recording artists are the same way. I can always find a time when each artist is really happy and another time when that artist is unhappy. I have to be careful how I handle the unhappy times. I have seen artists who left our company after their contract ended but told me later that they enjoyed the time we worked together. That is very meaningful to me.

Some artists we sign to a recording contract do not write songs while others do. There is a tendency for labels to want to find artists who write their own songs because this assures a label there will be a continual stream of material for the artist to record that will hopefully reflect the image of that artist. However, sometimes an artist who has not written songs will be signed to a label and, after

they are signed, will decide to become a songwriter in addition to being an artist.

One of the most feared statements that any record company hears is when they have an artist who became successful from recording songs by major writers announces “I am going to write all the songs for my next album.” The label did not sign that artist as a singer-songwriter and yet somehow the artist reached a point where they felt a need to write the songs they sing.

It is difficult-if not impossible-to fathom why an artist decides to write songs when he or she is not a songwriter.

Perhaps one reason is that some critics and fans feel that artists are not authentic if they do not write their own material. I do not feel that way. In every musical genre there are a handful of singer-songwriters who can consistently deliver hits. Toby Keith, Vince Gill, Neil Diamond, James Taylor, Taylor Swift and Bob Dylan are some examples from the past and present. There are other artists who occasionally write or co-write one of their songs, but that does not make them a true singer-songwriter, although I am sure that some artists feel that in order to be complete they must be a singer-songwriter.

The greatest artists have been the ones who may write some of their hits but also record songs from other songwriters. Johnny Cash is a great example, Cash was a poet who wrote great songs like “I Walk the Line,” “Folsom Prison Blues,” “Get Rhythm” and “Give My Love To Rose” and yet he recorded “Ballad Of A Teenage Queen” or “I Guess Things Happen That Way” which were written by Jack Clement, or “Sunday Morning Coming Down” written by Kris Kristofferson, or “A Boy Named Sue” written by Shel Silverstein or “Ring Of Fire,”

which was written by June Carter and Merle Kilgore. A lot of Johnny Cash's biggest hits were written by other writers and yet this is the man who wrote "I Walk The Line," "Cry, Cry, Cry," "Big River" and "I Still Miss Someone." To me, a great artist does not have to be a great writer but if that artist is a writer-artist and open to recording the songs of others – that is having the best of all worlds.

A publishing company always seeks to invest in songwriters, so publishers sometimes sign singers who, after they receive a recording contract, are then encouraged to write songs. That way, the publishing company is assured of getting six or seven songs released on an album, and perhaps some singles. At this point, the publisher makes an agreement with the singer-songwriter that if the artist writes, perhaps six songs which are included on their album, they will receive an advance of X amount of dollars. The artist signs that agreement and then the record company receives an album with four or five good songs and six songs written by the artist that are perhaps not as good.

At Curb Records, if we sign an artist who has already signed with a publishing company, at least we have entered into the situation knowing we have signed a singer-songwriter. Over the years that generally has not been a problem and there have been some great singer-songwriters like Bob Dylan and Neil Diamond. However, if we sign a songwriter who is signed with a publisher, we will have protections in our contract saying that we have mutual approval on the selection of material. If we sign a singer-songwriter to our label who is signed to our publishing company, we know we do not have a problem because we are not going to force that writer to have songs on

their album just because we own the publishing rights; we are more interested in the overall picture.

A new artist is usually introduced to consumers through a single. A successful artist must consistently release hit singles in order to stay on top and that makes the issue of picking a single a touchy one.

There are some major label contracts where the artist is the only one who picks the single; we do not have that provision in any of our agreements. Most of our contracts have a provision where there is a mutual agreement about the single that will be released. However, I believe that, at the end of the day, the record company should have an important role in picking the single that will have the potential to be a hit on radio.

Having said that, let me add that if the label can pick the single the artist wants, or if the artist feels he has chosen his own single, the label will get more cooperation from the artist in promoting that single. I can probably count on my fingers the number of times that Curb Records has released a single that an artist did not want released. In almost every instance it has not been good for the relationship between the label and the artist and their representatives at the time. In about half of those instances, that situation has resulted in a very good decision for our company and the other half of the time we probably wish we had not disagreed with the artist. That's the record business!

I will also say that I would not be in business today if I had not been willing to occasionally disagree with an artist when I thought he or she was wrong. At the same time, I would also not be in business today if I had not been willing to compromise most or all of the time in order to get the best results.

Recently, an artist on our label was upset over the choice of a single, but we felt it was the only choice we could make because radio was already playing the record. She sent her manager and attorney to try to change our decision. I was so sure of this record, but I had to listen to the artist, her attorney and her manager. This was painful for me because all three of them are friends of mine and I do not like to be disrespectful to my friends. Several weeks later, after the record had become a hit and was the most requested song in her show, she sent me an e-mail saying “I’m very sorry that I gave you such a hard time on that single. You were right about it. I am really, really sorry.”

I don’t believe the artist knew how much that apology meant to me. It takes a big person to do that. On the other hand, I can think of artists on our label who would never write me a letter saying “you were right about this – I was wrong.”

Sometimes I have to be ready to say “You were right and I was wrong.”

Have we made mistakes? Of course we have. The times have changed in the industry. It used to be a sales driven industry and the major country charts for country singles in *Billboard* are still very influenced by airplay. This means that if radio programmers start playing a song from an album, it becomes a single, even though the record company and the artist might not want that particular song to be a single. There is nothing that can be done about it. Many an artist has told his record company, “That’s not the single I want out” while radio was already playing an album cut. Nevertheless, that’s the single that radio chose to play!

We had that happen two or three times with Tim McGraw. In a couple of cases, that unsolicited airplay came at times where there were

singles he wanted out that were important to him. For example, on July 4th of the year when “Please Remember Me” was a big hit, radio began playing “Something Like That” with its lyrics, “barbeque stains on my white t-shirt.” Well, Tim wanted to put out “My Best Friend,” which was a tribute to Faith, for his next single and he wanted to sing it on the CMA Awards Show. The idea that another song came out bothered him. Our promotion staff tried to convince radio not to play it, but radio stations continued. Finally, I had to call Tim’s representative and say “We can’t fight radio – let’s let radio play ‘Something Like That’ – they’re going to play it anyway and if we fight it we are just going to keep it from being a hit. Let’s do it quickly so Tim can sing ‘My Best Friend’ on the CMA Awards Show in October. Then Curb will release that record by the end of the year and everything will be fine.”

Would Tim have preferred that the record company continue to fight releasing “Something Like That?” Maybe, but we knew “Something Like That” was an up-tempo song and we knew the song it was following, “Please Remember Me,” was a ballad. “My Best Friend” was also a ballad, but we knew that Tim was such a big star that radio stations would play his new ballad while the up-tempo song was still playing.

Was that the decision that Tim would have made at the time? Maybe not. Was it the right decision? As it turned out, radio did embrace “My Best Friend” after he sang it on the CMA Awards Show and he ended up having a hit with all three records. So in retrospect, it seems like the right decision.

Nearly the same thing occurred on Tim’s hit single, “My Next 30 Years.” Radio selected it from the album but Tim said at our meeting

that Faith thought he sounded too old when he sang it. Personally, I thought it made him sound young because I believe every woman wants to hear “in my next 30 years I want to spend more time with my wife.” That’s what I told him at our meeting. However, Tim had a new song, entitled appropriately “Things Change” that he wanted for his next single. He debuted the song on the CMA Awards Show and was terrific when he sang it live. However, radio did not want to play it, even though we tried hard to promote it. Instead, radio wanted “My Next 30 Years,” so we went with that recording because, if we had not, it would have stopped in mid-chart and that would not have been good for Tim’s career.

I think that decision may have damaged my relationship with Tim. but I was convinced it was the right thing to do. I believe that 95 percent of the time, Curb Records and Tim McGraw agreed on the decisions that were made. I believe the same was true with Sawyer Brown – 95 percent of the time we were in sync. How many relationships last for many years with a 95 percent rate of agreement? Unfortunately, the public only hears about the few disagreements.



CHAPTER 29

The Business

A record label does not deal directly with an artist on all business decisions because most artists have managers who handle the business of an artist's career. It is important to have good relations with artist managers because they are an important part of the music business. I have dealt with a number of artist managers through the years and I have learned that managers vary. Some feel they have to micro-manage every aspect of an artist's career, and perhaps that is necessary in isolated cases. However, in terms of the record business, the best artist managers are the ones who work hard to encourage and inspire the record company's departments to work for their artist.

Those artist managers inspire the publicists, the marketing department, and the sales department to promote their artist. They have the ability to convince their artists to make appearances surrounding the release of a record and are able to commit their artists to do "meet and greet" events for key members of the media, particularly personnel at radio.

The best managers are the ones who have a vision for their artist; however, many artist managers find themselves being "yes men" to

their artists. This is not necessarily the manager's fault because it may be a situation where the artist only wants to hear how great he is. When all is said and done, the best manager is one who has the respect of his artist, the way Elvis Presley respected Colonel Tom Parker. Whether I agree or disagree with Colonel Parker, I have to admit that he could make commitments for Elvis Presley, and Elvis would do what he asked. The way I look at it, Colonel Parker was right much more than he was wrong and Elvis became the King of Rock & Roll.

Some artists believe a good manager should be confrontational, but I do not believe a manager should have an adversarial relationship with the record company. If that is the case, I will not get personally involved. I have never conducted my business in that manner and if a manager is adversarial toward me, I do not ever meet with him again. If a meeting is necessary, I will have other people meet with him. The same is true with adversarial lawyers or accountants. I have worked hard enough in my life that I do not need to put myself in awkward confrontational positions. I believe that as I treat people, they should treat me and I always try to be respectful to people.

As a record label, we often have to communicate bad news to an artist. Sometimes there is information that tells us a particular record we thought was going to be a hit is not going well and we are losing it on the charts. If the artist has a tour scheduled, the manager, agent and artist are all going to be upset. We may be in a position where we can make them happy with a couple of positive statements, and perhaps our promotion department can obtain a couple of positive movements on behalf of the record, but we know that it is impossible to turn some records into hits. It is difficult to call someone and say

their record is not happening because it can create negative feelings. However, the situation may be reversed by releasing another single that does become a hit.

The question usually arises, “why won’t the manager tell the artist the bad news?” At our company our advice is to have the manager inform the artist, but unfortunately, managers can usually be fired at will by the artist, which sometimes leads them to avoid giving bad news and turns them into “yes men.” Agents who book artists on personal appearances have to sell a number of artists to promoters. They feel a need to tell the artists what they want to hear. If the agent works with many different artists at many different levels of stardom and does not know which ones are going to have a hit and which ones are not, they do not feel they can risk giving bad news.

Unfortunately, the buck stops with the record company because if the record is not a hit, everybody will know it. They will know it when they pick up *Billboard*, or when they talk to a radio station. It is very rare when there is not an artist’s manager or attorney or agent agitating an artist about the record company. The day this stops happening will be the day when we are no longer in the music business. There is never going to be a time when each artist is content with everything that his or her record company does. I remember Sammy Davis once told me, “if you say too many nice things about my manager I’m going to fire him because he must not be doing the job right.” That is a common thread throughout the music industry. Artists often feel they need their manager, lawyers, and agents to be the tough guys for them, to make sure they are getting their fair share.

Some have suggested that with all the changes in the music industry a record label may no longer be necessary because an artist can record an album, upload it on the internet, and it will be available to everyone all over the world. However, I adamantly believe that the function of a record company has always been and will always be necessary. Depending on the artist and the genre, the involvement of the record company in the future may be different, but with respect to the functions of a record company, developing the artist, financing the artist, promoting the artist (in some cases for many years before they have success), selling the records and marketing the records, that function will have to be done by someone-and I believe it will be a record company.

There are only a handful of artists who can market themselves like a record company does. Many times it's an artist at the end of his or her career. In other cases, it's an artist who enjoys doing that sort of thing, and enjoys doing the promotions and marketing. A good example of an artist who enjoys that type of thing and is really good at it, is Garth Brooks. He enjoys creating unique marketing concepts and does it very, very well and then backs it up with great promotion and television appearances. He has managed to acquire his entire catalogue. Then again, Garth Brooks is the kind of guy who has made a lot of things work that other artists have not been able to do because Garth Brooks is the biggest artist in our industry, and maybe the biggest male artist of all time, in terms of his sales.

Some have suggested that the artist management companies of today will be the record labels of tomorrow. However, I could count on the fingers of one hand the number of managers I have met who

I believe could run a record company. Certainly under the right circumstances and with the right investment, some managers could run record companies. Some lawyers who are in the industry could run record companies and some agents and managers who are in the record industry could run record companies-but they would all be exceptions. At the same time, I believe some of us who run record companies could also work as agents or managers, but those different parts of the industry require different skill sets and abilities because they are doing different jobs. In terms of whether record companies will exist in the future, if you look over the history of the music industry from the very beginning right up to today, you'll see that there is a need for some entity to provide the functions and responsibilities of the record company like we've seen for over a hundred years.

In today's corporate world, a bottom line must be projected. One of the reasons that major record companies have trouble as subsidiaries of major corporations is because they release hit recordings and their earnings go up so their stock goes up. The next year a top artist does not deliver an album or does not do well, so the parent company has to take a loss when they expected a profit. Most businesses seek to have a steady uphill climb in income because people who buy stocks want to see a consistency in that stock. There is no guaranteed consistency in the record business.

Curb Records has had over 300 number one records over a 50 year period and that looks like consistency! However, five of those number ones might have been in one year but the next year we might not have had any and then the following year we might have had eight. The record industry is not a precise business. Companies that

make widgets can be consistent and are able to judge how many can be shipped and sold. A recording by an artist can be a huge hit, and the same artist can do everything the same way for the next release, but the record might fail.

The bottom line is that there has to be a bottom line because we can only get to the next year if we have the cash flow and/or profits from the prior year. We have to take the cost of our marketing, our overhead-including our employees-the cost of recordings, manufacturing, factor in the returns, and at the end of the day show a bottom line profit. If we have to give discounts or lower our prices, then we have to lower our overhead, lower our marketing and recording costs. The musicians' unions do not have a provision for taking a lower amount for the recording of records when there is a bad year. The studios do not reduce their prices and manufacturing facilities do not reduce their prices either. And I have never met an employee who wanted a smaller salary than he received the previous year. Costs do not go down and, that being the case, we have to generate increasing profits while dealing with a myriad of issues – including the national economy – like any other business. If retailers have low sales during Christmas season, then records will also sell less.

Costs to market an album and artist are actually increasing each year because record companies now have to pay for all forms of access to consumers. Record companies have always had to pay recording costs, the costs of their staff and marketing costs, but now we have to pay to be stocked and displayed in a retail store. Record companies are also being asked to take over the costs of radio station promotion that used to be absorbed by the radio stations.

The recording industry has been impacted by government legislation that has affected the culture of the recording industry. It is government regulation, government legislation and FCC decisions that have created a situation where there is no longer a limit on how many radio stations a company can own. We have seen a few companies buy literally thousands of radio stations because of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, which totally changed the culture of radio. Where there used to be three country stations in a town or city, there might now only be one. There tends to be more formats of more genres, but each genre is making less impact than it used to because there are fewer significant stations playing the music of each genre. That is certainly true of country music! This genre has fewer significant stations playing this music today than it did in the 1990s.

Today, instead of a local owner, or someone like Gordon McLendon in Texas who owned several stations, there is massive control of radio stations by a few owners which leads to music becoming more compressed. Radio stations cannot play as many records or take as many chances, so the music goes more to the center rather than coming from the left or right, and as a result, country records tend to sound more and more alike. Think about the great innovation in country music from Garth Brooks in the early 1990s, or Shania Twain in the mid-1990s, the Dixie Chicks in the late 1990s, or acts like Tim McGraw, LeAnn Rimes, Wynonna, and Jo Dee Messina. They are artists who had multi-platinum albums in the 1990s that were perhaps a little left of center. Today an artist like Lee Brice has the ability to do that, but it is difficult to achieve those sales because of changes in our industry. An artist as successful as Taylor Swift felt that

she had to leave the country genre and become a pop artist in order to achieve her goals.

During the mid-1990s there were artists who sold in excess of five million albums and could, essentially, carry a label. In other words, those artists made enough money so the label could have a full roster of acts. We had that happen with acts such as Tim McGraw, LeAnn Rimes and Wynonna. Today, there are not many artists who can sell five million albums in the entire industry. In order to be a successful, mid-sized record company like Curb, it's necessary to have ten artists who can sell enough albums to be profitable. By that I mean selling a minimum of 250,000 units, on up to 500,000, which is "Gold," or a million, which is "Platinum" or, in the case of downloads, well over a million copies of singles. Many people don't realize that it takes 1,500 streams to equal the income for one album today.

There is a certain skill needed to run a recording company, tied to an understanding of what a hit record is and how it is created. If anyone ever tells you that he or she has all the answers to this, you need to be careful.

The music business is a business that has learned the art of putting in a recorded form a song by an artist which combines the singer's voice, the song, and the musicians on the recording session – which includes the recording studios, engineers, and arrangers. The art of mixing the recording is to manipulate the levels of sound from each instrument and the voice so that it sounds blended when played back on a car radio or home stereo. If the recording is a "hit," that means a customer will want to listen to it again and, hopefully, purchase it. The record business is an art that is marketed in an open market economy

and only those who understand the art in the context of this market can succeed.

Sometimes a major record company will reach a certain level of success in terms of the artists who are there, but may not generate as much profit as corporate owners want. This may lead corporate executives who oversee the record label – and a record label is only one division for a major multi-national corporation – to bring in someone from outside the industry. The incoming executive is often successful initially because he or she will drop artists who are not selling and keep artists who are selling. This will cause the bottom line to increase in the short term. However, that executive may find that two or three years down the road there have been no new artists who have developed.

I have seen that happen after a record company has brought in someone who does not come from the music business and does not understand it. The person running a record label does not have to be musical. Some really good executives in the music industry are not musicians. Look at Clive Davis; he is not a musician but he is an excellent record and music executive. Whether his success is attributable to talking to a lot of different people and synthesizing that information or whether it is because he has “great ears” – or some combination of those two – I cannot quarrel with the success he has had over the past 50 years.

Being the head of a record label involves making day-to-day business decisions, being an administrator, managing employees, and working well with a creative community that provides artists, songwriters and songs.



CHAPTER 30

Motivation

A key to succeeding in business is the ability to motivate people to do their best, day after day. The first step is to find the right people as well as the right combination of people. They must be good at what they do and want to constantly improve. Those are the ones to trust. It is important to find executives who are willing to admit when they are wrong; if we cannot admit our own mistakes and do not know our own weaknesses, then we are never going to know our strengths.

When I make a mistake, I admit it. If I am a producer and I believe there is someone else who can do a better job with an artist, I am willing to let that other person do it, because then I am building a company. If I believe that I have to do it all by myself, then that is unfortunately all I will be able to do and therefore I will be in the unfortunate position of having to rely only on my own skills. But if I place a value on the skills of others and realize that others can do things better than I can in numerous areas, that's when I can build a business. My real job is keeping people motivated and having a purpose in their work.

It was important for me to grasp an important lesson: Even if I own the company and have complete control, I should not get involved

in what I do not know. I do not want to be a know-it-all and I do not try to impress people. Instead, I try to keep learning because in that way I will progress in what I do.

I believe that at Curb Records we have the best people in A&R, starting with our current CEO, Jim Ed Norman, and our Word CEO, Rod Riley, and our Vice Presidents of A&R, Bryan Stewart and Josh Bailey. I also know that most of the people in our company are better than I am in their particular areas of expertise. I am not a great marketer so when I see someone who is, I respect him or her. If I have respect for that person there is a better chance of him or her staying with the company. We have to show that respect in a number of different ways, not just monetarily. For example, Dennis Hannon (Executive Vice President at Curb Records) has done a great job over the years and has trained younger executives such as Jeff Tuerff, Benson Curb, Josh Thompson and Blair Munday. Dennis, Jeff, Benson and Blair have developed a professional marketing and sales department that has allowed Curb Records to compete with companies that are much larger than we are. The same is true with regard to our General Manager, Taylor Childress, and our promotion department, under the leadership of Ryan Dokke and long-time national promotion executive Mike Rogers. Sr. Director, RJ Meacham, Directors, Lori Hartigan, Brooke Meris and Samantha DePrez and Coordinator, Jessie Lowe. In addition, over thirty employees have been with our company for 15-50 years or more, including Dennis Hannon, Aaron Bowlin, Drew Alexander, Colt Murski, Micha Ligon, Jeff Edmondson, Kathy Flanigan, Benson Curb, Bryan Stewart, Jeff Tuerff, Blair Munday, Mike Rogers, Tracy Moore, John Nemoy, Becky Judd, Tanya DuReaux, Courtney Childress, Stacey

McDonald, Candice Fults, Craig White, John Butler, Dick Whitehouse, Rod Riley, Josh Bailey, Doris Bratcher, Shana Van Matre, Robbie Clinton, Dusty Wells, Samantha DePrez, Sean Hannon, Christy Robinson, Eddie Francis, Harley Hatcher, Jerry Spurgeon, Pearl Spurgeon, Pedro Vigil, Maria Vigil and Carole Curb Nemoy, who still serves as president of our international music and film divisions. Carole is married to Dr. Norman Nemoy who is a founding partner of Tower Urology at Cedars Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles. Norman has become a close friend and an advisor to me, and has been a wonderful mentor to our family, not only to John Nemoy and Laura Nemoy Duggan, but also to Norman's and Carole's daughter Caroline – we are very proud of her business success. In many cases, individuals such as Pedro and Maria Vigil have made the complete transition from California to Nashville and are like members of our personal family.

