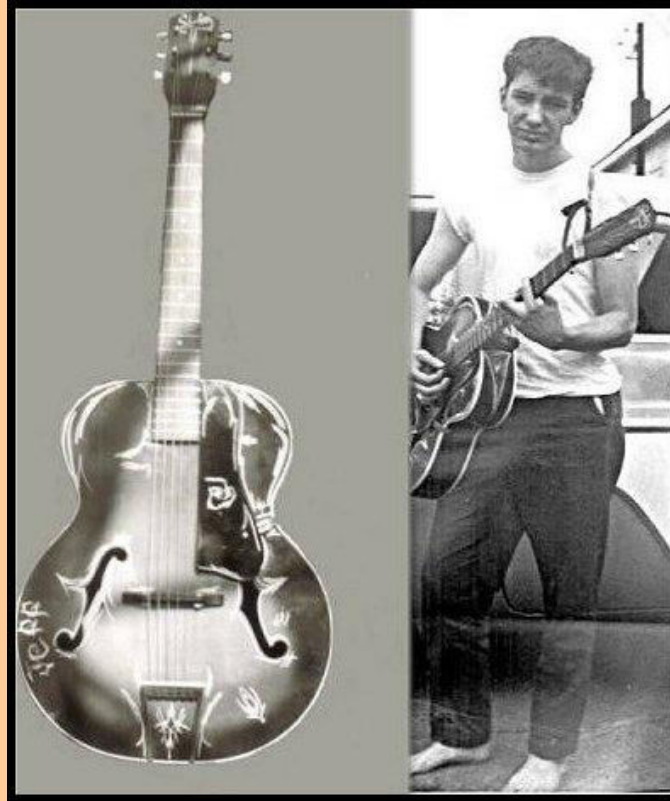


A Little Music for the Soul

During my early Jr. High School years (1952-1954) I began listening to the [radio](#) and found that Rhythm and Blues, then later that hard blues, was to my a liking. Prior to the 1950's the music rage was Big Band and Swing and hearing it brings back fond memories of my youth when my parents would listen to it for hours. However, a new kind of sound began to fill the airways that really became popular with the younger crowd; "Rock and Roll." Teenagers in our neighborhood would gather in someone's backyard and dance to the new "rock" music using 78-RPM record players and later 45-RPM records were just beginning to appear on the scene.

While visiting with Junior High School friends at their home we would sit by their swimming pool and talk the teenage talk, giggle and try to impress girls with our vast knowledge and experience. My girlfriend told me they had a guitar and would I like to play it. Before that time I had played a ukulele a little and my father was a guitar player, but the instrument did not hold any interest with me. That was the first time I picked up a guitar and those first notes would spark my interest in making music that would last the rest of my life. At the moment it may have been more to impress my girlfriend, but something clicked inside as my fingers picked at the strings.

In those days teenagers were expected to earn spending money after school and my jobs included mowing lawns, working at a gas station, a grocery store and a paper route, and so on. Eventually I saved enough to buy a used Sears Silvertone acoustics guitar. It was a stretch to say I was "guitar playing," it was more like picking at it -- but it was a start. That same guitar carried me into high school in Knoxville, Tennessee and a chance meeting with a really good guitar player, Virgil LaRue. We were both in commercial art class, so our friendship grew and after school we began to meet at his house to play music. Later, with Virgil's help we added an electronic pickup and a cheap amplifier.



Sears Silvertone guitar, me in 1956 posing (1955 DeSoto in background).

His parents loved to listen in; from the opposite side of the house, so our music career got off to a good start. We also met at my house out back in a laundry room that was connected to the garage; but owing to our loud noise that carried throughout our neighborhood and then people complained! Once the police showed up to put a stop to our playing and suggested we take our band up on top of a nearby ridge -- where no one lived! That worked out great because we found a concrete pad beside a maintenance facility with an electrical outlet and we could hook up our amplifiers. The maintenance guy was happy to see us and we could make as much noise as we wanted to; but before long we had an audience of teenagers and other musicians.

Of course, it was hard to find a place to practice; however, a nearby skating rink needed more business and decided to provide the area teens with live music, so with a large dancing floor they could charge a buck at the door and make some needed cash. A bandstand was setup and later on several local bands would get together after school to practice and eventually rehearse for weekend gigs.

