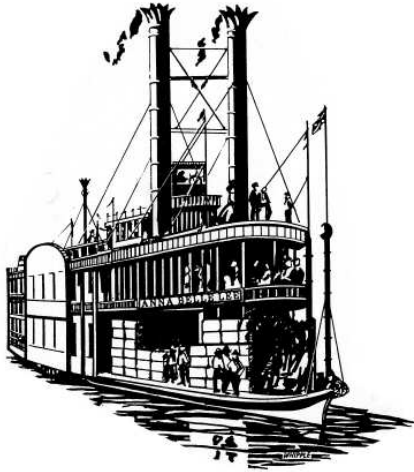


# MUSIC River of Life



**By Tabby Crabb**

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## Introduction

This book could easily reach 1,000 pages. As I write and reflect, I realize that I can never tell it all but I can distill it into small gulps and hopefully impart a little information, inspiration, a few laughs, and perhaps a sobering look at the music business from a soldier in the trenches standpoint.

Like many of you reading, I aspired to reach the top. The times I reached these high pinnacles I discovered that basically the only difference between the top and the bottom is the smell of the cologne and the price of the haircuts. The people are basically the same.

Remember that.

Miss Minnie Pearl called me on the phone one day when I was at Lobo Records in 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue in the early 1980s. She had heard my single, *Among Grandma's Souvenirs*, and wanted to call me and basically invite me to meet with her. She was moved by the lyric and wanted to give me some good advice.

*Tabby, this is Sarah Cannon, Miss Minnie Pearl.*

*Gasp! Yes Ma'am.*

As we talked she told me stories about her friend Gordie Tapp and how funny he was, and Stringbean too. She invited me to meet with her at my convenience.

The advice I took away from that meeting is worth sharing and I always tried to remember it even though I wasn't always successful.

*Tabby, be very careful and never forget where you come from.*

While I wasn't always careful, I don't think I ever forgot where I came from. I never forgot the family and friends who enabled me and gave me my values and what sense of fair play I maintained.

Unfortunately for me and my family, I basically lived for the moment. My planning skills were not the best as you'll learn but I hope you take away something to help you not repeat some of the mistakes I made. Then I can feel good about my life.

The rest is up to you, dear reader (I have always wanted to say that after reading Edgar Rice Burroughs as a kid).

## **Making A Career Out of It**

**I**f you spend any time reading this book you'll discover that I've lead an eclectic life in the entertainment business. At times being in the business was more important to me than being a specialist. Let me explain.

Since the 1960s I have been in bands, worked for a radio-television complex, played piano in a supper club for millionaires in Houston, worked as an extra and then a Cotton Eyed Joe dancer in a major motion picture, been on the road as a musician with the top band in the Country Music business, worked on the road as the onstage sidekick for a couple of top comics including a major show room in Las Vegas, a recording artist with almost a dozen Cashbox Magazine Top 100 Country singles, had a top video on CMT, owned a popular Nashville recording studio, plus a whole lot more.

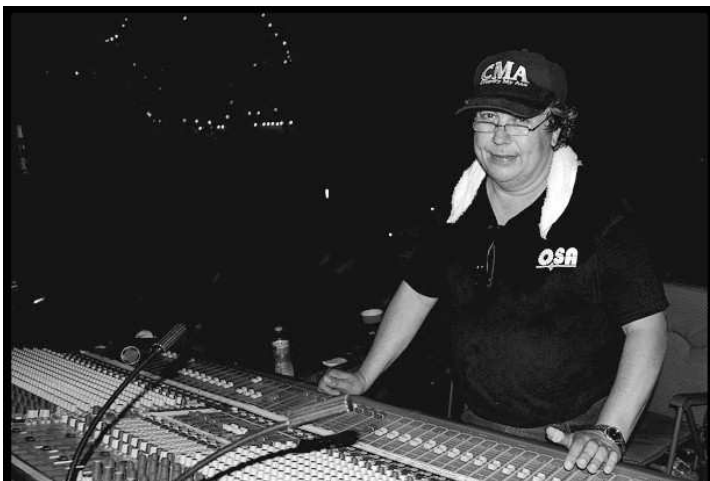
Maybe if I had just stuck with the piano playing or guitar playing I might have actually made something of myself but there was always the lure of doing something new and the new associations and friends it would bring. Plus, it was all part of my survival. Not having been lucky enough to be born rich, I had to be paid for what I did.

A few months ago I was in the Nashville area working as a monitor engineer at the

Celebration of Waylon Jennings life in Leiper's Fork. The event was a big deal. Since Waylon Jennings' death, the group hadn't been together in years.

Waylon's wife, Jessie Colter, The Crickets, Jamey Johnson, Tony Joe White, Bonnie Bramlett, even Kris and Willie were talking about showing up. How many years had it been? Almost seven.

My best friend, Greg Kane, had been Waylon's monitor engineer. Richie Albright, Waylon's producer had pulled Greg in many years earlier. Greg had pulled me into everything he was doing and the Waylon Celebration was no exception.



Greg behind the monitor board at The Celebration

Richie produced some of my best singles when I was working as a recording artist. At the pre-

event dinner in Leiper's Fork, Richie told me that I deserved to be there even though I wasn't actually a part of the band or the old crew but had a history with so many of those who had.

Members of the band had played on my records including Richie on drums and Fred Newell who played the simulated Buck Trent part on *The Night Porter Wagoner Came to Town* for me. Greg engineered the record too.