In order to motivate people, I must make sure that every time they try something different or try something special, whether its creative marketing or creative recordings, they should be aware they may be contributing to the culture of Nashville and to this nation. What is exciting about the music business is that we can impact the culture for generations to come, particularly if we find the right artist and the right song. When we create a record that people enjoy fifty years later, that is making an impact on culture. It excites me when I hear many people taking credit for a hit because it takes lots of people to make a hit.

While I am running a record company, I do not know what issue is going to appear on any given day. It could be anything from the tax accountants calling to tell me there is a new tax rule that says I cannot do business the same way anymore, or it could be a representative from

a publishing company telling me the song I want for a particular artist is not available.

As the head of a record label, the hardest thing to do is to stop dwelling on all the worrisome things that are happening in the music industry that are beyond my control. For example, I cannot change the fact that the major record companies are consolidating and merging. I realize that radio stations are consolidating too, and that thousands of record retailers have closed. I have to accept the fact that free file sharing and internet piracy has drained our profits and that the pricing structure for recordings is being set by mass merchandisers, internet downloading, streaming and other things that may come in the future.

The key, I think, is to focus on what I can control, not the things I cannot control. In order for me to move forward each day, it is necessary to spend a portion of my day on industry issues. Major decisions must be made on inventory, or whether we want to conduct our business a certain way with radio or whether we will accept new policies imposed on us that will cause us to re-price our product. It seems like almost every day I have to negotiate with our major distributor to get them to honor our contracts and pay us, and most of all, allow us to exist.

There is no question that the majority of the employees at every record company – including Curb Records – still want to do business the same way they have always conducted business. That means find an artist, find a song, make a great record, manufacture it, send it to radio, promote it, have it become a hit, make an album, put the album out, follow that with three more singles from the album and when those singles are all finished, make another album, put out four singles from the new album and when those four singles are finished, make the next

album.

Along the way, we must deal with the day-to-day issues of managers, booking agents, and artists-such as how do we get the artist to complete his or her album on time? We want artists to be on tour, but can they take a month off to make their album?

We have people in our company who handle all those issues that we have dealt with during the last 50 plus years. We have people doing publicity, marketing, radio promotion, artist and repertoire experts, finance people, and attorneys. Most of those people want to do business the same way they have always done it, but they can't because we live in a different world today.

Artist managers, especially, want to do business the same way. Most managers would like for the record company to pay for most of the costs for promoting and marketing an artist. However, artists now derive more money from their concert tours, and other activities such as major commercials, than they do from sales of their recordings unless we have 360 degree agreements involving participation in other income streams, such as touring, publishing and merchandising. A record company will only earn money when a recording is sold, so record companies have to be careful what they subsidize as physical sales fall.

Obviously the record companies must advance the recording and marketing costs for an album, but I believe the record company of the future is going to have to be very careful when paying for costs that are not directly related to the product they are selling. That means that labels will be saying "no" sometime instead of "yes" to the requests from managers and artists. That is not good for a record company's relationship with its artists, the artists' managers, agents, attorneys, or accountants.

Attorneys must also learn to do business a new way. In many cases, small entertainment attorney firms have merged with larger firms. They have rented space, hired employees, incurred overhead and are used to billing a certain number of hours at a certain rate. Although there may not be as many new artist contracts to be signed, they cannot give up the profession which they have worked so hard to establish. Still, many attorneys come to the label wanting agreements that the label will record an album, that it will be recorded and released within a certain period of time, that there will be monetary advances from the label to the artist for that album, and that a certain number of singles will be released from each album.

The internet business is a singles driven business where people buy one or two titles from an artist, although there are examples such as Outkast, Alicia Keys, Norah Jones, Adele or Tim McGraw where the artist has been able to connect in such a way that people feel the entire album is a good experience. Those are enjoyable albums to listen to in their entirety; however, successes like these are the exception to the rule. By and large, the internet customer appears to be more interested in downloading a single or at least putting their own collection together. I am pretty much that way as a consumer. One interesting area that is being explored by some companies is called bundling, which refers to adding other items to an internet album in order to induce the consumer to buy the entire album. This can involve adding video clips, artist interviews, special promotions, live performances and other things that are not available on the physical album sold in stores.

We are learning from the internet that there are a number of artists who have only one or two songs that people like; instead of downloading

albums, people are putting together their own compilation albums comprised of a variety of acts and songs they like. Many major artists are upset by this because they feel the creativity involved to put their albums together is being compromised. Some artists are still concerned about record companies compiling greatest hits albums. They don't realize that if we don't do it, the consumer can go to iTunes, Amazon or Spotify and put together their own greatest hits compilation.

As an industry we must decide our strategy for creating a profitable business model for downloading individual songs. Labels know that consumers should be allowed to download individual tracks but there are some major acts who resist the idea of consumers downloading single tracks instead of an entire album because those artists feel they have worked hard to create and structure their albums so they do not want single songs pulled away from the album.

Artists often go back and forth about what track should be third on the album, or what track should open or be last or which track should follow another track. After all those creative decisions, along comes the internet generation, which takes the first track, the third track and the eighth track, reverses the order, and puts it on its own compilation with four other artists that the download has created – ignoring the artist's creative vision. Nevertheless, artists and record companies have to remember why we are in business - the fans and consumers are always right.

For the past forty years, the popular music industry has been an album industry. Consumers have purchased albums so this was the way recording labels structured their business. The album was created by Columbia Records in 1948. At that time it was a 33 1/3 rpm vinyl collection of 10 to 12 songs and sought to replace the old 78 rpm records

that had a song on each side. The album initially became significant because of Broadway musicals, classical music and easy listening music primarily aimed for adults. The early rock & roll business was a singles business, presenting songs on the 45 rpm single developed by RCA. It was not until the Beatles hit in 1964 that rock albums regularly outsold rock singles. From that point forward, rock & roll consumers have preferred to purchase an album of their favorite act, rather than just the single. Recording labels have used the single as a promotional tool to receive airplay, which created demand for the album.

The downloaders and the streamers have turned back the clock, preferring singles to albums, or rather preferring a collection of singles on an album, which is now defined as a collection of tracks. The recording labels charge about \$10 wholesale for a physical album, which covers a variety of costs, everything from the normal overhead of doing business – rent, salaries etc. – in addition to the marketing and promotion of a recording artist. These can be costly buys of advertising, tour support and record production as well as payments to songwriters, publishers, and artists. If the industry shifts back to a singles business, the record label will have about 60 to 70 cents per single to cover all these costs.

This is an interesting issue because if there was anything that had disappeared at the beginning of the 21st century, it was the commercial single. Most of the major charts, like the ones in *Billboard*, have based their computations for charts of singles on the airplay of records, as opposed to sales. Fortunately, now sales are factored in, and total consumption, including downloading and streaming, are factored into the charts as well.

During the first few years of the 21st century, record companies cut back on their release of commercial singles to the point that most

retailers rarely stocked commercial singles. The reason was that large record companies learned during the past 40 years that if somebody loved a single, they would buy an album. That is a major reason why the internet was so difficult for the record companies to initially understand. The internet works on the practice of consumers liking a single so they download that single. The consumer then puts that single with singles by other artists, mixing artists, labels and songs. This confounded the industry at a time when the industry was cutting back on the release of commercial singles and retail rarely stocked singles. The problem was exacerbated by the fact that there were file sharers illegally downloading recordings. The consumer received singles for free and justified it by saying the internet was the only place they could find them. From this angle, it looked like the record labels and retailers had not been attentive or responsive to the market.

The whole issue of free downloading from the internet came at a terrible time for the recording industry. When the compact disc was introduced to the United States in 1983, the record labels thought they had finally found a solution to piracy, which, at that time, consisted of consumers copying records on tape. There were no CD manufacturing plants in the United States, and only a handful in the world. There were few computers on people's desks. The internet was a government creation used primarily by the defense department and research laboratories; the worldwide web had not been created and few people had an email address. Frankly, most people did not understand digital technology or how the internet worked.

It was not until 1999 when a young college student, Shawn Fanning, created Napster that the recording industry finally became

aware of how revolutionary the internet could be to our business. Since that time, problems and opportunities have exploded and multiplied. What cannot be denied is that the internet has become the delivery system of choice for most young people wanting to hear or possess music recordings. This has caused frustration on the part of young consumers and endless problems and opportunities for record labels. For the recording industry, it was almost like being hit by a meteor.

For the most part I have to say that the record industry saw this coming. They saw the internet downloading when it started with Napster, they saw this illegal activity coming and no one in the industry knew what to do, including me. The RIAA tried suing, at the urging of the major labels, and there were court victories and other victories through law enforcement but no one figured out how to completely stop illegal file sharing. We lost control of that and I personally believe the industry needs to continue doing whatever it can to try to stop it but it is equally important to make legal downloading and streaming easier. Now that the mobile telephone can download music directly we have a chance to regain our position through legal downloads provided that we can continue to find ways to better monetize streaming and other delivery methods.

Because of those developments, there are nights when I do not sleep, trying to figure it all out. It is not only figuring out how to capture and control this technology, but how to cut my overhead when it involves people that I like and changing patterns of doing business that people are used to doing.

Whenever there are terminations of employees from record companies, and artists dropped from labels, there are opportunities for small independent labels. Curb Records is not small enough to

take advantage of this because we carry too much overhead. A small company that can put its money into new artists rather than into built-in overhead will flourish. There are certainly opportunities for independent companies when big companies are consolidating and dropping artists.

It is important to realize that there are small independent companies evolving which are comprised of people who are not set in their ways and who have no preconceived notions about how business should be done. Those small companies can take an artist and do exciting things via the internet to market them. Meanwhile the established labels are spending time and resources trying to figure out how to consolidate overhead so a profit can be made with an existing business structure.

This period of time when we are dealing with streaming audio and downloading music reminds me of when tape first came in many years ago. Companies like GRT and Ampex were signing up record companies for their tape rights and some labels took big advances and made deals but then found themselves locked into contracts that had very little return. By that I mean some companies took a big advance and just a small royalty on tapes. Well, that was fine when tapes represented two or three percent of the business, but when tapes represented the majority of the business, those record companies received a small percentage per sale. Other companies stayed on what I call the gross margin model, which is when they sell recordings at full price less a distribution fee.

That is how we do our physical record business. We pay a distribution fee, we pay for our manufacturing and then we have what is left to run our business. The companies that stayed on that method for tape found that when tape came in they had the same kind of margins

on tapes that they formerly had on records because tapes were selling for more. The same was true in the internet world. There were all kinds of deals originally offered to us to sign for this royalty or that royalty and of course at that time the internet had accounted for a small (though growing) part of revenue. We turned down several internet proposals because they did not have a gross margin formula that would give us enough cash in the event we were successful. We were fortunate to have young interns and employees who were educated in our colleges and programs at Belmont, Vanderbilt and Fisk. They made me aware of the importance of keeping our digital rights to our recordings separate from our physical recordings, which allowed Curb to take the major step of directly distributing all of our digital product through our own digital distributors, including downloads and streaming.

At the beginning of this century, Warner (my distributor) was upset at Napster. At that point, they allowed me to keep all of my digital rights. A few years later, when iTunes started, Warner tried to place some of Curb's music on iTunes, saying that iTunes only wanted to work through the major distributors and that may have been true. However, my contract clearly said Curb had all digital, download and streaming rights. Thanks to Steve Jobs (head of Apple and creator of iTunes) and great work by my attorneys Jay Bowen, Amy Everhart, Tracy Moore and John Nemoy, we prevailed during another tough year with Warner. Today we have over 50 non-physical distributors and this means that we have our own digital distribution system and that one distributor can't hold all of our money. The most important thing for future record entrepreneurs to understand is that you can't let all your income pass through one large distributor.



CHAPTER 31

The Accident

The opportunity to take part in the negotiation to purchase Word Records in 2001 was one of the most exciting moments in my life. My first record after graduating from high school was released by Word Records, and I had a long history with Word, going back to the beginning of Contemporary Christian music. I did not realize at the time that the Warner Word negotiations might kill me.

Word Records had negotiated with Provident, another gospel label, about a purchase or merger in 2000 and I knew those negotiations had broken down. However, things heated up around April and May of 2001 because Gaylord, which owned Word, changed management and brought in Colin Reed as President and Mike Rose as Chairman. That happened abruptly and during the latter half of 2000 I had informed Roger Ames, Chairman of the Warner Music Group, about the opportunity to purchase Word Records.

I talked to Roger about the synergies of Curb and Warner buying Word together because I knew it did not make sense for me to buy it alone since I am not a distributor or a manufacturer. My thought

was that Warner Bros. would want the manufacturing and distribution and I could be involved in content. I'd had a good relationship with Roger Ames for many years – he had owned London Records, which distributed our label in Great Britain before he joined the Warner Music Group.

I was serving as Chairman of the Board of Vanderbilt Children's Hospital and was leaving my home one day for a Board meeting when the phone rang. I did not want to be late because I was chairing the meeting so I hesitated, but then answered it and it was Irby Simpkins, former publisher of the Nashville *Banner* newspaper who had sold his home to me. Irby asked, "Mike, what are you doing tonight?" I told him I was on my way to Vanderbilt Children's Hospital for a Board meeting. He asked me when the meeting ended and I told him it would be around six o'clock. He told me he would pick me up at quarter to six to take me to dinner with Colin Reed and Mike Rose, who were just appointed CEO and Chairman of Gaylord which owns many hotels, including Opryland and many other holdings. I never imagined that someone could handle this situation as fairly as Colin Reed did. He continues to amaze me with all the great things that he has done for our community.

I went to dinner with Mike Rose and Colin Reed and Reed told me that Gaylord was thinking about selling Word and other assets. They mentioned Acuff-Rose Publishing when they talked about "other assets." They knew about my involvement in the Christian music business in Nashville and I told them I was very interested and had been working on a proposal with Warner Bros. to purchase Word Records. They informed me that Warner Bros. had contacted them as

well, which surprised me, and said that Warner wanted to distribute Word's records. I told them I did not believe it would be a very good idea to make a distribution deal because if they were going to sell, whoever bought the label would probably want Word's distribution.

I called Roger Ames after that dinner and asked him, "If we're going to buy this together, why are you contacting Word about distribution?" He told me he'd had a chance meeting in New York with Mr. Gaylord's son. Roger said that after this encounter he thought they had a chance to do a distribution deal with Word, which would help with negotiations for the purchase of the company. Roger then asked me why I had stopped the distribution deal and I replied that because I was his partner, he should have notified me of his intentions. If I had known this was part of a purchase strategy, I obviously would not have stopped it. Nevertheless, I felt I had given Gaylord honest advice.

During the following two week period I spoke to executives at Sony, because Gaylord said they did not want to talk only to Warner Bros. I talked with several others as well, then Roger called and said "We've thought about it and we'll do this agreement to purchase Word with you." Warner and Curb then made a bid to buy Word together and that bid was accepted by Gaylord. After the acceptance, I received a call from a friend who said, "Are you sitting down?" My friend told me that he had learned from a reliable source that Warner Bros., by itself, was going to make a bid against the existing Warner/Curb bid.

When I received confirmation that Warner had bid against Warner Curb, I allowed myself to become upset. I quickly placed a call to Sony and asked if they wanted to reconsider their bid because, if they did, Sony and Curb could purchase Word. During this period I spent long

days working and was not sleeping much. I had lawyers on the phone, sometimes four at a time – our own lawyers and Gaylord’s lawyers. I was trying to figure out how to buy Word even though my wife said to me, “Why all of this fighting? It doesn’t seem like a positive thing for us.”

One night about 11 p.m. I was at home talking on the phone with multiple attorneys from the West and East Coasts regarding Warner and Word when my wife, Linda, walked in and said “Your face is flushed, you’re exhausted.” So I promised I would come to bed. She was in the shower when I finished the call and walked into the hallway, collapsed and fell, pushing my head through the plaster wall. I created a hole in that wall!

I was out cold when my wife found me on the floor outside the bedroom. I was transported to Baptist Hospital to intensive care and the diagnosis was syncope, which means your body becomes exhausted and for a split second shuts down. I went through every medical test imaginable and they all determined that I did not have any serious medical problems. However, while I was in the hospital I made a promise to myself that from that point forward I was just going to help Gaylord sell Word and that is essentially what I did. I did not take any percentage from that sale.

After the sale, Malcolm Mimms, who did a fantastic job handling the sale of Word, called and asked for help with his contract under the new arrangement and when my friend, Barry Landis, was offered the job as President, I sat with him on a Sunday for four or five hours and helped him with his negotiations. I also helped Mark Funderburg, President of Word Distribution, who played a major role in the success

of both Word and Curb Records.

After the sale of Word I decided that I no longer wanted to be with Warner Bros. because I felt that I could no longer trust them. I felt like I was betrayed by Warner and it was not healthy for me to stay with them as Curb's distributor so I began talking with Sony about a distribution agreement. First, I was going to establish a gospel label with them and utilize some of their old catalog – like the recordings they had in their archives with Mahalia Jackson – as well as issue some new albums. Then I was going to move Curb distribution from Warner over to Sony. I had constructive meetings with Tommy Mottola, head of Sony Records, and Paul Russell. Everything was moving along smoothly but my agreement with Warner Bros. did not end until 2002 and I needed to give them six months' notice.

During the week of July 4, 2002, almost exactly a year to the day after I had my "accident," I was close to finalizing the agreement to move my distribution from Warner Bros. to Sony. I was scheduled to go to New York to meet with Tommy Mottola, Paul Russell and the top Sony worldwide executives to enter into the final contract stage. I have had a long relationship and a wonderful personal friendship with David Murdock and I was on the Board of his Dole Food Company for almost 20 years. Our annual Board meeting was coming up later in July so I said to my wife, "Why don't we go into New York and get settled – we can see the fireworks from the hotel – and I'll have my meeting the next day with Tommy Mottola and the various Sony people." My goal was to finalize the contract and get it signed. Those contracts were in my brief case with just some minor changes necessary to complete the Curb/Sony agreement.

During the meeting with Tommy Mottola, who had been President

of Sony for 15 years, he said “I’ve always wanted to do business with you but I want you to know there’s going to be some major changes in this company. A lot of people that you’re working with now won’t be working with you in the future. You’re a friend of mine so I want you to know that.” This revelation jolted me.

Tommy was honest with me so I asked, “Are you saying I shouldn’t leave Warner Bros.?” And he replied, “No, I just want you to be aware of this. In fact, I don’t even know if I’m going to be here.” Sure enough, a few weeks later Sony announced that a thousand people were going to be cut and Tommy Mottola left the company a few months after our meeting.

I continued to negotiate with Sony until we had finalized almost everything. We had attorneys on the phone who were going to make final changes in the Curb/Sony agreement and get them to me the next day. I was concerned about the meeting with Tommy but pleased with the terms of our new contracts. I left the Sony office and went back to my hotel about six to take my wife to dinner. My older daughter had called us at the hotel about something that had come up and we ended up being late for our dinner reservations. While we talked to my daughter – the conversation lasted about 40 minutes – the other phone in the room rang. I picked it up and it was Roger Ames.

I asked Roger, “How did you know I was in town?” And he said, “One of my spies told me you were at Sony today.” Then he said, “I’d like to talk to you. Could you come over? I want to explain all that’s happened.” I won’t reveal what my wife said about me going over to Warner Bros., but I promised we would have dinner after the meeting.

I went over to Roger’s office around 6:45 and he said, “Mike, would

you like to know why I did the Word deal without you?" I said "yes." He told me that he felt that because I wanted Word so much, if Warner Bros. bought Word I could be enticed to sell half of my company, Curb Records, to Warner Bros. in order to get half of Word.

I informed him about my accident at home and that if I had fallen about a foot further, I would have gone over the banister and might not be sitting in his office. I admitted that I wanted Word and wanted it badly but also told him that I was so far down the road with Sony in our negotiations that they were scheduled to send me documents that evening which could be executable. I'd had a meeting with Tommy Mottola and finished a three-hour meeting with their attorneys and they had agreed to most of our changes. I informed him that I might have the contracts waiting for me when I returned to my hotel room after dinner.

Roger looked at me and said, "Mike, all the documents for the extension of your distribution agreement with Warner Bros. are right here." Part of my deal to jointly buy Word with Warner Bros. was that I was going to extend my distribution agreement and those contracts had been completed but not signed. Roger said to me, "All the Word documents, exactly the way you wanted, are also right here. Dave Johnson, our chief legal counsel, is going to talk to you and if there is any issue bothering you, I'll fix it. I want to sign this tomorrow. You'll be our partner with Word and Chairman of the Board. We want to extend your distribution agreement with Warner Bros. and do your manufacturing. If there is anything else you want, let me know."