Guitar picking was a struggle until later on my friend introduced me to his guitar teacher, Mr. Frank Herndon; who was one of the area's well-known big band guitarist and teachers. So it was back to work mowing lawns and working at a filling stations and odd jobs to pay for weekly guitar lessons.



Frank Herndon Business Cards (1955-60)

In time I worked odd jobs and saved enough to buy a 1957 Gibson Les Paul TV Special guitar from our teacher. Later on, late 1958 I think, one of the pickups went bad so my teacher replaced my yellow "TV-Special" with the 1959 Les Paul "SG" Special (cherry red double cut model). It was after finding my old scrapbook of hot rods and guitars with notes from late 1959 that I remembered that my first Gibson was not a 1959 Les Paul Special; after all, it has been more than 60 years ago!

Vintage Guitars Info's Gibson Vintage Guitar General Info, Specs, and Serial Numbers:

<http://www.guitarhq.com/gibson.html> "Mid-1958 Gibson "Les Paul SG" Special guitar specs: body style change to symmetrical rounded double cutaways, thick slab mahogany body, cherry red finish, "TV" beige finish optional. The peghead still says "Les Paul Special" (or "Les Paul TV Special" if yellow), but often this body style is referred to as the "Les Paul SG Special" body style. The Les Paul Special TV model was also introduced. Since the "normal" LP Special finish was now cherry red, Gibson offered the original TV style yellow finish on the Les Paul TV Special only....."

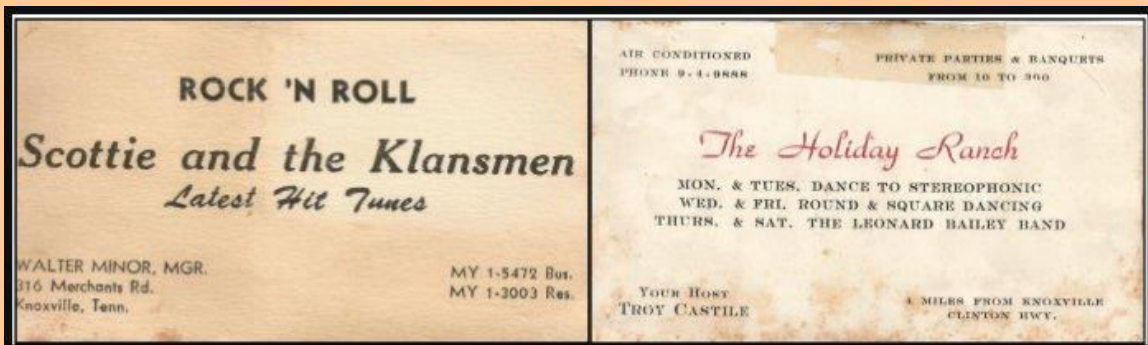
Virgil bought one of the original Gibson 1957 Les Paul Goldtop guitars that he recently sold for a lot of money. Around that time at the suggestion of Virgil we both bought the Gibson Ranger GA - 20T Tweed amplifier. Can't remember the cost but it was worth many yard mowings and working at a gas station to pay for it.



LEFT: 1957 Gibson Les Paul TV Special: CENTER: 1959 Gibson Les Paul "SG" Special , RIGHT: 1957 Gibson Ranger GA - 20T Tweed amplifier

As time progressed we would play in several local bands at popular teenager hang-outs; such as dance halls, skating rinks, and for our high school as well. Yeah, they would set up a portable bandstand in a skating rink and fill it with hundreds of wild jitterbugging teens and charge them a buck at the door, so the band members would rake in a "huge amount" of maybe \$5 each, or on a good night maybe \$20 each.

From late 1955 though 1958 we played with several local "rock & roll" bands and eventually formed our own band called "Scottie and the Klansmen." No, we had nothing to do with those spooky guys in the white sheets; for some reason it was named by our band leader. Walter "Scottie" Minor (Piano/Singer - *deceased*), Virgil LaRue (Guitar - *deceased July 02, 2014*), me (Guitar), Ronnie Warwick, (Sax - *deceased*), Don West and Jim Stalsworth (Drums), can't remember name of the bass.



LEFT: Our Rock Band Business Card. RIGHT: Holiday Ranch Dance and Strip Club Business Card (1957)

Our band was doing great and we played "off the door," or money from the entrance fee and tips, at many of the area beer joints, a strip joint out of town (Holiday Ranch), and other places. The

skating rink gigs on the weekends would draw crowds of hundreds of kids and this was especially good because with so many people dancing or watching us -- we all felt like being in the big time and our noise (music) was better than ever.