*Renee Armand*, one of the greatest unknown singers in the world put the engineering staff which consisted of house mixer, *Wes Delk*, Greg, and me, up at her organic farm a few miles out of town. Renee did the lead vocal on the theme song from the film, *The Poseidon Adventure* and wrote *Bony Fingers* with Hoyt Axton among much, much else.

The night after the concert, I was the only one still left there at Renee's farm since I had a long drive the next day and wanted to get a good night's sleep rather than just heading out like Wes and Greg who lived closer. I had a great conversation with her into the wee hours of the morning. She played me her newest studio project and I'm awaiting the arrival of the final cd now. It is music that will heal the planet if everyone will just listen. Google her up and get a copy of her newest cd if you can.

I had remarked to Greg in the phone the next day driving back to Georgia from the concert that I thought this would be a perfect place to start the new book, the one you're reading right now. I would start it at the end.

Funny, when we were setting up earlier in the day of the show, *Fred Newell* came by and I heard him say, "Look at those two old roadies up there on stage. There's nothing like making a career of it." Fred, of course, was no spring chicken himself when he said it. Greg said that would make a good book title – Nothing Like Making a Career of It – but I was set on Music River of Life by then but he's right. It would be a good title. Fred was always funny like that as well as being a great guitar player and pedal steeliest.



Jessie Colter graciously took everyone to dinner the night before the concert

Anyway, I thought that starting at the end might work for me so here I am at retirement age looking at a life probably shortened by temptation and abuses.



Richie and Tabby at The Waylon Celebration

But, it's been a fantastic life filled with friendships and music, lots of laughs, hard times too but Naomi Judd said it best when she said,

*Life might not be very long but it can be wide.*

A recent quote by Fred Newell comes to mind too,

*There's nothing like making a career out of it!*

## Willie, Waylon, and Me

**B**obbe Brown called me out of the blue one day and invited me down to Galveston Island to hear his band The Brown Brothers play. He said there were no hard feelings from my taking his job at Gilley's Club. He said I did him a favor because he was making two or three times the money playing at The Islander Beach Hotel on the beach in Galveston. In fact, he said that's why he called. He wanted to know if I'd be interested in coming to Galveston and joining up with The Brown Brothers band. He said that they'd call it

### *The Brown Brothers and T C*

I'd come to look at myself as being some sort of musical gun slinger, or guitar and piano slinger as it were and I could always dig deeper and pull out the fiddle or the five string banjo too and if I really felt like I needed an edge I'd haul out the pedal steel. I could do the job and when Bobbe told me what they were making I got interested pretty quick.

Making any real money at Gilley's looked pretty slim and short of writing a hit song there was little a musician could do to start getting ahead. I was playing most of the sessions that came through on piano and Dobro. Larry Bob Leiman had joined The Beats while I was on the road with The Urban Cowboy Band. Larry

was a fine pedal steeliest but drank like there was no tomorrow. Everybody called him The Bourbon Cowboy.

One night Larry Bob grabbed me and started banging me against the wall in the dressing room backstage. He was extremely drunk. Earlier in the evening I had stepped on some of his high treble steel passages with some of my high treble notes on the piano, or maybe he stepped on me (musician talk for one player playing at the same time as another on a solo part) I really don't remember but I think sober it wouldn't have affected him but drunk it became a real issue. It was becoming less fun as the days went by. Harmony started giving way to chaos.

The Brown Brothers had an outdoor gig on a Saturday in downtown Galveston for the grand opening of a new music store. It wouldn't interfere with my job at Gilley's Club. Galveston was only an hour away. I decided to drive down and check it out.

Bobbe's band was a three piece, a stripped down version of a band like ZZ Top. Bobbe's brother Larry covered the bass adequately and did some singing and their brother Stick Brown played drums. Stick wasn't really their natural brother but if you played with The Brown Brothers you became a Brown and that's all I ever knew Stick by.

## 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue

By the time I got back to Nashville, Greg was already working for Lobo Music on 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue as engineer. Lobo started his career with a huge hit record. He told me that his first royalty check for *Me, You, and a Dog Named Boo* was almost six figures.

He said the day before, he was down to five bucks and he and his bass player pal, Billy Aerts, spent it for beer and watched a football game. Lobo had a deal with Famous Music out of New York. It was a big deal.

Greg invited me over and I hit it off with everyone. I already knew Don Goodman who was a writer there. I met *Billy Aerts*, *Jeff Raymond*, and *Lathan Hudson*, all staff writers. I made the mistake of mentioning that I had a financial backer and everyone wanted to be my friend.

Jeff Raymond got me into a poker game that met once or twice a week and I started dropping a few hundred a game. I was so dumb. I trusted everyone. I can't believe how naïve I was looking back.

One night my friend *Billy Sea* asked me if I could get him in that game. Billy had been one of the singers with Memphis just before I

moved north. I got Billy in the game. They all thought he was a “pretty boy” and looked forward to scalping him too I guess. I later learned that they referred to me as *the fish!*

Playing Poker that night was an amazing experience. Not only did I loose around \$500, all the others at the table dropped easily that much themselves. I had never seen any of them sweat before. Billy couldn't lose. He cleaned them out.

When we got in his car to drive away that night he asked me how much I had lost. I told him and he peeled off five hundred and handed it to me saying,

*Tabby, don't play cards with those boys again. They cheat!*

I didn't either. Later, when I got to running with the magicians out at *The Magic Castle in Hollywood*, I learned about marked decks and have thought they must have been using just a simple deck of marked cards from a magic shop. There were two in Nashville.

The main problem was that I had been duped and I felt pretty bad about it. Billy and I got to be good friends and he rode with me on the first leg of my record promotional tour a few months later down to Florida. That's the

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