Fortunately, our L.A. office was still open because, although it was about 7:30 in New York, it was only 4:30 in L.A. I faxed those Warner

documents to Tracy Moore, our chief legal counsel, and she phoned our outside legal counsel, Tom Sherrard, and Dick Whitehouse at home. I spent the entire next morning going over the Warner documents and that evening my attorney called and said, “You won’t believe this but Warner Bros. made all the changes you wanted.”

That night the chief legal officer at the Warner Music Group, Dave Johnson and Roger Gold, two Warner Bros. executives whom I trust, came to our hotel room and my wife was the witness as we signed the documents for the extension of the distribution agreement between Curb and Warner Bros. with the agreement where I became a partner and Chairman of Word Entertainment.

After the agreement was signed, I reflected about the past and the time when Word did not pick me up as an artist back in 1963 or when Reprise, which became part of Warner Bros., did not pick up my option as an artist in 1964. I recalled when I might have been disappointed by a decision that did not go my way, I did not yell, scream, or fight with any of the people who made those decisions. In all three cases I tried to stay positive. I still respected Roger Ames, particularly his ability to understand the entire world record industry and his vision for the future. In other words, when I was cut out of the Word deal, I continued to help Gaylord sell the company, otherwise there would have been bad feelings everywhere. The Warner people may have thought I was trying to destroy the agreement. It was July of 2001 when I went through that wall and it was July of 2002 when I was put back into the Word partnership with my new distribution agreement with Warner Bros. That was quite a year, and I have to thank Colin Reed for his incredible leadership skills that made it possible for me to become

a partner in Word and later acquire the entire Word company.

I do not want to blame my accident totally on the protracted Word/Curb negotiations because I was also dealing with a lot of other difficult issues involving some of our top artists. However, there is a hole in the wall just outside my bedroom that is still there. My wife refuses to have it repaired because she wants it to serve as a reminder of what can happen when you try to live your business 24 hours a day. I learned that no business day should last more than 12 hours.

Maybe that hole in the wall is what it took to remind me that I am supposed to stay positive. I am not saying that I handled everything perfectly but I am saying that I read the signs. The common element in all of the major issues during my lifetime has been trying to turn negatives into positives by letting time pass, staying positive, not being vindictive and suppressing my anger as much as possible. That's a lesson I learned. Did I learn it the hard way? Did I have to go through a wall to realize it? Yes, I did. But if I can save someone else from going through a wall, then I have done something worthwhile.



CHAPTER 32

Word Records

In addition to those major events in my life there was a major event in the life, of this country that occurred during the same year as my accident. I was supposed to be in New York on September 11, 2001 because we were working on the acquisition of Word Records by Warner Bros. and were scheduled to examine the books of the company on that Tuesday in New York at the Deutsch Bank, which was across the street from the World Trade Center. On the previous Friday, Gaylord said “no more bids for Word Records” because they had narrowed it down to Sony and Warner Bros. The next step was to examine the books in New York because both were serious bidders and I was talking with both Warner Bros. and Sony about the possibility of acquiring Word Records. Later that day, Warner Bros. received an extension from Gaylord in order to formalize its bid.

Donna Hilley, head of Sony/Tree Publishing was involved with the Sony bid and left for New York on Friday to spend the weekend there. I was going to fly up on Monday morning but Warners did not have its bid ready until later that day. Late Monday night, Malcolm

Mimms, the head of Word at the time, called and told me he felt the bid from Warner Bros. was going to be too low for Gaylord. Malcolm was unhappy with this situation so I promised I would call Paul Robinson, the attorney for Warner, first thing the next morning, which was Tuesday, September 11, 2001. Paul has been an important part of every Curb/Warner contract through many administrations. He has an ability to hold things together and stay calm even under the most difficult circumstances. I was on the phone with Paul in his Warner office, discussing the bid and what we should do when my wife came in the room and said her mother had called and for us to quickly turn on the television.

I turned on the TV while still on the phone but did not mention anything to Paul because it looked to me like a small plane or helicopter had hit the World Trade Center. I had always thought something like that might happen and often wondered why planes had not hit the Trade Center, particularly in bad weather. As I watched the television I suddenly realized that this was very serious and told Paul to turn on the television in his office. He replied that we should finish the conversation but I insisted, so he turned on his TV. Then an announcement came from AOL-Time-Warner telling everyone to immediately evacuate their office. Paul said, "I think we'd better stop talking now." I will always remember what I was doing on the morning of September 11, 2001, the same way I remember the day of the John Kennedy assassination.

Despite my respect and good relationship with Paul Robinson, it has often been difficult to get to the point where Curb no longer has to negotiate for the basic performance of our distribution agreement with

Warner. Another example: in addition to the iTunes Warner issue and the Word purchase negotiation, we had an issue involving the language in the Warner/Word/Curb contract. The clause in the agreement clearly stated that Warner would not charge an administration fee to Word/Curb for Warner employees. As it turned out, Warner was charging Word/Curb for an additional fee that in fact did include Warner employees, in the form of an administration fee. The contract also has a clause that I would advise anyone reading this book to never allow in any agreement. That clause allows a larger company, such as Warner, to invoke an accounting firm chosen by both sides to interpret the contract in lieu of an attorney. The problem with this clause is that an attorney would interpret the exact language, which is obvious, and we don't want to be negative, but it is difficult to find an accounting firm who isn't interested in future business with a major company such as Warner. The accounting firm obviously thought this was okay even though the language clearly said otherwise and Warner charged fees to Word/Curb for its own employees. The good news is when Warner tried to include that provision years later in our Word/Curb purchase negotiation, I said "No" and it was not included.

On June 12, 2015 I received a letter that I never expected to receive, offering me the opportunity to purchase the remaining 80 percent of Word Entertainment that had previously been owned by Warner. We began a difficult negotiation that lasted over eight months and concluded on March 1, 2016 with Curb now the full owner of Word rather than Warner. Obviously, there were all kinds of normal acquisition issues regarding system changes and other transitional issues that both parties worked hard to resolve. Just like the issue we faced with Warner

many years before involving our digital distribution, six months after our deal was signed, Warner's Nashville CFO sent a document to Word CEO Rod Riley which, if signed, would have transferred several million dollars of Word Entertainment's income to the print company that Warner was in the process of selling. Fortunately, Rod did not sign the document and alerted our attorneys who were never copied on the document. Once again a large company like Warner tried to obtain an income stream from a smaller company. The result was many months of pain because services and monies owed to Curb were withheld by Warner.

Once again, after well over a year of Word negotiations, and transitional issues and the issue involving Warner withholding my money, my health was affected and I had to undergo a bronchoscopy because doctors found something in my lung. Fortunately, it was not cancerous, but it required me to avoid tension and pressure to prevent my health issues from becoming worse. Warner continued to argue that even though the income stream they desired was listed as one of the assets we were acquiring, they agreed there were clauses in the contract that negated the clear language of the agreement. The pressure from all of this, in addition to all the other issues that we were dealing with at Word and Curb Records, created a circumstance where I had to have a second bronchoscopy less than two months later on October 13. It was performed by a specialist in Dallas, Texas. Again I was told not to fly and avoid tension or high pressure meetings. As it turned out, the next day my wife and I had agreed that we would be back in Nashville to babysit our grandkids because their parents had to be out of town for several days. I had people flying in for meetings all day

Monday and we met all day Tuesday with the very talented head of our Christian distribution company, Ed Leonard. and the CEO of Word Entertainment, Rod Riley. On Wednesday of that week the Warner lawyers, including my friend Paul Robinson, were in Nashville for long meetings at our attorney Jay Bowen's office regarding the income stream and other issues. My mother's 96th birthday was October 19, and I left late that afternoon for California where I stayed until my mother died on November 10. I was unable to follow my doctor's advice to avoid stressful meetings, but these issues show that when you've owned a company such as Curb Records for over 50 years, it's hard to separate the business issues from your personal life and health issues.

In the future, I hope that I can avoid other accidents involving Warner and Word like the ones I've had involving the negotiations during the first seventeen years of the twenty-first century.



CHAPTER 33

Curb Records – *Billboard* Christian Imprint Of The Year

*“God Bless The U.S.A.,” “Three Wooden Crosses”
and “I Can Only Imagine”*

When there is a war, there is going to be a patriotic record that is a hit. I remember sitting at home with my wife when the war in Iraq broke out and on the TV, while the tanks were rolling, they played “God Bless The U.S.A.” by Lee Greenwood. I remember saying to my wife, “That’s our version of ‘God Bless The U.S.A.’” a song that was originally a hit for another label. Lee left that label and signed with Curb, where he re-recorded “God Bless The U.S.A.” in stereo. We had never released that version as a commercial single so I immediately made phone calls and the next day that record was shipped and on the market. It went to number one on both the *Billboard* pop and country sales charts.

Right after patriotic music hits, there is not an immediate return to mainstream music so that becomes a good time for inspirational music, like “What The World Needs” by Wynonna, “Three Wooden

Crosses” by Randy Travis or “I Can Only Imagine” by MercyMe. Curb Records was involved in all three of those hits.

The story of “Three Wooden Crosses” goes back to the early 1980s while I was in Washington serving as Finance Chairman for the Republican National Committee. I attended a special tribute to publisher Bill Lowery in Atlanta where I met the Congressman from Savannah and told him that I had been born in that city. The Congressman invited me to Savannah for a “Mike Curb Day.” I thought, “Wow, that’s pretty impressive” but when I arrived in Savannah I realized the real reason I had been invited was to hear the son of the Congressman’s Chief of Staff, Doug Johnson, who had a band. Doug was a teenager who wrote songs for his group; I signed them to Curb and we released a single that did not hit and I forgot about this young man and his band until the late 1980s. By this time, Doug had found a Georgia artist named Doug Stone, whom he produced for Epic.

We were considering signing Tim McGraw so we asked Doug to produce some sessions on Tim to determine how he sounded in the studio. Doug was producing John Michael Montgomery, who had hits for Atlantic Records. Doug was doing so well that he was named the head of A&R for Epic Records, which meant that he could not produce Tim. After Doug joined Epic, we saw each other occasionally and then he became president of Giant Records and hired away my top three promotion people, all on the same day. It was a jolt so I called Irving Azoff, who owned Giant, who promised that he would do me a favor sometime in the future in order to make amends for what Doug had done. That “favor” was paid when Irving granted permission for Don Henley to be included on the *Coyote Ugly* soundtrack.

I did not hear from Doug for quite some time but one day he called and we had lunch. His situation at Giant did not work out – the label folded – and Doug had come to the realization that he did not want to run a record company again; instead, he wanted to go back to A&R and write songs. I had decided to start a second label, using the name Curb/Asylum, so I hired Doug Johnson as head of A&R, and signed him as a songwriter as well. The very first song he wrote under our publishing arrangement was “Three Wooden Crosses.” I did not know Randy Travis was considering it for a single until Barry Landis, president of Word, called and told me. I had become Chairman of the Board for Word and the Randy Travis album would be the first release on the Word/Curb label. Doug Johnson had not heard the Travis recording when I told him about it during an A&R meeting. He said “That’s my wife’s favorite song,” and took my only copy of the recording home with him.

The song was released as a single, became a hit in the Christian field, then crossed over and became number one on the Country chart. It won the Country Music Association’s “Song of the Year” in 2003 as well as the “Song of the Year” for the Academy of Country Music. I don’t know if there has ever been a crossover from Christian music to country, I can only think of Ferlin Huskey’s “Wings of a Dove,” which had a Christian message. I do not know of a record that started in the Christian field and crossed over to country; I only know that it had never happened on Word.

“I Can Only Imagine” had been a Christian hit but the single was pretty much over and the follow-up album for the group, MercyMe had been released. One of the pop stations in Nashville was playing

“I Can Only Imagine” a little and had received a good response, but there was a general belief that a praise and worship record could never cross over to the mainstream and pop market. A “praise and worship” song is vertical, meaning it speaks directly to God. That is different from a regular gospel or Christian song, which is horizontal, meaning it talks about God or about a person’s relationship with Jesus.

I had a good relationship with Jeff Mosely, president of INO Records, MercyMe’s label, so we offered to go into a co-venture with that single, album and artist to promote it pop. I felt the song had a wonderful message for the returning soldiers but never did I dream that it would go all the way to number one on the Pop sales chart like it did. That was one of the most exciting moments in the history of Curb Records. The album went multi-platinum as well.

We released a humorous song by Ray Stevens that was both witty and patriotic soon after 9/11. Ray’s career as the writer and performer of witty, insightful songs goes all the way back to hits like “Ahab, The Arab,” “Gitarzan,” and “The Streak” as well as beautiful ballads such as “Everything Is Beautiful.” After the tragedy of 9/11, when America discovered that Osama Bin Laden was behind the attack on the World Trade Center buildings, Ray came up with “Osama Yo Mama,” which became a hit on both the country and pop charts. Several years previous to this, we released a video package of Ray Stevens performing his earlier hits and that video became triple platinum. After “Osama Yo Mama” hit, we added this video and released the package on DVD.

On Donald Trump’s Inauguration Day, January 20, 2017, we released our *Make America Great Again* album. I am so proud of the

great patriotic hits that Curb brought to America. We put them all together on one album, including “God Bless The U.S.A.,” “I Drive Your Truck,” “If You’re Reading This,” “America Will Survive,” “Change The World” and “It’s America.” The album debuted in the Top 40 of the National *Billboard* Country Album Sales chart.



CHAPTER 34

Problems in the Music Business

In 2003 I had the first significant financial loss that I had ever experienced in all the previous years of owning a label. That loss was not because our music was not doing well; it was because there were fewer people buying records in the conventional form and more retailers returning records because stores were going out of business. Stores continue to go out of business because they cannot compete with the illegal file sharing and other cultural changes that are affecting our industry.

In the future, the economy, the stock market, and all the economic indicators will go up and down but we will experience fewer jobs in the traditional music industry and that is because this is a very technologically driven recovery. The problem is that we are living in an age where it is not necessary to ask someone else to help; people are being trained to help themselves on their own computers. Will they need to go to a grocery store? Will they need to try on a suit if they want to buy it? There will always be people who want to do it that way but I would not be surprised if the internet devises a way to somehow do that. A car can be bought over the internet and the buyer can learn

everything he wants to know about it, although I'm one of those who wants to drive the car first. I want to try on a suit before I buy it. I like to feel a CD in my hand and if I am looking for something in a music store, I like to browse through a record section. However, I do not think there are going to be many people doing that in the future.

The biggest problem we faced in 2003 was the decline in the sale of recordings. That may have been the fault of the internet or retail's reaction to the internet, or various other factors, like the rise of video games and other competitive products. However, the fact was that brick and mortar stores were closing and they were returning inventory. That was not totally new because inventory management and return rates have been one of the biggest negative issues in the record industry during my entire career. It was customary that ten to twenty percent or more of all records that were shipped to a retail store were returned. The record label had to subtract those returns from sales, which entailed a lot of costs.

In the future there will be specialty stores in each city, but there won't be a record store in every mall or a record store on every corner. As those stores return the product they have not sold, it will be like the dynamic we experienced when we had to take back every cassette we did not sell because the CD had taken its place, or when we had to take back eight track tapes because the cassette replaced them.

In the future, new companies will come in with four or five employees and they will be able to move faster, smoother and often in a more challenging way – or at least a more innovative way – because they can take risks while the larger companies are trying to be profitable by cutting costs. That means that each year there is going to be more

morale lost at record companies as more people lose jobs because many of them are not trained for the technology that is required in this new internet world.

The people who grew up studying on computers are going to be better suited to quickly understand these systems and it is going to result in a total change in the industry. Every single record we have out now had to be replaced by a digital form. Curb Records has about a thousand current albums – each one with ten to fifteen tracks – and every one of those copyrights had to be re-licensed. Every one of those masters had to be transferred to a digital format that allows people to download. There had to be codes set – ISRC codes – for every mix. If there is a record with ten different mixes or a record that has been edited three different times for shorter versions and longer versions, each one had to have a different code and had to be downloaded by that code.

It's not unusual in our business to find a promotion person who says, "My job is to promote records to terrestrial radio on the West Coast; here are the 50 stations that I cover; that's what I've done for 40 years and that's what I want to do until I retire." Those people often have deep relationships there and are the right people for that job. Convincing a person he should also visit with an internet provider or should explore YouTube, or Satellite radio often becomes difficult. It isn't just the heads of the record companies who have to rethink all of this; the employees have to be open. It's not age related; some of the older employees are more excited about this phenomenon than some of the younger ones, but the younger employees tend to have a more natural way of moving through the new media because they've

come up through it and they understand it, and it's been a part of their lives. It isn't something that they have to learn how to do because it's something that they have grown up doing and that they do with their friends, so it comes naturally.

That means almost every person in a record company is or will be doing a different job today than he or she was doing just a few years ago. Since we are dealing with human beings we find that some adapt and some do not. I cannot get complacent and I am always reminded of the saying, "When you get tired of running the human race, there's someone standing there to take your place."

The recording industry is worried about the internet in terms of the free file sharing. However, if we ever master the internet and utilize it properly, and if it is as successful as projections say it will be, then the internet may allow us to have an inventory-free industry.

As a record company, we have to work every day to re-license every song from a copyright standpoint, re-license from a third party source if the license is inadequate, get ready to re-tool our systems, get everything digitized. We have people working harder than they have ever worked in their lives while we have others who are saying "there's no job here anymore." The big question from record companies is that when we get all of this done, will there be a way for people to buy our recordings or will consumers continue to find ways to get them free?

The major reason for the massive layoffs in the music business is that there is a projection that as the traditional brick and mortar industry meets the digital download legitimate industry, the traditional venues will shrink in number and perhaps disappear. Every time a

young techie solves the mystery of a protected CD, we get closer to that reality.

The record industry has been unable to figure out a model that allows it to keep the same kind of resources it had in the past. A legitimate internet business has evolved that will replace some of the brick and mortar models but the prices for recorded product may be so low and the margins may be so small that it will not allow a major label to have 5,000 employees, or an independent company to have 100. In the future, a major label may have 1,000 employees; an independent may only have 25 employees.

Historically, Americans have known that the economy vacillates; it will be great for a while and then it will go down. If the economy is doing great it can be assured that someday it won't and if the economy is doing poorly, some day it will do well. The stock market will go down, then it will turn around and go up. The best people in the stock market are those who have been through three or four downturns because they understand that.

Normally, an economic recovery results in more jobs. In terms of the music business, this means there might be prosperity on the internet in some form for music but it might not go via the record companies. It is possible that some artists can figure out how to put their own creative work on the internet without the investment of a record company. There might be inexpensive marketing tools using the internet, but the traditional record company model might not be doing it.

Those involved in the recording industry tell me I won't really know how good a job I have done with recording artists until they are

no longer with me. That's like the difference in talking to daughters when they are teenagers or when they are in their mid-20s. They have a different perspective later than they might not have had in their teenage years. Hopefully, they might say nice things about me at my funeral where they will have a perspective based on the totality of my life rather than a particular moment when I might have said no to something that made them unhappy.

As a record company owner I have to look at artist relations that way, otherwise I will stay awake all night because the things that some artists or their representatives say or do can make me feel very low. The way I look at it, an artist is part of our family and just as children need a parent at the beginning to help them with their needs, an artist needs a record company. It was a wonderful time in life when our kids needed us. On the other hand there were many times when they did not need their parents. If they were at a party with their friends the last thing they wanted was for their parents to be present. There are times as parents when we are not needed or wanted at all. It is the same with recording artists. Today, your family and your artists are tweeting to their friends and fans every day. There will be some positive and negative tweets and it is impossible for everyone to be happy 365 days a year. Abraham Lincoln famously said, "You can please all the people some of the time and some of the people all the time but you can't please all the people all of the time."

Until each artist writes a book, we won't know what he or she thinks about our relationship in its entirety. We all need to do our job and continue to turn negatives into positives. We need to let time pass and at the end of the contractual relationship hope the artist feels

positive. A company is like a family. Its people do not realize how much the company cares for them until many years later when they reflect on the complete relationship.

I have never thought of selling anything that I have acquired. I still have every 45 rpm record that I ever bought and still have every master that I ever recorded and every song; I would not think of selling my portion of the song “You Light Up My Life” because I feel it would be like somebody cutting off one of my fingers.

Part of that goes back to the experience I had early in my career when, as a condition of joining MGM I merged my assets with that company. At the end of the four-year MGM relationship, I had a difficult time getting my assets back and, as a matter of fact, I did not get all of them back. I was fortunate because that was very early in my career, when I was in my 20s. Since that time, anyone who has ever tried to buy my assets has found that I was not interested in selling.