In an early "Rock" band I occasionally played featured a black singer; his stage name was "June Bug." Wow, before then the only black people I came into contact with were across the city street or at the county fairgrounds where they would hold concerts with black Rhythm and Blues bands. We would stand upstairs in the Jacob Building on Chilhowee Park in the elevated walkways and watch people below dance, and of course we would dance with our girlfriends and try to emulate those moves from the dancers below. Guess it was called "segregation" in the Deep South, but in this scene we whites were relegated to the balcony. We would occasionally play with the choir at a local black church after the preacher finished his sermon - we would rock!



Jacob Building on Chilhowee Park

Concerts I attended at Chilhowee Park in the 1950's: On May 1, 1956, Fats Domino, whose shows later that year would spark riots, returned to that venue fronting a "Big Rock 'n' Roll Party" with a pretty incredible lineup. With him was Georgia-born madman Little Richard, the Clovers, the Cadillacs, Ruth Brown, and others. Little Richard returned later that October with Big Joe Turner, Etta James, the Moonglows, the Five Keys, and the Five Satins. Jimmy Reed also was there several times. Bo Diddley arrived in June 1957 with a legendary-sounding show that included the Coasters, Ruth Brown, Paul "Hucklebuck" Williams, the jazz saxophonist who's considered a progenitor of rock; the Drifters, Smiley ("I Hear You Knocking") Lewis, and others. In February 1958, Chuck Berry, at the height of his fame, and Larry Williams (famous for "Bony Moronie" and "Dizzy, Miss Lizzy") were there.

One of my hot rod buddies discovered "June Bug" and we would meet at a small "mom and pop" grocery store to jam with the local black guys. He invited us down to their part of town once after big Rock and Blues concert at the county fair and we met and played, side by side with famous blues man, [Jimmy Reed](#). It was staged in an old frame building that had a beauty parlor down stairs and an illegal nightclub upstairs! Jimmy Reed was my favorite Blues singer in those days. Knoxville was in a dry county in those days, so booze was plentiful from bootleggers and they didn't ask for ID in juke joints.

I also played with "The Leonard Bailey Band" that was mostly black guys at a joint called "Walkers Dance Club." While from the small bandstand it was hard to see the dancers and that was my saving grace because they would take off a lot of clothes during their ballet. I really learned to play Jazz during those days. Years later my parents told me they came out to that "strip joint" and watched us play. Our teen Rock & Roll band would play on Wednesday nights and some of us would sit in with the Jazz combo on Friday nights. I remember an older couple used to be there every Wednesday night and dance around in a big circle like a waltz or Polka dancing and leave a \$5 tip! The problem with it all was that my father was not happy that I was

making more than he was. Given all the part time jobs, lawn mowing and sign painting my take home pay began to rise.

Once while walking downtown with an older friend, Gene Kerr ("Twerp"), we found an old blind black man playing a [bottleneck](#) or [Acoustic Resonator guitar](#). He was blind and sold pencils on the street, with a tin cup. We like the way he was "hanging out on the wires," so to speak, so Twerp brought him to his house several times, and being in the "deep south" his neighbors were aghast of course. We both learned many Blues "riffs" and tunes from him. Learning from a master blues man was instrumental in getting our band into places where people would not tolerate sloppy music.



LEFT: My Hot Rod Mentor and guitar playing Friend, Gene ("Twerp") Kerr at breakfast meeting while I attended our 50th High School Reunion in Knoxville, TN in August 2009. RIGHT: Acoustics Resonator Guitar.

After graduating from high school some of the band members stuck together for a while. We worked at odd jobs and borrowed from each other to stay alive. As an "accomplished musician" I remained in Knoxville for several months thereafter to work at various jobs; selling art work (signs) at local grocery stores, stacking clothes at a Levi Strauss distributor and storage, and playing guitar at several dance halls in and around the area. Virgil and I appeared with several well-known Rock, Blues and Jazz bands, and played the Friday and Saturday night segments of the nationwide radio show called "[the Tennessee Barn Dance](#)," at KNOX station. Also, we played once on the [Cas Walker's](#) TV show (WBIR) where Dolly Parton got her start. Lowell Blanchard and Archie Campbell were the master of carmines.

String Bean did some comic stuff once there as well. I think even Junior Samples was there once. Our band was featured for five minutes on national broadcast one night on the Tennessee Barn Dance and we were in hog heaven that night! I remember backing up [Porter Wagoner](#) a few times on the radio show. Once while *Buck Trent* (<https://bucktrent.com/>), the banjo player for the Wagoner band, was waiting to go on stage and he sat down next to me on a bench and we began talking. He had his electric banjo and we started picking some riffs. Just in those few minutes together he taught me more country music than ever before. It was an exciting time, even though I had no idea who he was until Porter showed up and Buck went on stage to meet him and begin playing. The Everly Brothers appeared on one of the KNOX radio shows once, but cannot remember when.

Sometime during late summer of 1959 I joined the musicians union and would get called to play with certain bands in and around Tennessee. Between odd jobs and a few months working at the Levi's warehouse our band found a "manager" who had an old short school bus with a new Oldsmobile 394 cubic-inch Rocket V8 with a four-barrel. Windows were painted over and some seats removed for more room. Most of our belongings and instruments were stored in overhead racks and we would sleep on a long seat, or at some motel along the way. Walter followed along us behind in his car and occasionally we would just camp out on the road. We started off somewhere on the North Carolina coast and played at various beer joints, dance halls or night clubs then down to South Carolina to work with local bands from Ocean Drive Beach to Myrtle Beach, then on into Savannah, Georgia. We jammed with [Wilbert Harrison](#), who wrote "Kansas City," at Myrtle Beach once and that led to some interesting playing dates around that coastal area. Later on we jammed at the beaches in and around Cocoa and Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Walter then returned to Knoxville so we had to find a new singer and we did some gigs at various clubs on the beaches.

We ended our eastern seaboard trek at the Vagabond Club on Fort Lauderdale Beach, a very popular joint with spring brake college kids and draft dodgers. Yeah, my draft card was burning a hole in my wallet. It was a fairly large bar with the bandstand right behind a long bar behind a chicken wire cage and out of the way of screaming drunks. Of course, that didn't protect us from flying debris, like bottles, glasses and an occasional pair of panties! After several months on the road Virgil had to return home for his dad's rail road retirement party and the rest of us decided we had been on the road too long and off we dove back to Knoxville. We had accumulated a fair amount of money and tired of the nightly grind playing and then a day job, so it was time to call it quits. In mid-October 1959, with no prospects of a job and longing to see my family, we all parted ways.

Before giving up the musical business the band was invited to attend a musical audition at the Hartley Theater in Washington, D.C., that was to lead to an audition to appear on the [Ed Sullivan Show](#) in New York. However, a dispute erupted within the band and subsequently the opportunity was lost. My buddy Virgil was off seeking a career in the "plastics industry" and we lost touch sometime after graduation. I would play twice more at the KNOX radio station then got tired of that. During the late 1950's a deep recession was in progress and we made very little money in those days, so jobs for a skinny, uneducated kid were hard to find.

After a long struggle to make a life for myself hunger finally drove me to visit my parents in Virginia. The recession deepened and jobs were fewer and further in between; plus in those days the first thing a prospective employer asked was, "have you finished your military obligation yet?" Obviously not since I was only 19 years old! Oddly enough the most money I made up to that time as hauling a couple of loads of bootleg whisky from Memphis to Knoxville. That was not exactly a fulfilling career move, so the search for a job continued. Several more months passed and my job hunting proved unsuccessful, so by February 1960 I was back in Richmond, Virginia and went to the military recruiters then decided to join the U.S Air Force. Finally in late February I began processing and was sworn in to the United States Air Force. I met several other recruits at the Richmond airport and we fly to Washington, DC and then on to Austin, Texas. Boarding a bus we took a long ride to San Antonio, Texas then to Lackland Air Force Base for basic training.

Off to the U.S. Air Force

After basic training at Lackland AFB, Texas I was off the technical school at Chanute AFB, IL where I met many musician friends and played the guitar at the Service Club at every

opportunity. Since our training day started at 4 a.m. and ended around 9 p.m., we would get to bed sometimes later after a good session at the Club picking the guitar. I met a guy from Chicago, who was there for reserve duty, that was a professional guitarist and we played together where I learned more Jazz.