I consider myself lucky to have learned early on that when I sell my assets for stock I take a risk of losing all my assets. I do not regret having done that back in the 1960s because it was a valuable lesson for me. That’s why I have not done it since and that is why Curb Records is not for sale. An incredible example that I have never discussed before this book was written occurred at the beginning of this century. Warner tried to buy Curb Records with AOL/Time-Warner stock. They made me feel at that time that I would someday be a billionaire. The stock was selling somewhere between 200 and 300 Dollars a share and they were projecting even more. Well, fortunately I did not sell Curb Records, and I waited for the AOL/Time-Warner stock to drop to almost 10 Dollars a share and then I bought a large amount of AOL/

Time-Warner stock at that low price. Since that time, Time-Warner has spun off Time-Warner Cable, AOL and even Time. They have also sold other assets, including the Warner Music Group which has had five different owners during this century alone. Ironically, Time-Warner is selling what's left of itself to AT&T for over 80 Billion Dollars. I have to give credit to the current CEO of Time-Warner, Jeffrey Bewkes, who recently said that the AOL/Time-Warner Merger was "the biggest mistake in corporate history." Even more ironic is that I used some of my profits from my Time-Warner stock to purchase Word Records from Warner, where I acquired over 35,000 masters and 35,000 songs and many great artists, employees and excellent real estate holdings. I love America.



CHAPTER 35

Curb in the 21st Century

*Rodney Atkins, Steve Holy, Hank Williams Jr.,
Tim McGraw, LeAnn Rimes, Wynonna,
Jerrod Niemann, Mo Pitney, Clay Walker,
Kimberley Locke, OBB, Natalie Grant, Lee Brice,
Dylan Scott and for KING & COUNTRY*

As Curb Records moved into the 21st century, I realized that during the 1990s we had moved away from being a multi-format label and needed to return to our roots. We remain heavily involved with country music but increasingly now look at R&B, pop, rock and Contemporary Christian music as important parts of our company. We also continue to work in the international market and soundtracks.

Roger Ames used to be our distributor in England when he owned London Records, before he became president of Polygram, then took over as president of Warner Bros. He had been responsible for helping us break “How Do I Live” by LeAnn Rimes and other records on our label internationally. Roger called one day and asked about a joint venture between Elton John’s label, Rocket, and Curb because he thought it would help solidify LeAnn as an international artist and be

good for Elton domestically. That is how the duet of Elton John and LeAnn Rimes performing “Written In The Stars” came about. The song came from *Aida*, the Broadway musical for which Elton and Tim Rice wrote the songs. That record was a worldwide hit.

We released the soundtrack to *View from the Top* in 2003, a film starring Gwyneth Paltrow and Candice Bergen. Michael Lloyd, Michael Behymer and I wrote the title song for the movie. Michael Behymer is an incredibly talented musician and the father of Micha Behymer Ligon, who works for Curb Records now and previously taught my daughter, Megan, in high school, inspiring her to become a teacher. Micha has become a wonderful mentor to our family and will hopefully be with Curb Records long after I am gone. The single from the album was “No Sign Of It” recorded by Natalie Grant, a Christian artist who won the Dove Award for “Female Artist of the Year” in 2005, 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2012. Her recording of “Held” propelled her album to the point where it reached gold record status, which is rare in today’s Contemporary Christian music business. Over the years, Natalie became a GMA five-time Female Vocalist of the Year and set a new standard of achievement because of her incredible talent and work ethic. In 2017, Natalie started the year with her number one record “King Of The World”.

Soundtracks continue to play an important part in the history of Curb Records. In 2003 we released the soundtrack to *Legally Blonde 2*, which starred Reese Witherspoon, a Nashville native who attended the same high school as my daughters. The title song for that soundtrack was recorded by LeAnn Rimes; also on that soundtrack was a recording by John Lennon, one of the first times a recording by him had been approved for a soundtrack album. We also released the soundtracks to

Angel Eyes (Jennifer Lopez) and *Driven* (Sylvester Stallone).

We had international success with Kaci Battaglia, a teenage pop artist who we signed after she had been on a Disney Christmas special and in movies released on video. Her single “Paradise” and two follow-ups were top ten records in England. We were amazed in 2009 when Kaci decided to continue recording by creating a significant, cutting edge pop/rock hit “Crazy Possessive.” Kaci went on to have two *Billboard* number one dance records, including “Body Shots” which was a duet with rap superstar Ludacris.

Michael English is an incredible vocal talent who dominated the Christian music field and won six Dove Awards from the Gospel Music Association in 1994. However, shortly after the awards ceremony, he announced his withdrawal from the Christian music industry, which would not stock his albums in Christian retail outlets and pulled his songs off Christian radio stations. I knew he was an incredible singer so we signed him to Curb Records as a pop artist. His first album was *Healing* and the single, “Healing,” was a duet with Wynonna. His second single was “Your Love Amazes Me,” which became a top ten hit on the *Billboard* Adult Contemporary chart. Michael then moved back into the Christian field with his successful *Gospel* album.

Tiffany Arbuckle was the lead singer of a band called Plumb and they had Christian hits on Essential Records. When her contract ended we were fortunate enough to sign her and she began recording for us as a solo act, still using the name “Plumb” when the band broke up. Her first album for us was *Beautiful Lumps of Coal* and her single, “Sink-n-Swim” did well on Contemporary Hit Radio and Adult Contemporary. She had a single, “Real” for us and there could not be a better word

for Plumb because she is the real deal. That song crossed over from the Christian to the Adult Top 40 chart. Plumb has now reached the number one position with songs such as “Hang On” and “Need You Now” and has achieved international success. Plumb also made her mark as a songwriter, writing “Day By Day” for Point of Grace and “Wrong” for Kimberly Locke. Nate Sallie is another Christian act who is “the real deal.” He had opportunities with several record labels but something always fell through before he signed with Curb Records.

I signed Nicol Smith after meeting her in a Nashville restaurant where she was our waitress. I went to see her perform at a Baptist Church in Nashville where she was performing with her brother, Todd, and Allan Hall. There had been problems completing her album so when I saw the three perform together, I was knocked out and told them, “This is just too good – let’s make this a trio.” The three came up with the name Selah and their first album won the Dove Award for Best Inspirational Album in 2000; their next album won the Dove in that same category. Selah had a big hit with “You Raise Me Up,” which was originally a song on an album by Brian Kennedy on our British label. Phil Cokell, formerly the head of our international office in London, heard the song and told Bryan Stewart in our Nashville office about it. Stewart suggested that it would fit Selah and they agreed and recorded it on their album *Hiding Place*. That recording exploded and debuted at number one on the SoundScan Christian chart.

Todd and Nicol Smith are the grandchildren of missionaries who were killed while serving in Africa. Their children – Todd and Nicol’s parents – went back to Africa to finish the work of their parents. During their time in Africa, Todd and Nicol were born and grew up

learning an African language; sometimes they sing in that language. Nicol is now married and her name is Sponberg and she records successfully as a solo artist for Curb Records. Selah added Amy Perry to the group and we recently presented them with an award for selling four million albums. I am proud that Todd and Allan graduated from the Mike Curb College at Belmont University in Nashville and even more amazed at how Selah continues to grow and inspire their fans across our great country.

Kimberly Locke finished third among the three finalists for “American Idol.” The first two, Reuben Stoddard and Clay Aiken, received recording contracts but she did not. Fred Bronson at *Billboard* told Bryan Stewart “You guys like great singers and this artist could be one. I believe she would really complement your label.” Bryan called me about Kimberly and sent over the video clips of her singing on “American Idol.” When I finished watching those clips I thought, “Wow, she’s a great singer who can sing anything.” There was also the fact that she was born and raised just outside Nashville and is a graduate of Belmont University, which is where the Curb College for Entertainment and Music Business is located. I told Bryan I would love to see her perform and we drove to Memphis to see the “American Idol” live show on tour. She was great and we met with her there and decided we wanted to sign her.

I was in Los Angeles when “American Idol” held the press conference about her signing, which was on TV. Kimberly’s first single, “Eighth World Wonder” went to number one on the *Billboard* single sales chart. She also reached the number one position on various *Billboard* Charts seven times, and I had the privilege of co-producing,

with Michael Lloyd, five of her number one hits. I have always wanted to break an African-American act out of Nashville and believe we achieved that with Kimberley.

We had a long-term relationship with Hank Williams Jr. that lasted for over 40 years. In May, 2004, *Billboard* did a special “Spotlight” on Hank Williams Jr. who, at that time, had over 80 chart singles under Curb; 38 of those were top ten and 11 of those were number ones. There have been so many great songs from Hank Jr. “Family Tradition” is special and so is “All My Rowdy Friends” because if ever there was a country record that was really a rock & roll record, it was that one. The video was the first video of ours to win the CMA Video Award as well as probably the first country music video that was made like a rock video. It included a number of country stars – from Waylon Jennings to Kris Kristofferson. “All My Rowdy Friends” went on to become the Monday Night Football song. There are records that cross genres without ever crossing charts and this song never crossed over to any rock or pop chart but it crossed into the rock audience. It is records like the ones by Hank Williams Jr. that are heard in the infield at a NASCAR race. Not all of those racing fans are country music people, some of them are rock fans, but they all love Hank Jr.

Kid Rock’s debut in country music came on “The ‘F’ word,” a Hank Jr. record that he wrote and Kid Rock sang harmony. I believe this was one of the most unique singles ever released. What is ironic is that the lyrics in the song say “in country music we don’t use the ‘F’ word.” Then Hank Jr. does a verse where he tells his son, Shelton – who records under the name Hank Williams III – to “take ole Dad’s advice and lose the ‘F’ word.” Although Hank III has not

taken his dad's advice on that subject, he has recorded and continues to record innovative albums that cross the boundaries between country and rock & roll. This is one thing that Hank III has in common with his father in that Hank Williams Jr. has done more to bring rock & roll to country than any artist in history. Both Hank III and Hank Jr.'s albums are successful and I'm proud to say that Hank Williams Jr.'s album entitled *That's How They Do It In Dixie* was certified gold. That is an incredible achievement when you consider that 2009 was the 40th anniversary of Hank Williams Jr. signing with Curb.

Rodney Atkins was on our label for seven years before he had his first big hit with "Honesty." He attended college about 80 miles from Nashville and kept coming in, trying to get a break. Ted Hewitt introduced him to Chuck Howard, who produced his initial recordings for Curb Records. His first three singles were on the country charts, but none of them hit. He spent several years working on his first album, which was produced by Ted Hewitt. Unfortunately, that album was not commercially successful. During this down period, I remember meeting Rodney on a plane and talking to him about changing managers and writing his way back into this challenging business, which he absolutely did with the help of Greg Hill, Ted Hewitt and Phil Gernhard. After this, Rodney went back into the studio with Ted Hewitt and worked for approximately three years on a second album, which was released almost ten years after Rodney had signed with Curb Records. Fortunately, Rodney recorded "If You're Going Through Hell" which became the number one record in the country for the year 2006. The next year his single "Watching You" was the top country single for 2007. He went on to have two more number one singles "These Are

My People” and “Cleaning My Gun” which tied Tim McGraw’s record of having four number one singles from the same album. Not only did Curb Records stick with Rodney, but Rodney stayed focused on his career until he had his breakthrough record. He is a talented artist and songwriter who endured numerous obstacles while following his dream. Rodney also hit the number one position with “It’s America” and “Take A Back Road,” in addition to his number one album and his Academy of Country Music Award.

We worked with another talented artist,. Steve Holy, for approximately ten years. In 2001, he stunned the music world with his first number one record, “Good Morning Beautiful” which remained number one on the *Billboard* chart for five consecutive weeks. Everything we released during the next five years did not succeed although the records were well recorded. In 2006, five years later, Steve Holy had his second number one record with “Brand New Girlfriend.” This was a song that Steve told us about for quite some time because of the incredible reaction he received when he performed it live. Steve is another example of an artist who stayed completely focused and, like Rodney Atkins, is an example for all young artists to emulate. In addition to his number one records, Steve received Gold records for “Good Morning Beautiful” and “Blue Moon”, which was written by Mark Tinney, a wonderful Texan who was also a Special Ed teacher and a wonderful, talented person who unfortunately lost his life way too early.

The record business is definitely a business where, if you don’t succeed, you have to keep trying. Another example of determination is Clay Walker. Clay had been dropped by two major record labels because he had not had a successful record for several years. One

day I received a call from the Governor of Texas, Rick Perry, who told me that his friend Clay Walker was ready to return to the record business. My mother, my wife and I were in San Antonio visiting both of our daughters who had recently moved there and Governor Perry invited us to meet at the office of Jim Lanager, one of the most successful businessmen in Texas. Clay and Governor Perry had just completed a bike marathon benefiting multiple sclerosis, which was a disease that Clay had miraculously overcome. We were impressed with Clay's energy and vision so we agreed to sign him immediately, and I am happy to say that Clay returned to the record industry with hit recordings "Fore She Was Mama," "She Won't Be Lonely Long" and "Fall" on Curb Records.

Governor Perry loved our recording by Clay Walker "We're All Americans" and our recording by Larry Gatlin and the Gatlin Brothers "Americans, That's Who." I served as one of the honorary chairmen of Rick's presidential campaign and he introduced me to Governor Rick Scott of Florida, who like Rick Perry, has done a fabulous job as governor of a major state. I had an opportunity to work with both of them at the 2017 Presidential Inaugural and I was able to help obtain performing artists, including The Beach Boys, for appearances at the various inaugural balls and events. After talking to both governors and my friend Ambassador Bill Hagerty, I assembled an album of all the great patriotic songs, many of which were part of the Inaugural, including "God Bless The U.S.A." by Lee Greenwood, along with the songs by Clay Walker and Larry Gatlin and the Gatlin Brothers.

We have been fortunate over the years to have artists who succeeded on their first single, such as Wynonna, The Judds, Sawyer

Brown, LeAnn Rimes, Jo Dee Messina, Hal Ketchum, The Four Seasons, The Bellamy Brothers, Exile, Shaun Cassidy, Debby Boone, T.G. Sheppard and Kimberley Locke. We also had artists who had to work many years and had several singles released before they had hits, such as Rodney Atkins, Steve Holy, Lee Brice, Dylan Scott, Mo Pitney, Tim McGraw and The Osmond Brothers. Another exciting example was Heidi Newfield, who was the lead singer in our group Trick Pony. She left the group to perform as a soloist and had a significant career top ten hit record with the song “Johnny And June.”

We have had artists who struggled to get their first hit record. The most significant of all was Tim McGraw, who had several singles and an album that did not hit before he succeeded with “Indian Outlaw,” launching a career where he became the number one artist in country music with more than twenty number one singles and over ten number one albums.

Tim McGraw’s success indicates another significant phenomenon because he achieved the biggest single of his entire career with “Live Like You Were Dying,” a song inspired by the death of Tim’s father, Tug McGraw, who was originally responsible for sending Tim to Curb Records.

There is no better example of perseverance than Lee Brice, who spent years as a songwriter and performer developing his talent before he had the first of his five major number one singles and his number one album *I Don’t Dance* at the end of 2014. In 2015 “I Don’t Dance” by Lee Brice became the ACM Record of the Year during the 50th Anniversary ACM celebration at Cowboys Stadium in Dallas, Texas. Lee’s first hit “Love Like Crazy” defined his career. Lee has so much talent as a songwriter, artist and performer, but he could not have

another record at that time not be a hit. Radio kept trying to get us to change to another record called “Beautiful Every Time.” We refused and we continued to promote “Love Like Crazy” for a then record setting 54 weeks, and the record became the *Billboard* number one record of the year.

Another amazing example of perseverance is Dylan Scott who had to release several great recordings that did not hit over many years. Dylan is an amazingly talented songwriter and artist with a very strong and distinctive voice. In 2017 his recording of “My Girl” became a hit after spending more than half a year on the charts. Dylan was the first new artist to have a record break primarily from streaming through Spotify, Apple and other streaming sites, which is very similar to what is occurring in the pop and R&B markets, where records break from streaming and other digital sources and radio follows. In the past, radio would start a record and then retail, physical or digital, would follow. That change is now occurring in country and Christian and continuing to be the dominate change in pop, R&B and other markets. The examples in the preceding paragraphs provide the most important aspect of what we are trying to achieve by writing this book. In the record industry there are no absolute formulas. If you believe in your talent, whether as an artist, songwriter, musician, publisher, executive, employee, engineer, or any other aspect of the music industry, you must never give up until you feel that you have exhausted all of your possibilities while attempting to achieve your ultimate goal. By not giving up, Curb Records played a major role and made huge financial investments in artists who were very talented, but needed their record company to be strong.



CHAPTER 36

Curb Records

*First Independent Company
to Become Billboard Label Of The Year
The Importance of Five-Year Plans*

I believe strongly in five-year plans and when I look back at the 50 plus year history of Curb Records, I see that we have succeeded because we always had a five-year plan. A major part of the reason we had five-year plans is because distribution agreements are five years, so every time we entered into a new distribution agreement, we had to look five years ahead for our company. However, I must admit that some parts of our plans have not worked; a five-year plan is not an exact roadmap and we have had to go to a “Plan B” a number of times. Still, our five-year plans have been a key to our success.

Our first five-year plan began in 1964, when we started Sidewalk Records with distribution by Capitol. We did the only thing we could do, which was soundtracks and commercials; we did the soundtracks to *Wild Angels*, *Killers Three*, *The Trip* and other films. Almost all of our hit records came from soundtracks and the reason I could do those

soundtracks was because I did them inexpensively. Everything we did during that time was to make money and survive so we could get to the next record. Because Capitol was our distributor, any time there was a hit on Sidewalk, they moved it over to their label, Tower.

At the end of 1968 we partnered with Transcontinental and developed a five-year plan so we could do all the things we dreamed of with a big distribution company. That meant making R&B, Adult Contemporary, country, and rock & roll records. In mid-1969, the Transcontinental distribution system started to unwind, although I felt we had a solid five-year plan.

During the first five years, we did not have a “Plan B”, but during our second five years we had to have one and that led to our merger with MGM. The MGM five-year plan was from 1969 until 1973, and here it seemed like everything fell into place. It was still the same five-year plan that I intended to do with Transcontinental, but discovered I could actually do that plan with MGM. We set out to be successful in the R&B market and we signed Lou Rawls, Solomon Burke, Gloria Gaynor, Johnny Bristol, The Sylvers, the Ovations, Brook Benton, Richard Roundtree, Isaac Hayes for the *Shaft* soundtrack, and Sammy Davis, Jr.

We signed Richie Havens and let him have his own label; signed Eric Burdon and War, whom I had seen perform at the London Palladium in late ‘1969. They created an exciting, urban sounding music with Burden, formerly with the Animals, backed by War, a black group. We entered into an agreement with Jerry Ross to distribute Colossus Records, which had the first version of “Venus” by Shocking Blue, then signed Bobby Bloom, a white artist with a heavy black

influence. During the MGM/Curb years, we went after the black record business, which led us to promote “One Bad Apple” by the Osmonds to black radio. That song reached number six on the R&B chart and that was a defining moment for us.

Our other dream was to grow our country business and we signed Mel Tillis, Don Gibson, Eddy Arnold, Tompall and the Glaser Brothers, Billy Walker, Ray Stevens and Hank Williams Jr.

At MGM/Curb we looked for crossover records and crossover artists. I have always believed that if we found an artist who could sell in two formats then we would have twice as much success. If an artist sold in three formats then we would have triple the success because a crossover record becomes a multiplier.

During our third five-year plan, beginning in 1974 through the end of 1978, we formed Warner/Curb and worked with Warner Bros., who distributed our product. This was the period just before I entered government service and during that period we had success with the Four Seasons, Shaun Cassidy, Debby Boone, the Bellamy Brothers and Exile. That plan came after Joe Smith and Mo Ostin approached me and said they wanted us to put Warner Bros. in the singles business. Warner Bros.’ goal was for Curb to find number one singles in the pop/rock field as well as find artists for Warner/Curb that would lead Warner Bros. into the country and Contemporary Christian genres. Our next five-year plan was put on hold when the people of California elected me to serve as Lieutenant Governor and later as Acting Governor from 1979 to 1983.

The 1984 to 1989 period was a five-year plan to form joint ventures with major labels. This began when we formed our Curb/MCA label,

which was our first major joint venture. During this period we signed acts like The Judds, who were doing rock and blues; Sawyer Brown, a rock band; the Desert Rose Band, who were a California version of the Byrds, featuring Rock & Roll Hall of Fame member Chris Hillman; and Lyle Lovett. We formed co-ventures with RCA for The Judds and Marie Osmond, Capitol for Sawyer Brown, CBS-Columbia for The Burrito Bros., Arista for Preston Smith from the *Cocktail* movie, Warner for Hank Jr. and T.G. Sheppard and Elektra for Debby Boone, Susie Allanson and The Bellamy Bros. We did this because there was no way for an independent label to get its records distributed unless they had major label distribution; independent distribution had started to unravel during the 1960s and by 1984 it was pretty much dead.