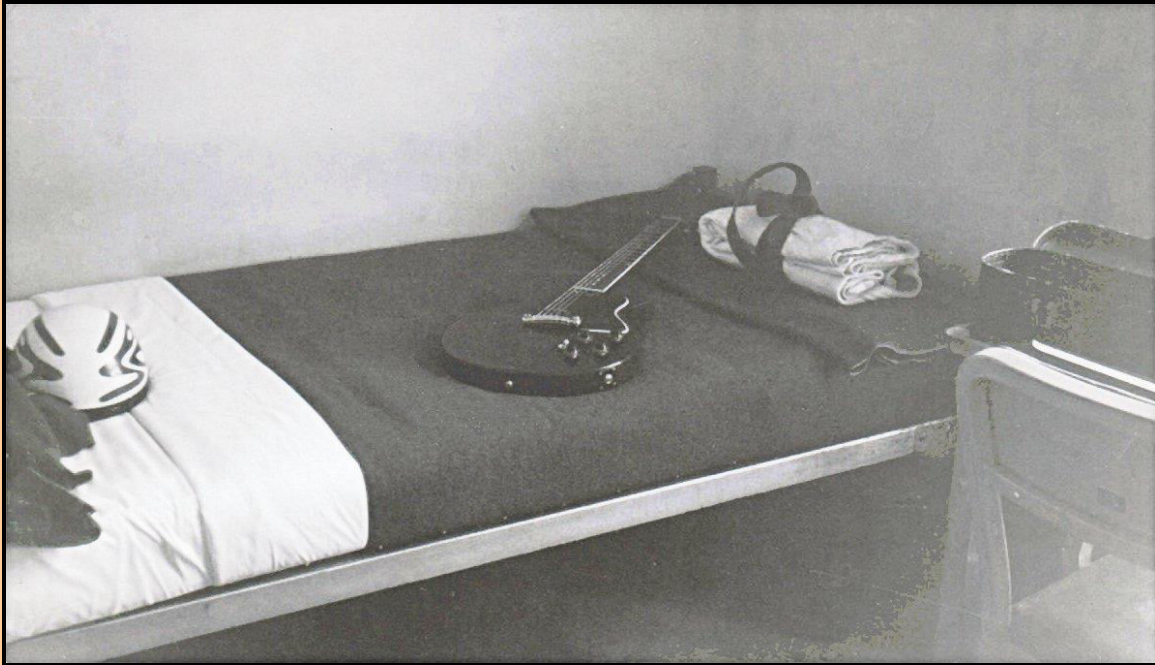
After graduating from tech-school I was transferred to Naha Air Base, Okinawa where I continued learning the guitar while playing occasionally on Saturday afternoons at the Airman's Club at Naha AFB and Kadena AFB. While sitting in with the Naha band I met the guitarist who wrote the words for the tune "Forty Miles of Bad Road," that was made famous by [Dwane Eddy](#). We usually played "hillbilly" or country music; however, occasionally we would rip off with some Chuck Berry or Blues tunes and brought down the house, so to speak. With an occasional beer bottle flying our way and at times jeers we returned to hillbilly music for the rednecks in the crowd. No chicken wore this time!



Airmen's Club, Naha Air Base, Okinawa in the 1960's.

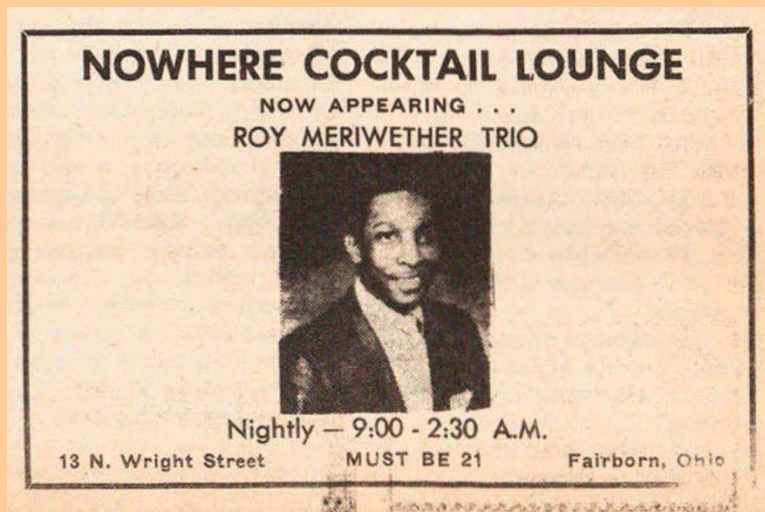
In the times we spent playing at the Airman's Club I do not remember the lead guitarist's name or much about him. We were too involved in the music and the band. He could play any style of music and imitate many of the big time guitarists like Chuck Berry and so on. I never saw nor heard of him after leaving Okinawa but surely he went on to bigger and better things in the music world.

The Kadena airman's club was larger and it attracted more Jazz musicians, so after a big jam session my fingers would actually bleed before leaving the bandstand.



Gibson Les Paul Special on my bunk in 51st A&E Barracks at Naha AB, Okinawa (1960-62).

Back in the USA I was stationed at Westover AFB, MA and assigned to a B-52 mobile flight simulator that took me to several other Air Force bases. In Fairborn, Ohio, adjacent to Wright-Patterson AFB, I sat in with several local Jazz bands and Combos. One of those Jazz combos in the Nowhere Cocktail Lounge in Fairborn, the [Roy Meriwether Trio](#), later to become quite popular. I sat in with a Dixieland Band where we would jam on Saturday afternoons. Also, couple night clubs in Fairborn where Jazz was a big thing, that was good for a few jam sessions and a few free beers. I played with three or four guys at some joint on a New Year's Eve once where we had to move when the front door opened up!! Such is the life of a Jazz guitar player. That was the last time I played the guitar in public; in a beer joint in Fairborn, Ohio on New Years Eve in 1964.

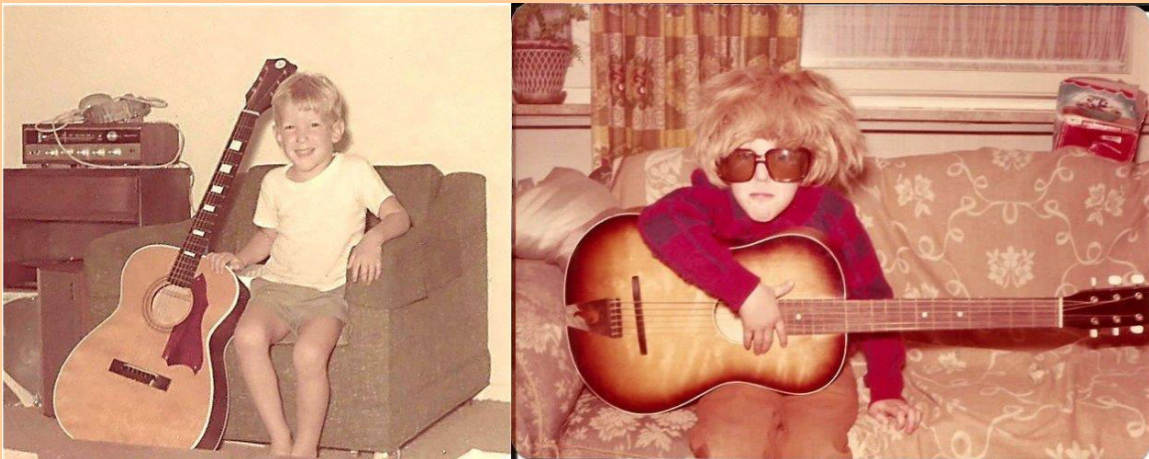


Some years later I returned home drunk and accidentally laid on my Gibson Les Paul Special and broke the neck. After several years of repairs and frustration that instrument went into the trash. While stationed at Carswell AFB, in Fort Worth, Texas I paid \$495 for a brand new 1967 Gibson