Our next five-year plan started at the end of 1988. Joe Smith joined Capitol and in 1989 he approached me about setting up a distribution P&D agreement; MCA had moved us away from joint ventures and into a P&D agreement in 1989 after Irving Azoff left the label and Al Teller took his place. I knew that Teller was not interested in distributing Curb Records but Joe Smith and Capitol were interested. That led to the P&D agreement with Capitol that began at the beginning of 1990. Unfortunately, Joe Smith left Capitol, leaving us with Charles Koppelman, so in 1994 we left Capitol's distribution company and moved over to Warner Bros.

The five-year plan we started in 1994 featured Tim McGraw and our goal was to build an artist who would be a country artist but also a rock star-like performer who could eventually reach the world. Our plan continued through Jo Dee Messina the next year and then LeAnn Rimes, who started in 1996 and continued into 1997. We had a definite

plan to continue what we did in the 1980s, which was take artists who were not mainstream country, and break them in the country field. The 1994 to 1998 period was a boom time for country music in Nashville and Curb Records had more than its share of success. We had Boy Howdy, Tim McGraw, Jo Dee Messina, LeAnn Rimes, Sawyer Brown, Wynonna and Hank Williams Jr. all exploding during that period. In 1997 and 1998 we had the dominant market share. At the end of 1998, our company had a hit with a song we co-published, “There’s Your Trouble” by the Dixie Chicks, the last act to break in country music during the 20th century. I certainly hope that country music forgives the Dixie Chicks because we need an act who is progressive and distinctive.

From 1999 to 2003 we had a five-year plan but in 1999 we had things happening in the business, especially on radio, where it was beginning to be difficult to break a new act. During the period from 1999 to 2003, radio changed drastically. The charts reached a point where there are a number of different categories; there’s rock, mainstream rock, urban AC, adult AC, CHR, rhythmic CHR, rap, hip-hop, country, and Americana. Pop and R&B have numerous charts although country music is defined by a single chart, which means that genre is narrowly defined by one major trade magazine, *Billboard*.

During the 1999 to 2003 period, not one major superstar country act debuted in the entire industry. The only success came from acts that had been signed during the previous five years before – Faith Hill, Shania Twain, the Dixie Chicks, Toby Keith, Tim McGraw and Kenny Chesney. We anticipated problems during this period. We knew Warner Bros. was in transition in 1999 when they brought in Roger

Ames. This meant that for the first time the labels under the Warner Bros. Music umbrella would be consolidated with one person running Warner Bros., Elektra and Atlantic. The entrepreneurs who founded those labels, Ahmet Ertegun, Doug Morris, Mo Ostin, Jac Holzman, and even the people who came in later like Bob Krasnow, were gone. Scarcely a month went by that Roger Ames did not offer to buy Curb Records but I did not want to sell!

In 2001, Curb Records became the first independent record company to become *Billboard* Record Label of the Year. At Curb we became more involved in soundtracks and wanted to become heavily involved in Christian music by acquiring a Christian company as a nucleus. We finally emerged with a partnership with Word Records which later resulted in Curb acquiring full ownership of Word.

We discovered in 2003 that we could no longer afford to pay for all the things we did during 1994-1998. We learned that a narrow format for country music had been created because there were less country stations and those stations were owned by a small number of companies. We discovered that retailers were being consolidated into mass merchandisers who do not stock much catalog. Mass merchandisers have taken charge of the industry and dropped the price of CDs, which squeezes the profit margin. Universal, the largest record company, dropped its price dramatically, causing us all to wonder what we should do. We now have to pay to get into a retail store but that store does not stock much catalog, just the current hottest releases.

Then there is the internet and the issue of moving from losing a huge amount of sales, to legal downloads. Curb Records has a catalog of 700 albums; that is probably close to 8,000 songs and we had to

re-license every one of them. The legal staff, which previously spent their time drawing up artist contracts, had to spend all its time on internet licensing agreements with the legal downloading and streaming sites. I had a five-year plan beginning in 2004 which hinged on the belief that we needed to be in all genres; for that reason we built a pop promotion staff. We re-signed with Warner Bros. for distribution to continue with them until the end of 2012. However, we saw a number of major problems in the recording industry during the five years after 2008. The five-year plan from 2009 to 2013 included educating artists, managers, employees and everyone else in this industry that we had entered a totally new business. With the sales of CD albums falling, and internet revenues not yet sufficient to take the place of the lost revenue, combined with store closures, returns, illegal downloading, massive changes at radio, lack of catalog in mass merchandisers, and the pressure to drop prices, we had to face the reality that it was much harder – and more expensive – to break new artists on radio. Then, once we broke them, it was harder to get their album stocked in a store. Fortunately, we exploded with Lee Brice in 2010 and he had several major hits during this five year period.

Country music has been moving inward; that is partly because of radio, which controls the gateway to exposure for recordings. Radio demands a consistency of sound for country, with recordings aimed at the female who is 35 and older. There is a trend to not cross records over into other formats because each format is designed for a specific target audience. This has led me to conclude that Curb Records has to do its part to expand the current format of country music. The next five years have enormous challenges and, frankly, they look scary on paper.

It is difficult to cut the size of our staff because we need our staff, but we need them to do different jobs. Some employees want to do the same things they have done for the last 20 years and, in some cases, that is not going to work. The people who are trying something new and different in this new age are the ones who will be most successful. The new jobs will come from iTunes, Spotify or some of the other legal distributors of digital music, but perhaps not from conventional record companies.

When I look at the next five years, I am excited because this period will determine what kind of a recording industry we are going to have. We will have to look at new and different streams of revenue. We need to take a look at a hit record and determine what it is worth, what price we can sell it for, where we can sell it, what will it cost to get it stocked in a store, who will play it and the costs of radio promotions and marketing. Will the revenues from the internet downloading and streaming distributors be sufficient to cover the kinds of marketing costs that it will take to market and promote a record? That is the question the recording industry is facing in the 21st century.

This “new” business has changed the way I do my work; in the past, I may have spent a week or two each year looking at budgets and revenue projections, but now, this is how I begin each day.

During the next five years, we hope to reach a profitable model without cutting employees. We want to get there by changing the responsibilities of our existing employees, and aim our existing artists in different directions. But most of all we need to become a label that encompasses pop, R&B, adult contemporary, country and Christian music and is willing to take a chance on left-of-center projects in all of those formats.

I believe a label that only does country and Christian music may fail, unless they get lucky. I do not want to gamble the jobs of our employees and the careers of our artists on luck. I want to build our next five-year plan the same way we initiated ten other five-year plans. We hope to be able to operate two labels, Curb and Word, and break artists the way we always have, through radio airplay, publishing, merchandising and touring, and we will do this while building rock, pop, country, Contemporary Christian and R&B artists. The Word label is having success with new artists such as We Are Messengers, Stars Go Dim, Sarah Reeves and African American rapper Steven Malcolm. Under the leadership of Rod Riley and Josh Bailey, Word is continuing to have hits with Love & The Outcome, Meredith Andrews, Family Force 5, Blanca, Sidewalk Prophets, Chris August, Francesca Battistelli, Big Daddy Weave and for KING & COUNTRY. As we entered 2017, the Word/Curb recording of “Hold My Mule” by Shirley Caesar was number one on the *Billboard* Gospel chart, and the WOW 2017 album (which Word/Curb is a partner) was number one on the *Billboard* Christian Album chart.

Natalie Grant was number one on a *Billboard* Singles chart and nominated for a Grammy along with for KING & COUNTRY. During the past five year period, Lee Brice achieved the Record of the Year from the Academy of Country Music for the 50th anniversary of the ACM Awards in Dallas, Texas. The following year, Lee’s recording of “Drinking Class” was the number one airplay record for the entire year, Rodney Atkins was honored for having the Song of the Decade and early in 2017 Dylan Scott was succeeding on multiple *Billboard* charts. Throughout most of our entire career we have had R&B hits,

but recently it has been sporadic so we have signed several additional African-American artists. We want to have more rock and pop hits, whether it is crossing over from Christian, country or R&B.

To sum up, during the next five years, Curb Records will attempt to become a multi-genre Nashville based record company. We believe we can do that because from the inception of our company “Curb” has been a multi-genre name: “C” stands for country and Christian, “U” stands for urban, “R” for rock and “B” for blues. We have a multi-year physical distribution agreement and a five-year internet plan where we distribute ourselves through agreements with Amazon, iTunes, Spotify and over 50 other internet accounts throughout the world.



CHAPTER 37

Listening

When I started Curb Records – then known as Sidewalk – over fifty years ago, I developed relationships with people who are still with our company today. I hired people in charge of every aspect of Curb Records so I am able to now work all day on different priorities; sometimes I spend an entire day working on the budget, or A&R or the internet. I have had to broaden my personal horizons to become aware of all the new sounds in music on the market today. When I began, I knew every record, every singer and every musical lick on every song but as time went by I found myself struggling to find enough time to listen.

I listen to the local rock and hip hop stations while I am in my car to stay abreast of what they are playing. When I am home I usually listen to the pop and country music channels, because if I see a record I have not heard I can turn up the volume and hear it; that is how I try to hear every country music record. For pop music, I buy the *NOW* series of CDs and for Contemporary Christian music I buy the *WOW* series and play those over and over. If I see a record on the trade charts

that I have not heard, I go to iTunes and download it. There is a radio service on my computer where I can listen to R&B radio and I also have satellite radio. The beauty of those channels is that they flash up the name of the artist.

I believe it is necessary to have all those things and listen to all the different kinds of music to be a contemporary music executive in a multi-format company. These are things that anyone can do. There is no way to have all the answers and be able to consistently pick hits, but it is possible to put the odds in your favor. The first way to do that is to work hard; the second is to have a passion for what is being done. If there is passion, then we will find music that is special.

I believe it is important to sign the best talent, preferably an artist who can perform live as well as on record. Often the best country stars are like rock stars who can put on a great performance and captivate an audience. If we achieve this, then a hit record can be taken to the next level and create a career for an artist who will become a star. Records will mean more and sell more because they will be part of the body of work of a star.

If we can create an event – through the guest appearance of another star – then a record will reach beyond its genre. Sometimes it is better to start a record in a single market and build a story from there. Every record should not be shipped to the world at first because it will not mean anything. It is better to establish a recording in a market or through social media before it is shipped to the world. A different approach must be made for each record based on the opportunities for each piece of product and we have done that with several of our artists.

We need to examine the intro to each of our records because radio stations do call out research where they play the first few seconds of a record, then ask the listener if they have heard it and whether or not they like it, so we put the odds in our favor by having shorter intros. We also try to get part of the hook or title of the record in the first 10 seconds. Today we can build a market for a record by starting a campaign through social media for both the artist and the music.

In addition to listening to music ourselves, we must spend a lot of time playing recordings for other people whom we trust, then we can synthesize the views of those people and that becomes a combined company view. I call this the “Master Brain” theory and to a great degree we use the Master Brain approach at Curb. That means we combine the visions of a number of key people, many of whom have been with our company many years, to create an approach that is bigger than any one of us could achieve on his or her own.



CHAPTER 38

Challenges

I've always said "if you don't know where music has been, then you won't know where it's going." I can't tell you how many times I benefited from knowing about records that were recorded in the Quonset Hut or RCA Studio B, as well as Sun Studios in Memphis. The records I produced were heavily influenced by records cut in those three studios. Those studios did not record one type of music; there were pop, country, R&B – a lot of different kinds of music – recorded in those studios.

My belief is that if a person is open to being in the pop, country, classical, rap or R&B genres, if he is interested in the art, sales, marketing and A&R departments, if he is open to learning about a wide variety of things in the music industry, then he has more chances of getting a job in the music business and a better chance of succeeding.

When I started my company, if someone was interested in a soundtrack, I was willing to do a soundtrack. If they were only willing to pay \$500 then I was willing to figure out how to do one for \$500. If they needed a song for a commercial, I was willing to do that song even

if I had to do it for free or for spec – which is short for “on speculation,” meaning if they like it they will pay for it, otherwise there is no money involved!

When I entered the music business I was interested in all kinds of artists and in special projects like soundtracks. If there was an auto racing or motorcycle movie, I was interested in that. I was open for business for country, pop, R&B, rock & roll, surfing music, motorcycle, hot rod or gospel music. Some would say that the opportunities are not here today like they were in 1964 when I started a label by recording soundtracks for independent films. I disagree. I believe the internet and new digital formats are leading to a lot of very inexpensive movies being made that will have inexpensive soundtracks, which young people can do. This opportunity is very similar to the opportunity when I started over 50 years ago.

Throughout my career I faced set-backs, problems, failures and difficult dilemmas. Those experiences helped me because I always tried to turn negatives into positives. Owning a company offers opportunities every day to turn at least one negative into a positive. Some days are good and there might be one negative; other days force an owner to turn ten or more negatives into positives. In the record industry one cannot say “yes” all the time and get the desired results. Sometimes suggestions have to be made to someone to try a different song or a different singer. An owner cannot sign every artist who wants to be signed to a label because there is not enough room or money. Running a company involves getting everybody on the same page, which is the hardest thing in the world to do. I must admit that sometimes I do not know if we do it or not.

This is particularly true when I am trying to give people more room to operate and some of them are doing things differently than the way I would like. That causes me to be torn between interceding or letting it alone because they may be right. That is the hardest fight I have now. Nevertheless, again I repeat: Turning negatives into positives is a very strong message.

Being open to changing is an important part of owning and growing a business. In 2003 when we had a bad year we realized that from that point forward our sales volume for physical albums was going to be lower because of the internet and illegal downloads. Artists who had been selling five million were now selling two million. We saw our mistakes and realized we had to change our model.

First, we realized that all those different areas we were operating in were in different locations. Our marketing department was in one building, our accounting department was in another building and our A&R department was over at the studio and my office was somewhere else. The legal offices were on the West Coast. At one point we were in ten different locations and not interacting. The first thing we did was put everyone together so if a great record was given to the A&R Department, promotion was hearing it at the same time. We wanted everyone on the same page.

We examined our artist contracts and made sure we had five years of product with our key artists. Our distribution agreements, financial planning, and merging of all of our divisions happened in that framework. The result of that was a turnaround in our business. In 2005 our sales volume was almost identical to what it was in 2003 but instead of losing money our profit was almost equal to the loss in 2003.

The changes we have undergone came from confronting the realities of the music business in the 21st century. There has been massive consolidation with record companies; BMG, which consisted of RCA, BNA and Arista merged with Sony, which contained Columbia and Epic. The Universal Music Group has the assets of MCA, Decca, Motown, Polygram, A&M, Mercury and Interscope. Universal then merged with EMI/Capitol and now we have an industry where 85-90% of the business is controlled by international entities.

It is the same with radio where three major radio corporations control the vast majority of the radio stations in the United States. It is the same with retail where literally a handful of mass merchandisers, starting with Wal-Mart, Target and Best Buy, control the physical sales of recordings.

At one time, retailers were primarily Mom and Pop stores – local entrepreneurs – and radio stations were mostly owned locally. Now there are large corporations owning over 1,000 radio stations. However, in some ways that situation is not too different from the late 1920s through the early 1950s when three networks – NBC, CBS and ABC – controlled most radio programming. From the 1950s until the 1980s, when Ted Turner and the advent of cable changed things, the three TV networks controlled TV programming. Now, there are over 500 channels.

I do not know the answers but I do know some of the key questions. For example, will some consumers continue to download a recording free? There are so many new things happening every minute – so many new gadgets and new delivery systems. I believe that Apple will continue to grow and be the leader for legal downloads with its iTunes,

but I also think Amazon, along with Spotify, will have a significant share of the digital market. There will be other players which do things we never dreamed of, but I believe that smartphones capable of downloading and streaming music will continue to be enormous. I believe there will continue to be an increase in the legal download and particularly streaming businesses and new income streams such as SoundExchange.

The key to longevity as a record company is having the ability to adapt to different genres, to have as much consistency as possible with your employees and to have a consistency with your own life so that you do not take risks that financially jeopardize a company or the jobs of employees. During the past 50 plus years I learned that in order for an individual to maintain a successful business, a person needs to stay away from the various influences in life that can abuse his mind and body.

When Curb Records makes plans for the future, one of our biggest concerns is what will be the volume? What if the top two artists suddenly stop recording or something happens to them? What does an owner do to provide a consistent environment for his employees? As one gets older it gets harder to start something new, so the key is to begin something while young to ensure being in a business for a lifetime.

My father once said that if you are doing what you want to do you won't feel like you're working. I don't know if the perfect job exists anywhere and I don't believe there is anything in the world you can do that is problem free because there are going to be good days and bad days. There are also the issues of family and health which affect

life. However, I do believe that consistency – being the same person every day, whether it is temperament or goals – and then being flexible enough to change when changes need to be made are keys to being successful.

A person who owns a recording company needs to be involved in as many musical genres as possible. He or she must also try to immunize the company from the worst that can happen, such as the loss of major artists or the loss of market share in any one genre of music.

There are major issues facing the recording industry today that will determine the future of this industry. We have to keep trying to figure out how the consolidation of retail is going to affect pricing and what the best methods of distribution are going to be for world-wide digital music. There must be at least 300 viable digital distributors in the world and we cannot possibly contract with all of them, so which ones do we work with? How do we structure our company so that as digital sales replace physical sales, we can compensate for the fact that the digital consumer is buying singles in place of albums, which can dramatically affect volume. The margin on an album is easy to compute; the margin on an individual download is almost impossible to compute.

When I lived in California, people were surprised my company was involved in gospel and country music. Now that I live in Nashville, people are surprised we are involved in rock & roll or R&B music or soundtracks. Another example of this is songwriting. A songwriter living in Nashville usually is excited about his songs being recorded by major country artists. When I was a songwriter living in California, the main goal in virtually every conversation was the number of songs

that were in a motion picture or television show. For example, when Roy Orbison wanted to write with me, it was during a time in his life when he wanted to write songs for motion pictures. Three of the songs we wrote together were chosen for three different films. The point that I am making is that Roy Orbison probably would not have been interested in writing with me except for the fact that I was California-based and he was interested in motion picture songwriting where I had a lot of experience.

There is a tendency to compete with friends or the people down the street rather than the universe. The reality is that we are one nation and for Curb Records this means that we want to be involved in every facet of the music and entertainment business: soundtracks, music commercials, TV or music work, rock & roll, country, dance, pop, rhythm and blues, gospel or Contemporary Christian, jazz, publishing, film, video, catalog development and compilation albums. In addition, because of the internet, we are operating as one world because no matter how hard we try to control illegal file sharing in our country, we are unable to stop illegal file sharing in the Soviet Union or other countries where our copyright laws are not accepted. The solution to this issue may hold the key to the future for thousands of people who want to have a career in some facet of the music business.

It is a great time to be an entrepreneur; however, it's important to know it is not necessary to own a company in order to be entrepreneurial. For example, some of the best entrepreneurs I have known have been individuals who restructure a department and run that department in an entrepreneurial fashion. Professors and teachers who take on the challenge of creating a department or creating an opportunity that has

never existed before for their students are also entrepreneurial. I have seen individuals who have accepted the challenge of creating an area that never existed before in a company. A business will not grow itself or solve its own problems unless the company is run in such a way that each department operates in an entrepreneurial manner that gives incentives to those with an entrepreneurial spirit who are dedicated to building the future of that company.



CHAPTER 39

Circles

It seems like the music industry has come full circle. Back in the early 1960s I walked up and down Hollywood Boulevard with a tape in my hand of a recording my band made the night before. There were numerous little record labels in that area and most of them had around three or four employees. I saw Herb Alpert, Phil Spector, Sonny Bono and others doing what I was trying to do – making records and hoping to get an opportunity. Records were released on 45 rpm discs and sold for 99 cents. The big retail account was Woolworth's. Today, we're back to selling singles again for 99 cents and the big retail accounts for singles are iTunes, Amazon and Spotify.

Back in the early '1960s we had to record on a responsible budget and costs had to be in line with the volume of sales. We have to get back to that same way of operating. We have to be cautious with our budgets and stay liquid with cash on hand. We didn't complain or gripe about the way things were back then and we can't complain or gripe about the way things are now; we have to operate within the business as it is.

It seems like some managers, producers, employees and lawyers that I speak with do not want to change, particularly if it means different

responsibilities, lower budgets, fees and payments. Many of the past prices and fees are completely out of date and digital has replaced physical product. Unfortunately, most individuals download singles rather than complete albums, which again reminds me of the past when the 45 rpm single was much more popular than complete 33 rpm albums. It's important to consider the economic circumstances where Wal-Mart shoppers in some cases have to choose between groceries and entertainment products. If there is anything I have learned in over 50 years in the music business, it's that the economy will go up and down and it's virtually impossible to predict the exact timing. For that reason, the most important thing you can do is make sure that you do not have too much debt and you carefully manage your inventories and other costs.

The problem our label and other established labels face is that we have to operate with an existing overhead, although we must cut expenses wherever we can, and we have to be careful regarding budgets for artists. We can't cut the cost of an employee because no employee wants to have their salary reduced, but we have to be cautious to adjust pay raises and the bonus structure to future results. We have to operate with a new set of rules and we can't make excuses or complain because those rules have changed during the past few years. We have to accept the music industry the way it is and operate within a realistic structure.

Everyone is going to have to live within the business. Budgets have to be lower so production costs have to be lower because sales volumes are lower. The advantage of being an experienced executive is that we might have an edge because we've weathered tough times before. It's like those in the stock market who have to face tough times when the stock market plunges. Those stockbrokers who never experienced

tough times are at a disadvantage compared to the brokers who have been around longer and prepared for the possibility that a day would come when stocks would go down.

The independent music business has come full circle and it might take ten years before it gets back to where it used to be. Then again, it might never get back to those days. Either way, we've got to find a way to invest in artists and do positive business. We have to change mentally and shift our thinking to work within the framework of what exists in the music business today. We made it work before and we can make it work in the future.

Like the stock market, we have to work within the framework we have. It doesn't do any good to make excuses, complain, or get angry because things aren't the way they used to be.

We have to use everything we've learned from the past because the new media alone won't save us. We can put artists on YouTube, Facebook, Spotify, mobile and digital downloads, and whatever else comes along, but the profit margins are such that today we will have to participate in the artist's touring, publishing, merchandising and/or other aspects of an artist's career because the record label is responsible for significant investments and numerous other promotion and marketing opportunities in order for an artist to succeed.

Back in the 1960s I woke up every morning excited about the music business, anxious to get started each day so I could search for a hit song or hit artist. It's the same thing I do today. I never thought that over 50 years later I'd still be trying to create hit records and sell 99 cent singles, but the music business has come full circle and I still want to be in that circle.

I'm still living the business but I've learned that in order to do that I have to live within the business. That's the big challenge facing Curb Records and everyone else in the music industry. There never comes a time in this business when you can sit back, prop up your feet and let the business take care of itself. Nevertheless, if you take care of the business, it will take care of you and I have learned that it is never easy, but over time it can be very rewarding. This business has given me a lot of rewards through the years and I am thankful that Curb Records is still in business and competing for hit records today.

There are a lot of people who find the music business exciting and glamorous-and sometimes it is. But, there are also times when the music business will challenge everything that you have experienced in your entire lifetime. It makes no difference if you are an employee, producer, songwriter, or record company owner, the music business is unlike any other business because you have to live it, realizing the uncertainties and negatives are far outweighed by the positive fulfillment that comes from building successful careers for artists and employees. I want to encourage others to believe in the music business and most of all have faith in themselves.



CHAPTER 40

The Mike Curb Family Foundation

****Five Honorary Doctorates*

****National Business Hall of Fame
and Musicians Hall of Fame*

****Stars on the Hollywood Walk of Fame
and Nashville Music City Walk of Fame*

There's more to a business and a life than just making money – there is also the question of what can be done with the profits. My success in the music industry enabled me to become a philanthropist for over a hundred different charitable projects for educational and charitable organizations. My family members who came before me gave through the dedication of their lives and volunteer work to organizations and causes. Although my ancestral family was unable to make financial contributions, I always felt the work and volunteerism of those family members was a much greater contribution and their work serves as an inspiration for my charitable work. Both my fraternal and maternal grandparents dedicated their lives to the service of others with the former serving as a YMCA director and soldier and the latter serving as a missionary and Church pastor. My parents, through teaching and

working as an FBI agent, dedicated their lives to raising a close, strong, family who valued helping others.

Linda and I made a decision to invest in educational organizations and charitable projects that benefit the communities where we lived and worked. The vision was to direct many of our contributions toward our goals for music education and historical music preservation.

Through our involvement in education, we have met many young people who have the desire and dedication to be part of an entrepreneurial business and/or develop skills that will allow them to play an important role in the future of the music and entertainment business. We feel that the most important thing we can do to encourage these future businessmen and women is to develop educational opportunities and preserve the history and the future of the overall industry so that these young people will have the opportunities they deserve.

The Mike Curb Family Foundation contributed to a number of organizations and projects when we lived in California, and I served on several non-profit boards of directors. I was particularly impressed with the growth of the university that I attended, California State University, which is located in the San Fernando Valley where I grew up, and made my first recordings. In addition to the Curb Chair for Music Industry Studies, the Mike Curb College of Arts, Media and Communication has become one of the largest colleges within California State University. Approximately 5,000 of the university's 38,000 students attend the Curb College, and more than half of those students are minorities.

It is impossible to imagine California, and particularly Los Angeles, without the educational opportunities that are available at this

university. California State has had incredible presidents, Dr. Jolene Koester and Dr. Dianne Harrison, who held a vision for this university that is exactly in line with the goals of the Curb Foundation. Deans Bob Bucker, Jay Kvapil and Dan Hosken have done an outstanding job after the retirement of Bill Toutant, who devoted much of his adult life to building this college.

Dean Bucker also served as executive director of the Valley Performing Arts Center, which is the home for the broadcast studios at the Curb College. The Center, which opened in 2011, is a magnificent performance venue, as well as a wonderful laboratory for Curb College students to learn valuable production techniques and explore various aspects of the entertainment industry. I am proud that we made the lead gift that launched the development of this outstanding facility.

In 2010, we extended our Curb Studio programs to include classrooms and studio facilities to help build an arts and music business program at the California State Channel Islands Campus, under the direction of President Dick Rush. In 2012 we extended our Curb Music Business program to UCLA as part of the Evelyn and Mo Ostin Center. It was ironic that this occurred 50 years after Mo Ostin signed my college band to Warner/Reprise Records where Ostin served as chairman for 40 years. The Mike Curb Music and Technology Lab is part of the Herb Alpert School of Music under the direction of Dean Chris Waterman and Chancellor Gene Block.

After our family moved to Nashville, there was a point when I questioned whether I should cut back on my professional life. Should I sell out like so many others had done? In asking those questions, I realized that people were excited to have Curb Records in Nashville.

The Nashville business, charitable, and educational communities have been receptive to partnering with the Mike Curb Family Foundation, and the record business was a way to keep funding the Foundation.

Our Foundation has benefitted from our long relationships with legal advisors, Tom Sherrard, Bill Harbison, Jay Bowen and Mike Kaplan who we sadly lost in 2017. Mike not only taught us how to live, he may have also taught us how to die with dignity. Our Foundation is proud to be paying tribute to Mike's life through The Mike Kaplan Legacy Fund, and its mission to promote golf and life-enhancing values with an emphasis on teaching youth and the disadvantaged.

The Curb Foundation's first connection with Vanderbilt University began on an airplane a year or two after my family moved to Nashville. I was seated next to Dean Marty Geisel of Vanderbilt's Owen Business School and the dean asked whether my company, which at the time was Tennessee's largest independent record company, was wired for the internet. I confessed that my company was not online and that I wasn't familiar with the technology. At that time, during the early 1990s, the internet was in its infancy. Dean Geisel asked, "Wouldn't it be wonderful if our students at the Owen School at Vanderbilt put Curb Records on the internet?" I was excited by this concept, so the dean selected several Vanderbilt students in their MBA program to develop a plan to make it happen.

Curb Records hired students who were in charge of the project, and this was the beginning of a creative relationship with Vanderbilt that over the years has allowed the Curb Foundation and the Curb family to play a major role in the development of the creative campus concept at Vanderbilt. My attorney, Tom Sherrard, Curb Records' Vice

President of Finance Jeff Edmondson and I have all enjoyed working with the dean of the Owen Graduate School, Jim Bradford, and the associate dean, Joe Blackburn, to develop a creative course involving graduate education for digital and entrepreneurship. Our vision is a music and entertainment concentration as part of the graduate business program at Vanderbilt, with the goal of developing future industry leaders.

Our daughters are Vanderbilt graduates. Courtney concentrated on a major that included the creative, holistic approach to business, which she practices in her role as Vice President of Human Resources at Curb Records. Megan studied education with a special emphasis on innovative approaches to students with special educational needs. She has spent most of her career as a teacher helping underserved students, including minority students and those from low-income families. Both of our daughters received master's degrees from Vanderbilt, and both married young men who earned bachelor's and master's degrees from Vanderbilt. Courtney married Taylor Childress, who was an executive administrator at Daytona State College, after having had a successful career as a baseball coach. Taylor now serves as General Manager of Curb Records. Megan married Brian Cox, who earned a medical degree from the University of Texas Medical School and is now a radiologist. We are proud of our daughters, their husbands and our six grandchildren.

My involvement with Vanderbilt University increased substantially when I met Dr. Harry Jacobsen, who asked me to serve as chairman of the board of directors for the Vanderbilt Children's Hospital. As chairman, I was involved in the financial planning for

Vanderbilt Children's Hospital as it began the construction of its magnificent new facility.

Dr. Jacobsen inspired our foundation to develop a special theatre at the Downtown Nashville Public Library which allows music and performances to be transmitted to Vanderbilt Children's Hospital in order to provide entertainment for young patients. The Foundation also developed a creative classroom at the hospital with children's books and other educational materials. This allows patients to go online to connect with educational programs at their own schools and other educational sites.

The Mike Curb Family Foundation encouraged and worked with LeAnn Rimes to develop the LeAnn Rimes Adventure Gym at Vanderbilt Children's Hospital. Thanks to the leadership of the hospital's chief executive officers, Dr. Jeffrey R. Balser, Dr. Kevin B. Churchwell and Luke Gregory, Rehabilitation Services Director Erik Hamnes, and Executive Director of Development Holly Walsh, this gym has become part of the Curb Pediatric Rehabilitation Clinics at the Vanderbilt Children's Hospital 100 Oaks Campus, which includes the magnificent Kevin Michael Crawler Gym, the Linda Curb Orthopedic Gym, the Courtney and Megan Sibling Play Area, and the Katie Darnell Wheelchair Clinic.

The Foundation's involvement with Vanderbilt University has been fostered through a combination of outstanding individuals: Bill Ivey; Executive Associate Vice Chancellor of Development & Alumni Relations Robert Early; Provost Susan Wentz; Dr. Jay Clayton, Director of the Curb Center; Dr. Steven Tepper; Jennifer Novak-Leonard; Dr. Elizabeth Long Lingo; Elizabeth Meadows; former

Chancellor Gordon Gee; and current Chancellor Nicholas Zeppos, who led the development of programs during his years as provost, acting chancellor and chancellor. A number of years ago, Gordon Gee and Nick Zeppos told me about the opportunity to bring Bill Ivey to Vanderbilt to establish a Curb Center for Art, Enterprise and Public Policy. They played a leadership role in the development of a center that could work with all ten Vanderbilt colleges to expand creative opportunities.

I was impressed with Bill Ivey's work when he served as executive director of the Country Music Hall of Fame, and his presidential appointment to head the National Endowment for the Arts in Washington. After his term in Washington ended, Ivey returned to Nashville and Chancellor Gee and future Chancellor Nick Zeppos were able to persuade Bill to head the Curb Center for Art, Enterprise and Public Policy where, because of Bill's great leadership, the Center has become nationally recognized.

The most exciting part of the Curb Center has been the development of the creative campus concept by Bill Ivey and Steven Tepper, who played a huge role along with the encouragement and support of Nick Zeppos. This program has the goal of equipping every graduate and undergraduate student at all ten Vanderbilt colleges with additional creative education.

I was honored when Chancellor Nick Zeppos chose the Curb Creative Campus as his first major initiative as chancellor. Nick's vision included students from the Curb Foundation's other educational partners, including Fisk University, Rhodes College, the Curb College at Belmont University, the Curb College at California State University,

the Curb College at Daytona State College, Bethune-Cookman University, Arizona State University and the Curb programs and centers at UCLA, Baylor University, North Carolina, Honolulu and Claremont McKenna College.

Vanderbilt established an office for the Center in Washington, D.C. and Vanderbilt moved the Curb Center in Nashville to the renovated Peabody Mansion and the adjacent building, which is the point at which Vanderbilt University almost touches Nashville's historic Music Row.

The Mike Curb Family Foundation's creative relationship with Vanderbilt became even deeper when Vanderbilt Board Chair Martha Rivers Ingram shared her vision to create the Curb Youth Symphony at Vanderbilt's Blair School of Music. Soon after this, Ingram spearheaded the construction of the Schermerhorn Symphony Hall, which houses the Nashville Symphony, and also includes the Curb Youth Symphony and the beautiful Curb Music Education Center.

The Mike Curb Family Foundation had a leadership role with former Nashville Mayor Karl Dean and Mayor Megan Barry's vision for Metro Nashville Public Schools and the educational programs called Music Makes Us and NAPE (Nashville Alliance for Public Education). Music Makes Us collects donated band instruments so students – particularly underprivileged students – have the chance to learn an instrument and become part of a symphony.

Martha Rivers Ingram set the highest standard for Music City USA by bringing the finest symphony hall in the United States to Nashville. The Curb family felt that we needed to honor her vision by working as a community to bring all forms of music together to develop the future of this great city. The Mike Curb Family Foundation

was a founding member of the Schermerhorn Symphony Hall and we continue to work with former Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, US Senators Lamar Alexander and Bob Corker, Tennessee Governor Bill Haslam and Nashville Mayor Megan Barry, who share our vision to provide students with opportunities in the arts.

The Curb Foundation has worked with former Vice Mayor Howard Gentry and the Nashville Chamber of Commerce Foundation to benefit the underserved and homeless. In addition, the Curb Foundation has worked with the National Health Care for the Homeless Council and the Nashville Rescue Mission and Safe Haven Family Shelter's Hike for the Homeless and other homeless programs. Former Vice Mayor Gentry stated that our "investment in the Public Benefit Foundation, provided the resources needed to begin and sustain collaborative efforts around poverty and homelessness. Because of Mike's sincere commitment, the city of Nashville is beginning to experience a decline in these areas."

My relationship with Belmont University began when Donna Hilley, president of Tree Publishing, introduced me to Bob Mulloy, the founder and head of the music business program there. Later, I met the university's president at the time, Bill Troutt, who had a visionary plan for growth. Part of his plan was to expand the music business program, which later became the Mike Curb Music Business program at Belmont.

I was impressed with the work Bill Troutt and Bob Mulloy were doing with the program, even though it was small at the time, and the Mike Curb Family Foundation's initial contribution allowed for the completion of the music studio program that Bob Mulloy had

started. Unfortunately, Bob Mulloy died of cancer in 1998; however, Bill Troutt and I spent one of the last days of Bob's life discussing his dreams with him. As we left that meeting, Bill and I told Bob that the new studio facilities were going to be named the Robert E. Mulloy Studios.

At the beginning of this century, Belmont University chose Bob Fisher to become president after Bill Troutt left. Bob has not only grown the university during his tenure, but the music business program has grown to the point where Bob envisioned the creation of a separate college – the Mike Curb College of Entertainment and Music Business. This college is now the largest stand-alone music and entertainment business college in the nation, with approximately 1,700 students currently enrolled. Bob's vision for building this University is beyond anything I could have ever imagined.

In order to create a home for the Curb College and create an overall entertainment, music, and sports presence, Bob Fisher had the idea to create the Curb Event Center that seats 5,000 people and provides live performance and recording opportunities. It has also created a sports complex of offices for coaches and a basketball arena, which has helped the Belmont Bruins men's basketball team compete at the highest level in the NCAA and reach the national playoffs a number of times during the ensuing years.

We were excited to learn that the Curb Event Center was chosen to host a major presidential debate between Republican candidate Senator John McCain and Democratic candidate (and future President) Barack Obama in October of 2008. This historic event occurred in large part because of Frank Fahrenkopf's vision I had the pleasure of

working closely with Frank when I was Chairman of the NRFC and he was Chairman of the RNC. He was a great Chairman and has always had great leadership skills.

As part of that Center, the Curb Café was built to include a stage where singers can perform in a small venue, similar to Nashville's Bluebird Café. The music business college needed more studio space, so a portion of our donation was utilized to purchase the number-one recording studio in town, Ocean Way Studio on Music Row. The first studio I recorded in was Ocean Way's predecessor, Western Recording Studios in Los Angeles. The owners of Ocean Way had established a studio in Nashville but decided to sell it, and our Foundation was fortunate that the Curb College at Belmont was able to purchase it so that Belmont students could learn recording techniques utilizing contemporary equipment.

In addition to Ocean Way Studios, the students at the Curb College as well as others also now have the use of the historic studios that the Curb Foundation purchased and restored, including Historic RCA Studio B, the Quonset Hut, Columbia Studio A and RCA Studio A. Those four studios created the beginning of Historic Music Row in Nashville, which is the largest collection of music and entertainment companies in the world. The Country Music Foundation was in need of cash and offered to sell RCA Studio B to the Curb Foundation, and the Foundation in turn committed to restore the studio in such a way that tourists could enjoy seeing the facility where great artists such as Elvis Presley, Roy Orbison, The Everly Brothers, Waylon Jennings, Eddy Arnold, and Dolly Parton recorded their classic hits. Each year, approximately 50,000 people visit RCA Studio B, and our goal to save

Nashville's Historic Music Row has also been enhanced by the newly renovated Quonset Hut, Columbia Studio A and the RCA Studio A.

In order to continue the growth of the Curb College at Belmont University, the Mike Curb Family Foundation purchased the Sony Building, which was the original home of both the historic Decca and Columbia Record labels. The Foundation purchased the building and, in conjunction with Belmont, restored historic Columbia Studio A, which the Curb College uses for classes. That building is the home for a program to teach students how to become songwriters. The Curb College offers a special songwriters degree and operates the history program under the direction of Don Cusic, who holds the Curb Professorship at the Curb College.

This building also houses Leadership Music, which continues to play a major role in the future of the music industry. At the end of 2014, in conjunction with Aubrey Preston and Chuck Elcan, we purchased the original RCA Records building, which included the historic RCA Studio A so this historic building on Music Row could be preserved. Our foundation is honored to continue to help preserve Music Row by acquiring the Word Records building from Warner, along with Curb's purchase of all of Word Entertainment. Curb also purchased the first building built on Music Row, which is now known as the Curb Productions and Studios building, adjacent to Warner Bros., and purchased the historic Roy Orbison building which serves as the primary studio facility for Curb Records under the supervision of Aaron Bowlin and Alex Powers.

Under the leadership of the inaugural dean of the Curb College, Jim Van Hook, the current dean, Doug Howard, former dean, Wesley Bulla, and former Associate Dean Pamela Browne, Belmont's Curb

College has expanded programs into the east in New York City and the west in Los Angeles, utilizing the Walt Disney Building Annex in Burbank, California that we purchased and which continues to be the western headquarters of Curb Records.

Belmont's Curb College further expanded into Honolulu, Hawaii, under the leadership of Hawaii Governor Linda Lingle, University of Hawaii Foundation President Donna Vuchinich, University President M.R.C. Greenwood, Chancellor Michael T. Hota, former Chancellor Ramsey Pedersen, Mele Program Director Kaela Chock, noted author Gavin Daws, and former Warner Bros. President and Curb CEO Jim Ed Norman. The Curb Foundation completed the new classroom and recording studio facilities there in 2010.

I initially became involved with the Country Music Hall of Fame when Bud Wendell – then the head of Gaylord Entertainment, which owned the Grand Ole Opry and Opryland – came to my office seeking a contribution for the Boy Scouts. Eddy Arnold introduced me to Bill Ivey because Eddy was considering a home for his collection of files and memorabilia that he had saved throughout his long career. During lunch with Bill Ivey and Eddy Arnold, Bud told me that if we would contribute the initial gift of a million dollars, then the Country Music Hall of Fame could solicit Gaylord, the Country Music Association, the major labels, and other companies to match that contribution. I agreed to provide that gift and I'm proud of the magnificent Curb Conservatory and Curb Courtyard, which are used for educational and public purposes at the Country Music Hall of Fame, which is now under the leadership of Steve Turner and Executive Director Kyle Young. In 2013, as part of the creation of the new Music City

Convention Center, the Curb Foundation participated in the expansion of the Country Music Hall of Fame by creating the Linda and Mike Curb Terrace, which is across the street from the new Omni Hotel. I have been honored to serve as a board member of the Country Music Association, the Academy of Country Music, the Country Music Foundation and Hall of Fame, and the Recording Industry Association of America, under the direction of Mitch Bainwol and Cary Sherman.

For many years I have served on the board of directors at Fisk University, which is one of the oldest African-American universities in the nation. At Fisk, the Mike Curb Family Foundation currently endows the Curb Chair for the Fisk Jubilee Singers, the first group to make Nashville “Music City U.S.A.” Their great legacy continues under the direction of Paul Kwami, director of the Jubilee Singers, and a genius who understands the art of African-American spirituals. Fisk was fortunate to be involved with former president Hazel O’Leary, the former head of the federal energy department. Hazel graduated from Fisk and, after she left Washington, became president and helped rebuild this historic university. After seven years under the leadership of O’Leary, Fisk was fortunate to have Dr. H. James Williams become the 15th president of the University and Atlanta businessman Frank Sims has served very successfully as Interim President. Sims has been an excellent president and a great leader for Fisk. Fisk has elected an outstanding future leader, Dr. Kevin D. Rome Sr., as the 16th President of Fisk. In 2016 I chaired the 150th anniversary of Fisk University, which was known as the Sesquicentennial.

The Curb Foundation made it possible for the Jubilee Singers to return to Paul Kwami’s homeland of Ghana, where the group’s

performance was recorded, and the Foundation helped renovate the Talley House so the Jubilee Singers could have a place to rehearse on campus. After many years of serving on the Fisk Board, I was elected as the third Trustee Emeritus in the 150-year history of Fisk University and in 2012 I was honored to be inducted into the Fisk Society of Philanthropists. In 2017 Fisk honored me by making me an Honorary Jubilee Singer. Later that year, Fisk gave me an honorary degree of which I am very proud.

The Mike Curb Family Foundation established the Curb Learning Lab for Music and Entertainment Marketing at Baylor University under the leadership of Kirk Wakefield; endowed a Professorship for Business and Law at Claremont McKenna College in Los Angeles under the direction of former presidents Pamela Gann and Hiram E. Chodosh, President Thomas LoBasso, Steven Siegel, Joshua Rossett and former Congressman David Dreier. The Curb Institute at Rhodes College was the vision of Rhodes President Bill Troutt, who originally established the Curb school at Belmont when he was president of that university. Bill always had an amazing approach to his community, which is particularly important in Memphis where he has provided leadership through the Curb Institute to reach out to virtually all of the music-based foundations and museums, which are so important to race relations in that city where so much music history originated.

Bill had a vision for tying together all of our music education programs so students can share their learning experiences. Rhodes in Memphis, under the guidance of Dr. Russ Wigginton and John Bass, specializes in the study of Memphis blues and the formation of rock & roll music, while Baylor specializes in Contemporary Christian

music studies. Fisk has a rich history in the development of spiritual music, Vanderbilt specializes in research and graduate studies, Belmont specializes in the overall music business and entertainment education, and California State University specializes in arts, film, communication and media. In addition to his leadership at Rhodes and Belmont, Bill inspired the Curb Creative Connection which ties together all of the Curb programs and colleges across the country. Jim Ed Norman and Jay Clayton have done a fantastic job leading the Curb Creative Connection. In mid-2017, Dr. Marjorie Hass assumed the presidency at Rhodes and is leading the College in a very positive way.

The Curb Foundation created an historical educational center and research institute in Kannapolis, North Carolina, which sponsors the North Carolina Music Hall of Fame under the direction of Eddie Ray, a remarkable man who rose from being the grandson of a slave to become the first African-American executive of a major record company. I'm proud to call him a friend. He has always been a mentor to me, giving me valuable advice and believing in me. He was the first person to provide distribution through Capitol Records for my young record label. Jerry and Pearl Spurgeon, Gene Overcash and Veronica Cordle have played important roles in the daily running of the North Carolina facilities for many years.

In addition to the mentorship of Eddie Ray, I was fortunate to experience the mentorship of one of the greatest leaders that the music industry ever produced, Mo Ostin. The Curb Foundation established the Mike Curb Music Business, Entertainment & Sports Institute under the direction of Dr. Pam Browne, Steve Sharples and Gloria Hawkins

and under the leadership of President Dr. Edison Jackson at Bethune-Cookman University in Florida.

Daytona State College created the Mike Curb College of Music, Entertainment & Art under Dr. Kent Sharples and Frank Lombardo. In 2011 Dr. Carol Eaton was elected as the first female president in the history of Daytona State and Dwight Lewis was elected Chairman of the Board. In 2015 Dr. Thomas LoBasso became President of Daytona State. The entertainment portion of this college includes music business programs involving the history of NASCAR as well as arts, music and entertainment programs and sports marketing educational programs. This created an excellent synergy due to the close proximity to Daytona Speedway and other historic regional ties to the overall development of American motorsports. Those facilities allow the display of our music and motorsports memorabilia and history alongside the overall history of those industries, which gives students an opportunity to study the future of music and motorsports while surrounded by the history of those who made its future possible.

Now that all of those programs have been established, the Curb Foundation's major goal is to determine a way for all of our educational institutions and programs to work cooperatively in order to allow students to take advantage of the various opportunities that may exist at one institution but may not exist at another.

In order to increase our educational, research, and music history goals, the Curb Foundation supported three projects. The first was the Foundation's purchase and renovation of the historic Elvis Presley Home in Memphis, Tennessee, the first home Elvis owned. Rhodes

College works with the Foundation to create research and educational opportunities in this historic home in conjunction with the goals of the Rhodes Curb Institute for Music. The students at the Mike Curb Institute at Rhodes benefit from internships at the Mike Curb Memphis Hall of Fame Gallery at the Rock & Soul Museum in Memphis. This Museum preserves the history of Rock and Soul music under the direction of John Doyle.

The Curb Foundation established the Mike Curb Gallery at the Grammy Museum in Los Angeles, which features the history of all music genres. This Museum is under the leadership of Bob Santelli and Neil Portnow. As part of our relationship with The Grammy Museum, the Curb Foundation sponsored two important Grammy initiatives: the Curb Careers in Music Program and the Mike Curb Music Mentoring Program for high school students interested in various aspects of the music business. The Grammy Museum has built a relationship with the Musicians Hall of Fame, which created a museum to honor studio musicians in Nashville under the leadership of Joe Chambers. I am proud to be a member of the Musicians Hall of Fame because it recognizes great musicians from all genres of music throughout the history of the music business.

At the suggestion of Senator Lamar Alexander, the Curb Foundation purchased hundreds of documents and awards that were previously displayed at the original Johnny Cash Museum in Hendersonville, a suburb of Nashville where Johnny Cash and June Carter lived. Senator Alexander felt that preserving the Johnny Cash Collection was of historic significance for future generations. In addition, after the unfortunate loss of the Jim Reeves Museum in

Nashville, the Foundation was able to acquire many of Reeves' awards and recordings in order to protect the historic significance of his legacy.

The Mike Curb Family Foundation is involved in teaching opportunities and free enterprise for grade-school students through Junior Achievement, which we sponsor in Los Angeles and Nashville, and a Mike Curb Center for Free Enterprise has been established in both Nashville and Los Angeles. The Foundation had previously given to the Boy Scouts and joined the Beaman Foundation in building a conference center in Nashville that we named in honor of Lee Beaman's father and my father.

The Curb Foundation sponsors a teacher development program for Nashville Metro Schools, which is named in honor of my mother, Stella Stout Curb, who studied to be a teacher. The Foundation was also involved in the rebuilding of the St. Vincent de Paul School that was badly damaged by Hurricane Katrina. The contribution to this project was given in honor of Linda Curb's mother, Mary Dunphy. The Foundation has supported Harpeth Hall School, where our daughters attended high school and where the Curb Family Music Center operates. The public library in downtown Nashville is home to the Curb Theatre, where children's plays and puppet shows are held.

The Curb Foundation works with Second Harvest Food Bank, where they sponsor the Mike Curb Family Welcome Center and previously, sponsored the Curb Golf Classic for the American Heart Association and now sponsor the Curb Golf Classic for Backfield in Motion under the leadership of former Middle Tennessee State University football coach James "Boots" Donnelly, which benefits

underserved youth. The Foundation supports the Achievement in the Radio Awards that benefit the March of Dimes and Rocketown, a youth club that allows inner city kids to participate in a positive environment.

At Baptist Hospital (now St. Thomas Midtown) in Nashville, the Curb Foundation established the Rev. Charles M. Curb Sanctuary, named in honor of my grandfather. In 2010, Linda and I were inducted into the Seton Society. In 2014 the Linda and Mike Curb Institute for Advanced Medical Education was formed involving the University of Tennessee (St. Thomas Hospitals), Indianapolis (Marian University and St. Francis Hospitals), the University of Texas, St. Vincent's Hospital in Jacksonville, Florida and the Seton Hospitals in Austin, Texas. This was possible because of great leadership from Mike Schatzlein, Karen Springer and Greg Pope.

At the KIPP Aspire Academy in San Antonio, the Foundation endowed the Eloisa Salazar Stout Library, named after my grandmother. Our oldest daughter, Megan Carole, taught at this charter school. She has dedicated her career to special education, which – in addition to general education and Spanish – was one of her three majors at Vanderbilt University.

Our daughter, Courtney, who oversees the human resources department of Curb Records, has a passion for animal rescue that she inherited from her mother. The Curb Foundation established the Curb Family Education Center at the San Antonio Humane Society and Courtney served on the board of the Oasis Center, which assists youth in crisis, and due to her involvement and that of my longtime executive assistant Becky Judd and Wynonna Judd, the Foundation established the Mike Curb Family College Access and Education Center at Oasis.

In 2014 the Curb Foundation partnered with The McCain Institute and The Herberger Institute at Arizona State University to launch the Curb Creative Enterprise and Public Leadership programs under the leadership of Arizona State President Michael Crow, Dean Steven Tepper and Senator John McCain. Tepper, along with Bill Ivey, has played a major role in our educational programs and I believe Steven will lead major universities in the future.

I was honored to be one of the original founders of the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library in California. In 2011, the Reagan Library celebrated the centennial of Ronald Reagan's birth with the opening of the newly renovated library, which includes the Campaign/Victory and Inauguration Gallery that our Foundation sponsored. This was made possible by the leadership of Fred Ryan, John Heubusch and Stewart McLaurin. Our Foundation also was involved in expanding the Reagan legacy to Washington, DC and the building of the Curb Media Center as part of the new Reagan Center. Nancy Reagan said, "It was always Ronnie's dream to create a Presidential Library that would inspire Americans for years to come, and with your help we are making his dream come true. Thank you, from the bottom of my heart, for your generosity and kindness over the years.

We were honored by the establishment of the Curb-Stout Patriots Theatre at Fort Campbell in Clarksville, Tennessee where our Foundation provided the funding for a facility that enables military families who live at Fort Campbell to have access to movies, live performances, and other activities. The name of the theatre honors my great-grandfather, Aaron Monroe Curb, and my maternal grandfather, Charles J. Stout, both of whom were war veterans.

Fort Campbell, located partly in Tennessee and partly in Kentucky, is significant to the circle of my life because the Curb family lived in Tennessee at the time of its original statehood in 1796. Aaron Monroe Curb fought in the Civil War and was the only member of his unit to survive. His wife, Fanny Curb, kept a handwritten diary of our family's history. My maternal grandfather, Charles J. Stout, fought in World War I and returned to become the YMCA director in Ashland, Kentucky, where my mother, Stella Stout Curb, was born.

If either of my two grandparents or great-grandparents, who were American patriots, had not returned from war, I would not be alive and all of the opportunities I've had in my life would not have existed. More importantly, the theatre is referred to as the Patriots Theatre because of all the great soldiers in our nation's history who sacrificed everything so that each of us can have the freedom to live our lives.

I am thankful to be active in the music business in a free country and I believe that everyone is standing on the shoulders of our brave ancestors. That is why we must give back to our country and our communities. Future generations must have the same freedom and the same opportunities. I also believe the charitable activities of our Foundation help motivate our employees and our artists. They realize their productivity is being channeled into areas that are good for the community and that their efforts will live on to benefit their children, grandchildren, and their families.

I have been awarded honorary degrees by five universities, including my alma mater California State University, Rhodes College in Memphis, Belmont University in Nashville, Pepperdine University in California and in 2017 I received an honorary degree from Fisk, the

historic black university in Nashville where I served on the board for many years. Also in 2017, Fisk made me an honorary Jubilee Singer, which was significant because, according to many historians, this group was the first African American group to be recorded and they are responsible for giving Music City USA its name. One of the most wonderful experiences in my life occurred at the 2017 commencement ceremonies of Fisk University where I was awarded an honorary degree along with Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi. Throughout this book I have spoken about experiences that come full circle in our lives. In this instance, both Nancy and I had been elected national committeeman and national committeewoman way back in 1976. Many decades later we were sharing this wonderful honor at an historic black university with the realization that we both shared the same values on the major social issues and in my commencement remarks I was able to let the students know the importance of fighting for everyone's human rights to ensure we protect our own rights to equality.

Throughout my life and career, I have been honored many times and in many ways. I have been named Nashvillian of the Year, received a Star on Nashville's Music City Walk of Fame, was inducted into the National Business Hall of Fame, the Musicians Hall of Fame (2014), received the Achievement Award for Historic Preservation, presented by the Metro Historical Commission (2015), and in 2007 I received a star on the historic Hollywood Walk of Fame, the same year that President Donald Trump received his Hollywood Star. My star in Hollywood rests in front of the Capitol Records building where I started my career. Those honors, like our work with the Foundation, bring my life full circle and give purpose, not only to me, but to my family and everyone associated

with our company. Back when I was starting my company with almost no money, living in a janitor's room over 50 years ago, I could never have imagined that I would be able to make charitable gifts valued at over one hundred million dollars. I can promise you that if you live your business, whether you are an employee or an owner, you will be proud of the opportunities that you have created for so many others.

I dedicate this book to all the great people who have allowed me to live this business and to create and build the oldest music company that is still owned by the original owner.

To see a gallery of photos related to this book, please visit:

Family Photographs:

<http://www.mikecurb.com/book/LTB/Family/>

Music Business Photographs:

<http://www.mikecurb.com/book/LTB/MusicBusiness/>

Motorsports Photographs:

<http://www.mikecurb.com/book/LTB/Motorsports/>

Public Service Photographs:

<http://www.mikecurb.com/book/LTB/PublicService/>

Foundation Photographs:

<http://www.mikecurb.com/book/LTB/Foundation/>

Quotes

GOVERNMENT & PUBLIC SERVICE

**LAMAR ALEXANDER - U.S. SENATOR
& FORMER TENNESSEE GOVERNOR**

“Mike Curb’s contributions to higher education, human rights and philanthropy for public well-being is what he will be most remembered for.”

**ARMAND ARABIAN – ASSOCIATE JUSTICE,
SUPREME COURT OF CALIFORNIA (Retired)**

“Many thanks for your ‘50 Years.’”

MEGAN BARRY – MAYOR, NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

“Mike Curb’s work to preserve music history and promote music education has made Nashville a better, richer place.”

**PHIL BREDESEN – FORMER GOVERNOR OF TENNESSEE
& FORMER MAYOR OF NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE**

“You’ve made huge contributions to the business and cultural life of our city and state and hope you’re very proud. California must be kicking themselves that they lost you.”

PRESIDENT GEORGE H.W. BUSH

“Mike, with sincere appreciation for your leadership of the GOP. Sincerely, George Bush”

**ELAINE CHAO – SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION
& FORMER SECRETARY OF LABOR**

“WOW! WOW!! WOW!!! What an amazing record of joy, innovation, creativity you have brought to America and the world!

Thank you for sharing this beautiful legacy of 50 years of your contribution to the music culture of our country! I always knew you were a genius but this book records your tremendous contribution to

your community, nation, the richness of our nation's musical soul and philanthropy!

Mitch and I will treasure this.”

BOB CORKER – U.S. SENATOR, TENNESSEE

“Thank you for your significant investment in the NRSC. I enjoyed our conversation and appreciate your support in every way. I hope we have the opportunity to set the agenda and move on towards solving our nation's fiscal issues.”

KARL DEAN – FORMER MAYOR, NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

“It's hard to imagine Music City being Music City without Mike Curb. Whether it's a country music hit he produced or a music education building on a university campus that bears his name, Mike's contributions to Nashville's music, philanthropic and civic life are unrivaled.”

BILL FRIST – FORMER SENATE MAJORITY LEADER

“It just shows the reach that Mike Curb has, his commitment to country, his commitment to freedom and the fact that he's not just a lot of talk, but he actually delivers. Mike Curb, because of his investments, his investments in humanity, his investments into individuals causes people's hopes and dreams, that he helps inspire, to become reality, and that's the unique contribution that Mike Curb has made to this community, to Middle Tennessee, to Tennessee, to this part of the country and indeed to the United States of America.”

**HOWARD GENTRY – FORMER VICE MAYOR,
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE**

“Mike's investment in the Public Benefit Foundation provided the resources needed to begin and sustain collaborative efforts around poverty and homelessness. Because of Mike's sincere commitment, the city of Nashville is beginning to experience a decline in these areas.”

PATTY & JOLLY GISSELL – MORGAN STANLEY

“Great experiences in government, but more important is the friendship that has endured so many years.”

WILLIAM F. HAGERTY – AMBASSADOR TO JAPAN & FORMER COMMISSIONER OF TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

“Your support of the Tennessee Film, Entertainment & Music Commission came at a critical time. Under your leadership as Chairman, we successfully repositioned the program for success.”

BILL HASLAM - GOVERNOR OF TENNESSEE

“Mike Curb’s work to preserve music history and promote music education has made Nashville a better, richer place. Whether he’s saving a historic studio or giving to a university or a museum, Mike makes sure we keep the music in Music City.”

“Mike, I believe that your participation in government is certain to leave a positive impact on the State of Tennessee.”

ORRIN HATCH - PRESIDENT PRO TEM, UNITED STATES SENATE

“I am very proud of you and your success. You have come a long way since we traipsed down the highways of California.”

JOHN HEUBUSCH – EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, RONALD REAGAN PRESIDENTIAL FOUNDATION

“I want you to know that there are about three people on this earth whom I’d like to be in my next life, and one of them is you.”

BILL IVEY – FORMER CHAIRMAN, THE NATIONAL ENDOWMENT OF THE ARTS, APPOINTED BY PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON

“This is fabulous and we need to get one to every Curb scholar.”

**JACK KEMP – NEW YORK CONGRESSMAN
& FORMER VICE PRESIDENTIAL NOMINEE**

“There is no public official in the United States of America who has given more public support for incentive-oriented tax policy than Mike Curb. Someone who is right out front with Prop 13 and also out front among public officials at the state level in the country with the Kemp/Roth Bill which was President Reagan’s ultimate tax victory in the Congress.”

DEXTER KING – SON OF MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

“I’m proud to represent my family at Mike Curb’s induction to the Hollywood Walk of Fame. Mike Curb shares the principles of our family.”

**ROBERT LIFTON – SUCCESSFUL ENTREPRENEUR &
FORMER CHAIRMAN, AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE**

“I met Mike when he was 20 years old. I was enormously impressed with his business sophistication, even at his young age, and with his understanding of the music world and particularly his ability to relate to the young, upcoming artists.”

**GENERAL WILLIAM LYON – CHAIRMAN & FOUNDER,
WILLIAM LYON HOMES**

“This history of all of your achievements is fun to read and reminisce through the years. Please know that your friendship means so much to Willa Dean and me.”

**SHELDON LYTTON – FORMER CHIEF OF STAFF TO
ACTING GOVERNOR & LT. GOVERNOR MIKE CURB
& PARTNER IN KELLY, LYTTON & WILLIAMS**

“Never before, and never since your administration has there been a Lieutenant Governor who took his office seriously and who was interested in actually moving the levers of government.”

**JOHN McCain - U.S. SENATOR & CHAIRMAN, SENATE
ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE**

“When I returned from North Vietnam with my fellow POWs, Mike and Linda Curb were gracious enough to welcome us in their home. I will never forget that.”

**STEWART McLaurin – PRESIDENT, WHITE HOUSE
HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION & FORMER EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR, RONALD REAGAN CENTENNIAL
CELEBRATION**

“We certainly did have some extraordinary experiences, and each of those was a result of your leadership and vision.”

HARVEY MILK - SAN FRANCISCO SUPERVISOR

“Mike – Congratulations & do a great job. Warmly, Harvey”

PRESIDENT RICHARD NIXON

“My only advice is - take nothing for granted and even when the polls may show you a few votes ahead - run as if you were a million behind.”

Your election is crucial to California. If - God forbid - Brown wins - we will have a half-time governor for a full-time job as he makes his run for the Presidency. When he is out of the state we simply can't run the risk of having the present incumbent as acting Governor. The campaign will be a tough ordeal, but your youth and drive will see you through.”

**LYN NOFZIGER – FORMER PRESS SECRETARY
FOR RONALD REAGAN**

“I don't know to this day if Ronald Reagan realizes what he owes Joe Rodgers and Jimmy Lyon and Mike Curb. What he owes is an awful lot. Without those three his 1976 campaign would have collapsed. He never would have had the opportunity to capture the hearts and souls of the rank-and-file of the Republican party during the 1976

National Convention. And without their support then there is little chance that he would have run for president in 1980.”

HAZEL O’LEARY – FORMER SECRETARY, DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY & FORMER PRESIDENT, FISK UNIVERSITY

“Mike is an educator, an entrepreneur and for someone like me a great believer in public service and public policy for the good of all. But I want, really, to speak to his influence of young minds through both educating and mentoring through setting his own example of public service and giving back.”

NANCY PELOSI - HOUSE MINORITY LEADER & FORMER U.S. SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE

Nancy Pelosi speaking at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee in 2017 said “Mike was Lt. Governor when I first started getting involved in California government. I’m very honored to be here with Mike because it’s about friendship and bringing Democrats and Republicans together.”

RICK PERRY – U.S. SECRETARY OF ENERGY & FORMER GOVERNOR OF TEXAS

“Mike, thank you for being honorary chairman of my presidential campaign. Most of all, thank you for your friendship, and I look forward to working with you in the future.”

NANCY REAGAN - FORMER FIRST LADY

“It was always Ronnie’s dream to create a Presidential Library that would inspire Americans for years to come, and with your help we are making his dream come true. Thank you, from the bottom of my heart, for your generosity and kindness over the years.”

PRESIDENT RONALD REAGAN

“I’ve enjoyed working with you, but most of all I trusted you and you never let me down. Please know, also, Mike, how grateful we are for the wonderful job you did as National Vice-Chairman of the campaign.”

**KEN RIETZ - AUTHOR & FORMER POLITICAL
CONSULTANT**

“What a fantastic life of accomplishments you have had! I am proud to have played a part in your public career.”

**FREDERICK J. RYAN, JR. – CHAIRMAN, RONALD REAGAN
PRESIDENTIAL FOUNDATION**

“This is a true masterpiece chronicling your achievements.”

**ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER – FORMER GOVERNOR,
CALIFORNIA**

“Mike made me realize that if he could come from the world of business into government, I could do the same.”

**RICK SCOTT, GOVERNOR OF FLORIDA & CHAIRMAN
OF THE PRESIDENT TRUMP INAUGURAL SUNSHINE BALL**

“As I travel our State, the one thing everyone remembers about our Sunshine Ball was The Beach Boys (performance arranged by Curb). Thanks for your friendship.”

FRED THOMPSON – FORMER U.S. SENATOR, TENNESSEE

“The heck with being president, I want to be Mike Curb. Mike and Linda Curb have meant an awful, awful lot to this community and this state and are two of the most generous people in the world that you’ll ever meet and have helped worthy causes of all kinds.”

**ROBERT HOLMES TUTTLE - FORMER U.S. AMBASSADOR
TO THE UNITED KINGDOM**

“You have had a fabulous life and career.”

**ANTONIO VILLARAIGOSA, FORMER MAYOR, LOS
ANGELES, CALIFORNIA**

“Thank you, Mike and Linda for being the cornerstone founders of the Valley Performing Arts Center.”

MUSIC & BUSINESS

EDDY ARNOLD

“Mike Curb is one of the finest young executives I’ve met along the way. Besides that, he is talented.”

RODNEY ATKINS

“Mike Curb encouraged me to learn about songwriting, how to write songs and how to produce those songs. He allowed me to get in the studio and experiment and learn the process. Hats off to Mike for really sticking with artist development for a long time.”

AL BELL – CO-OWNER STAX RECORDS & FORMER PRESIDENT OF MOTOWN RECORDS

“If Mike had not worked with us to produce the film soundtrack to Shaft and the money that we made on that soundtrack which outgrossed the film, then I’m here to tell you that there never would have been a Wattstax. That was because of Mike Curb.”

BILLBOARD MAGAZINE (on Curb’s relationship with Chicago)

“Curb negotiated one of the least known, but perhaps one of the most significant contracts in the history of the industry. Mike had become a part owner in a separate production company. Mike and his producer friend negotiated a contract with a then, relatively unknown act. The producer was Jim Guercio, the act Chicago.”

DEBBY BOONE

“My parents told me that Mike Curb brought over the most wonderful song. It was this beautiful song that literally changed my life and “You Light Up My Life” continues to change my life.”

LEE BRICE

“Mike, I want to thank you for giving me an opportunity to fulfill my dream – for sticking with me, and especially with this next record allowing me to be creative and true to myself. It means more than you know.”

ROSANNE CASH

“My entire family is tremendously grateful to you, and proud that Dad (Johnny Cash) will have a permanent presence in a physical sense on Music Row.”

JOE CHAMBERS – DIRECTOR, MUSICIANS HALL OF FAME

“It’s almost impossible to put into words what your support has done for the Musicians Hall of Fame! Thank you for everything.”

CHRIS CHRISTIAN

“You have helped so many people, and I just wanted you to know that for me, I am very grateful for all you did for me in the early days when I wanted to spend my life in the music business and it took someone like you to give me a start.”

DICK CLARK – CREATOR OF “AMERICAN BANDSTAND”

“American Bandstand is a legend in the music business – and so are you, Mike. Thanks for writing the Bandstand theme song.”

LYOR COHEN – FORMER CHAIRMAN, THE WARNER MUSIC GROUP

“It is always a pleasure to spend time with you. You are special and we are lucky to be in business with you. Thank you for your belief and your support.”

SAMMY DAVIS JR.

“My “Candy Man” record is Gold – don’t forget it. I waited 43 years for that, but it took the talents of a lot of people...first of all the belief that Mike Curb had.”

AHMET ERTEGAN – FOUNDER & FORMER CHAIRMAN, ATLANTIC RECORDS

“Great memories, Foreigner, Clapton – Cream soundtrack, great friendship.”

BOB GAUDIO – FOUNDING MEMBER OF THE FOUR SEASONS MUSICAL GROUP & CREATOR OF THE JERSEY BOYS BROADWAY MUSICAL

“Mike, you have been a big part of our Four Seasons and Jersey Boys story.”

BERRY GORDY – FOUNDER, MOTOWN RECORDS

“Mike we wish you many more years of great success.”

JOHNNY GRANT – HONORARY MAYOR OF HOLLYWOOD

“A man who has had an extraordinary career. Here in our great state he has played a leadership role in so many different areas; the political arena, the entertainment field and the business world. He has discovered some of the greatest names in the recording industry. I’m proud to welcome Mike Curb to the Hollywood Walk of Fame.”

NATALIE GRANT

“I’ve closed so many record companies that the first people I’d like to thank is Curb Records for staying in business.”

DENIS HANDLIN – CHAIRMAN & CEO, SONY MUSIC AUSTRALIA, NEW ZEALAND & ASIA

“We cherish our very special relationship with you.”

ISAAC HAYES

“Mike, thank you for making Shaft possible.”

STEVE HOLY

“Mike Curb is the most loyal person in Nashville”

SONNY JAMES

“I want to thank Mike Curb for believing in me and helping me get into the Country Music Hall of Fame”

NAOMI JUDD – THE JUDDS

“How proud we are to be associated with your label and how much we cherish the friendship. Thank you so much for generosity and thoughtfulness.”

WYNONNA JUDD

“There is no such thing as a coincidence to me, and I think Mike Curb was part of a plan. He is one of the most exuberant people I’ve ever known and I’m glad he walked into my life.”

CASEY KASEM

“During the years Mike has helped a lot of artists get started. He even helped me by insisting that I see a particular agent that he knew. Because of Mike’s insistence, I’ve done thousands of commercials and cartoon voices, including my greatest claim to fame, playing the part of Shaggy on Scooby Doo.”

PAUL KWAMI – DIRECTOR, FISK JUBILEE SINGERS

“Mike has so much wisdom and knowledge, I believe sometimes he may have to write things down for people to remember all his ideas.”

MICHAEL LLOYD

“You have instructed me all my life about creative things, business things, how to act with others, how to think, how to improve. It’s very difficult to describe 50 years of life altering events. It’s very difficult to capture the true essence of the faith you have had in me. All I can say is thank you for believing in me. And most of all, thank you for being my friend.”

LYLE LOVETT – at the Grammy Awards

“Thanks to Mike Curb, Dick Whitehouse and everybody at Curb Records.”

SHANE McANALLY – 2016 SONGWRITER OF THE YEAR

“He (Mike) asked if I might be interested in a record deal which was of course the reason I had come to Nashville in the first place, so I think that was probably the most important, best demo I’d ever done.”

RONNIE McDOWELL

“Thank you for loving my music and for caring about the history of all music.”

TIM McGRAW

"I've never come with a ballad first as a single, and I was scared to death to do that with "It's Your Love" but you were pretty insistent and you were right. I wouldn't have had a career if they at Curb hadn't signed me."

JO WALKER-MEADOR – FORMER EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, COUNTRY MUSIC ASSOCIATION

"When I first met you at a Gavin Convention in Acapulco, you were about 20 years old and had already accomplished more than most in a lifetime. Mike, you have been most generous in providing support and underpinning for so many entities in Nashville, and because of that, the impact on so many lives is tremendous. From Belmont to Vanderbilt to the Hall of Fame, just to mention a few, you have made a difference."

BILL MEDLEY – THE RIGHTEOUS BROTHERS

"I turned it down for about three months and Mike Curb kept saying, Are you sure? Are you sure? Finally, they called back and said Jennifer Warnes wants to record it with you, and I got to go in and do "I've Had The Time Of My Life." It turned out to be one of the biggest things I almost missed."

MERCYME

"We want to thank Curb Records for hooking us up in mainstream and providing the jet engines to break "I Can Only Imagine."

JO DEE MESSINA

"You've been really good to me. I'm truly grateful for all you've done in my career."

MARK MILLER – SAWYER BROWN

"The Gold and Platinum records mean to me that there has been a great partnership between Sawyer Brown, Mike Curb and Curb Records. It's pretty exciting as an artist to have this kind of vibe coming from the owner and president of the label."

LIZA MINELLI

“Dearest Mike...It was a party just to be near you.”

KITTY MOON – FORMER CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNTRY MUSIC ASSOCIATION & OWNER, SCENE THREE

“Not only is it an exceptionally well produced and thoroughly entertaining and informative history of your phenomenal success but manages to capture the heart and soul of why one Mike Curb is unquestionably one of the nation’s bona fide success stories. I’m so very proud of you Mike and particularly proud to call you my treasured friend.”

STEVE MOORE, FORMER CEO, COUNTRY MUSIC ASSOCIATION

“We are extremely proud of your past success as well as your recent accomplishments and look forward to working together for many years to come!”

DOUG MORRIS – FORMER CHAIRMAN, SONY MUSIC GROUP & FORMER CHAIRMAN, UNIVERSAL

“Mike Curb is among a handful of figures in our industry who have remained visionary and vital throughout the years.”

DAVE MOUNT – PRESIDENT OF WARNER ELECTRA ATLANTIC DISTRIBUTION CORPORATION

“I have fond memories of my association with Curb and of your friendship.”

BARBARA ORBISON

“I want to thank Mike. Mike has known me for a long, long time. I think we first met when I was married and I was 17 years old. Mike used to write with Roy and actually produced Roy way, way back when he was President of MGM Records.”

DONNY OSMOND

“He’d be coming up with the hit records and all of this time he became Lt. Governor of California. Mike, thanks for all the wonderful hits.”

MARIE OSMOND

“Mike Curb has an amazing ear for hearing a song and knowing it is going to be hit. He just kept coming up with these number one songs for us.”

MERRILL OSMOND – LEAD SINGER OF THE OSMONDS

“If it hadn’t been for Mike, there wouldn’t be an Osmonds - we would still be a barbershop quartet.”

MO OSTIN – FORMER CHAIRMAN, WARNER REPRISE

“Mike put us in the singles business in 1976.”

SAM PHILLIPS – SUN RECORDS FOUNDER (AS RECOUNTED BY MARY COOK SINGLETON & JOHN SINGLETON, CO-OWNERS OF SUN RECORDS)

“Of all the people in the music industry, I consider Mike Curb a true magical pioneering spirit. He is the person I have admired the most and would like to have known. His creative ideas are fearless, adventuresome and truly original. I consider Mike a true icon, the real deal, with a lasting legacy.”

NEIL PORTNOW - PRESIDENT OF NARAS (GRAMMY)

“We could not be more pleased and proud to have Mike Curb’s legacy deservedly honored here at The Grammy Museum.”

LOU RAWLS

“Billboard couldn’t honor a more ‘Natural Man’. Thanks for my Grammy Award for that record.”

EDDIE RAY – FIRST AFRICAN AMERICAN VICE PRESENT OF A MAJOR RECORD COMPANY AND CURRENT VICE CHAIRMAN AND MEMBER OF THE NORTH CAROLINA MUSIC HALL OF FAME

“I doubt that even a real Angel from heaven could have done as much for anybody as Mike has done for me.”

“It was more important to me, personally, when Mike and I took our first promotion trip together in Bakersfield, California, in 1964, and

I was refused dinner service because of my color. Mike and his group threatened to leave the restaurant unless I was served, and I knew then that my relationship with Mike would last for a lifetime.”

COLIN REED – PRESIDENT AND CEO OF GAYLORD ENTERTAINMENT

“Patience has its rewards! I was pleased to read the article in the Nashville Business Journal regarding your expanded relationship with Warner and Word Entertainment. Congratulations!

I’m certain that your new role will provide the opportunity for many great accomplishments and I wish you continued success with all of your endeavors.”

SUSAN RILEY – FOUNDER OF FERVENT RECORDS WITH ROD RILEY

“He has always been, and continues to be, such a great encouragement to our whole family”

LEANN RIMES

“I got an offer from a record company who I think basically if I had gone with them, would have canned the song (“Blue”), and I would have totally done a different album. I was lucky enough to find Mike and Curb Records and he actually gave it a chance.”

KENNY ROGERS

“Mike had given me my own record company. Thank you so much for that, it’s always a great highlight of my life.”

FRANK ROSENFELT – PRESIDENT, MGM

“Thank you, Mike Curb, for the spirit, the enthusiasm, and the leadership with which you inspired the MGM Records Division.”

BOB SANTELLI – EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, THE GRAMMY MUSEUM (on Curb’s Grammy Icon presentation)

“There’s a great sense of loyalty that you bring, not only to the business, but also to your personal life.

Your command of American music history, all kinds not just the

business point of view which lots of people from your walk have, but the understanding of records, artists and the recall that you have and the contextual ability to tell the story and the big picture. I'm very impressed. You are a musicologist as well. That's one thing you should add to your resume."

DYLAN SCOTT – commenting on his 2017 major hit “My Girl”

"I want to thank the whole Curb team for their great work and great belief."

**THOMAS J. SHERRARD – SR. PARTNER & FOUNDER
OF SHERRARD, ROE, VOIGT & HARBISON**

"You've had the privilege to live a rich and exciting life."

DAVID SMALLBONE – MANAGER, FOR KING & COUNTRY

"...Mike is highly regarded by our family and ... We are excited about the many opportunities that are possible with this new partnership and we are very grateful that you are making available this time."

RAY STEVENS

"What more can you say about this amazing man."

MEL TILLIS

"Mike, I'll never forget you signed me to my first meaningful record contract, thanks for believing."

**STEVE TURNER – CHAIRMAN, COUNTRY MUSIC
FOUNDATION & HALL OF FAME & FOUNDER
OF MARKETSTREET ENTERPRISES**

"Thank you for all you have done for our community and our nation. You certainly serve as a credit to a life extremely well-lived."

JIM VAN HOOK – FORMER CEO OF WORD RECORDS

"Mike Curb is an extremely caring and generous man. At this stage in his life, he doesn't have to be, but he is by nature. He has been more generous to folks like you and me than the rest of the industry combined."

**DICK WHITEHOUSE – FORMER PRESIDENT,
CURB RECORDS (35 years)**

“Nothing Mike does or comes up with ever surprises me anymore.
He’s the classic textbook record executive.”

HANK WILLIAMS JR.

“Mike, thanks for believing in me.”

SPORTS

CARY AGAJANIAN

“I describe Mike Curb as one of the great figures in American business for what he has accomplished in music, motorsports and politics.”

RICHARD CHILDRESS – NASCAR HALL OF FAME CAR OWNER, INCLUDING SIX DALE EARNHARDT CHAMPIONSHIPS

“Mike loves racing as much as I do, I know he does. The things that he’s done for the sport are incredible. I think Mike Curb’s impact on the world of racing has been tremendous. Mike Curb had a tremendous amount of impact on my career and how we all came together as Dale Earnhardt and Richard Childress, and Mike Curb played a big role in that, so yes, Mike Curb had a lot to do with the success of Richard Childress Racing today.”

KEN CLAPP – MAJOR MOTORSPORTS EXECUTIVE & HISTORIAN

“I’m proud to induct you into the West Coast Stock Car Hall of Fame. Your support of motorsports history is vital.”

ANDY GRANATELLI – FORMER CEO, STP

“You’ve achieved so much in your time and I’m very proud to be your friend. Congratulations on winning the Indianapolis 500.”

MIKE HELTON – PRESIDENT, NASCAR

“I’m thankful to have met you and benefitted from your talents and thoughtfulness.”

BRYAN HERTA (HERTA/CURB-AGAJANIAN MOTORSPORTS)

“Mike Curb and Cary Agajanian have made it possible for our team to win two Indianapolis 500s.”

KASEY KAHNE

“Since we formed our partnership in 2003, I am very appreciative of you helping make our team one of the top, if not the elite racing organization in short track racing in the United States.”

BRAD NOFFSINGER

“This is a great tribute to you and your family and we are very proud to be a part of it. Thanks again for all the great years.”

PETER O’MALLEY – OWNER OF LOS ANGELES DODGERS

“Turning each page has brought back many fond memories and your many friends will be grateful to you for thinking of them.”

RICHARD PETTY (ON THE ANNIVERSARY OF HIS HISTORIC 200TH WIN AT DAYTONA)

“Without Mike we probably wouldn’t have won our 200th race.”

ALEXANDER ROSSI – WINNER OF THE 2016 100TH RUNNING OF THE INDIANAPOLIS 500

“I want to thank Bryan, Mike and Michael for my Indy 500 victory.”

JOHNNY SAUTER

“Mike Curb has been like a second father to me throughout my entire career and the many great victories we’ve had together.”

TONY STEWART

“Mike, thank you for everything you do for us at TSR. I look forward to many more wins and championships together.”

UNITED STATES AUTO CLUB (Kevin Miller, President & Dick Jordan, long-time USAC executive)

“Congratulations on being the first car owner to win the USAC Triple Crown. Thanks for your loyalty to USAC.”

EDUCATION & PHILANTHROPY

GENE D. BLOCK – CHANCELLOR, THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES

“The Mike Curb Music and Technology Lab is a wonderful way to enhance your legacy in the music industry and a meaningful investment in our students, faculty and community. On behalf of the UCLA family, I extend my profound gratitude.”

JAY CLAYTON – DIRECTOR, CURB CENTER FOR ART, ENTERPRISE & PUBLIC POLICY, VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY

“I find your dedication to public service and your leadership in causes that range from the arts to anti-discrimination policies to be remarkable.

Your generosity has put us in a position to do unprecedented things for music, art and creativity in business, the nonprofit realm and society.”

MICHAEL M. CROW – PRESIDENT, ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

“Your generous support will create new and unique opportunities for learning, providing ASU students with vital resources as they pursue creative careers that will enrich lives and transform communities throughout our region and the world.”

ROBERT C. FISHER - PRESIDENT, BELMONT UNIVERSITY

“I want to say thank you on behalf of Belmont University, for the 1,700 students in the Mike Curb College of Entertainment and Music Business. You have changed their lives; you daily change and influence their lives. I want to thank you as I have numerous times before and tell you that you changed everything for Belmont when you stepped up and partnered with us in the Curb Event Center. It changed our campus, it changed who we are; it’s given us a really bright future.”

**GORDON GEE – PRESIDENT, OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
& FORMER CHANCELLOR, VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY**

“What a magnificent life you have led. It combines the great qualities of your personal life and your family, along with your professional achievements. It is obvious that you have blazed many trails brilliantly. It is more obvious to me that you are a good man and an inspiration.”

**M.R.C. GREENWOOD – PRESIDENT,
UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII**

“Thanks to your vision and generous support, the students of Hawaii have access to an amazing program preparing them for careers in the music industry.”

**DIANNE HARRISON – PRESIDENT, CALIFORNIA
STATE UNIVERSITY NORTHRIDGE**

“Your continued support of the University is significant and, I believe, represents a solid investment not only in CSUN but also to California. On behalf of our students, faculty and staff, I extend our gratitude.”

**MARTHA RIVERS INGRAM – PHILANTHROPIST
& CHAIRMAN OF INGRAM INDUSTRIES**

“I don’t think that there have been enough horns blown because of the things that Mike Curb has done, but he has definitely used his time and his resources to make Nashville a better place.”

**KENT SHARPLES – FORMER PRESIDENT,
DAYTONA STATE COLLEGE**

“Your support of Daytona State College will allow generations in the future to learn the music and entertainment industry.”

FRANK SIMS – PRESIDENT, FISK UNIVERSITY

“Mike’s support for Fisk University has allowed the Fisk Jubilee Singers to become an international treasure.”

**STEVEN TEPPER – DEAN, HERBERGER INSTITUTE
FOR DESIGN AND THE ARTS (where the Curb programs
are housed), ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY**

“I feel grateful to share a small part of the Curb legacy.”

WILLIAM E. TROUTT – PRESIDENT, RHODES COLLEGE

“Everyone knows about Mike’s prominence in the entertainment world, his success as a songwriter, as a producer, as a record company executive. But everyone should also know about his passion for the history of music, his focus on our musical heritage, his desire that our heritage be preserved for future generations.”

**NICHOLAS S. ZEPPUS – CHANCELLOR,
VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY**

“Mike Curb’s support makes Vanderbilt and Nashville a center for creativity and innovation in education for the next generation.”

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<http://mikecurb.com/>

<http://www.curb.com/>

<http://wordentertainment.com/>

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