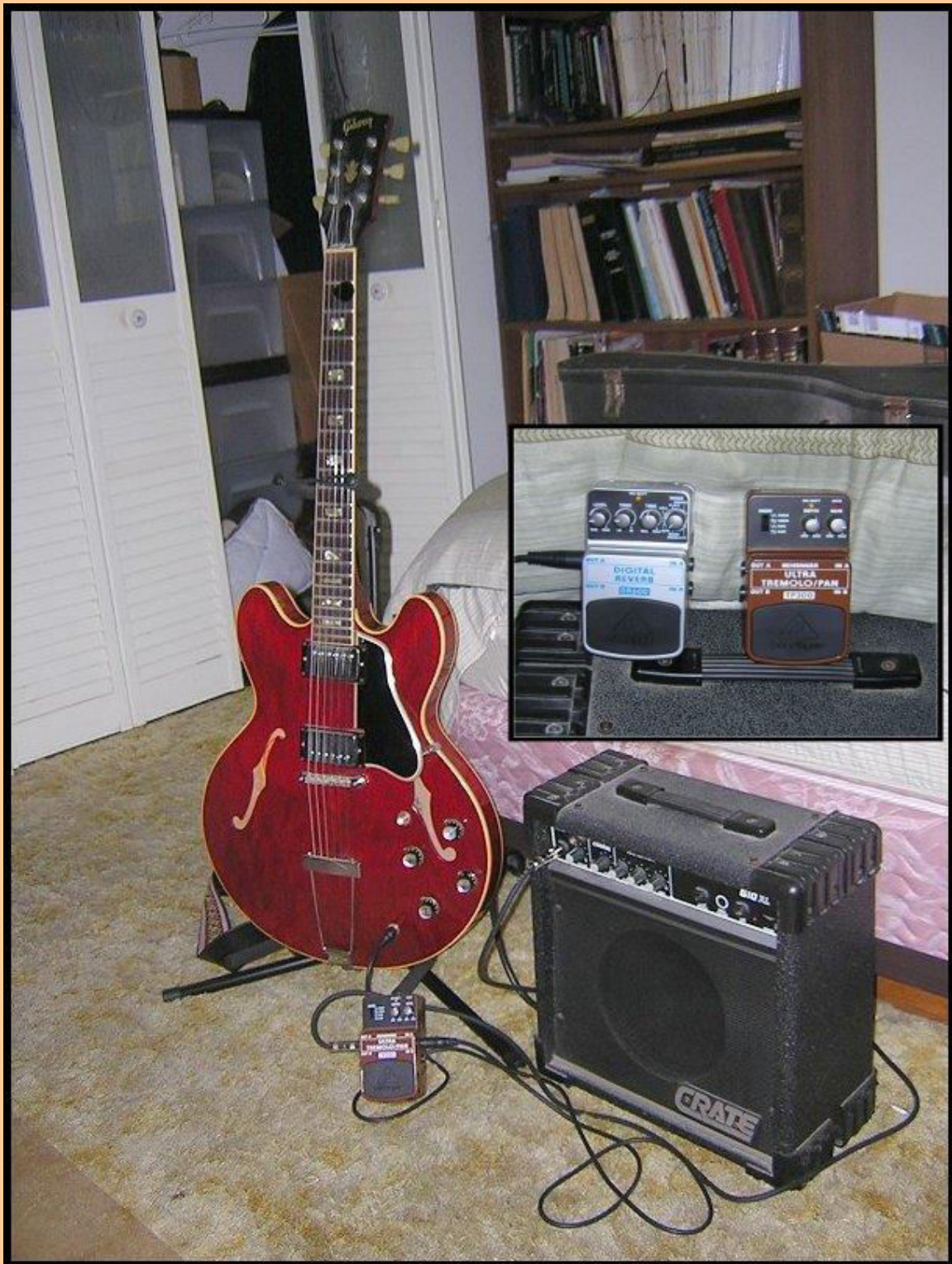
ES335-TDC at some music store and that one is still with me today. Occasionally it is dusted off and played, but with a lot less enthusiasm.



LEFT: Playing a guitar for friends in Tucson, AZ (1970). RIGHT: Miami, FL (1980's) with my 1967 Gibson ES-335TDC guitar



LEFT: Tucson, AZ 1970: Donny Beish and a Kay acoustic guitar. RIGHT: Donny in Germany 1972 with a guitar



My 1967, ES-335-TDC Cherry red guitar (S/N 865807) and Create G10-XL amp with Behringer TP300 Ultra Classic Stereo Tremolo/Panner Effects Pedal. Inset shows Behringer DR600 Digital Reverb Pedal

Actually, my story is not too different from countless other fledgling musicians for those times. The 1950's and 1960's brought us hundreds of one-hit bands and ten times that many that never

made it to their first recording. It was a nice time for us youngsters and now we speak of those days with nostalgia and of fond memories. We grew up in a time of reasonable tranquility during the 1950's and without the distractions of the modern 21st Century life style. It was a time when free spirited teenagers would engage in all kinds of activities, some good, and some bad - all somewhat innocent by today's standards.

A few years ago I attended our 50th High School Reunion and visited with Virgil LaRue. Due to health reasons he has stopped playing a guitar and had sold his Les Paul Goldtop for a considerable sum. We still call each other from time to time and especially on our shared birthday. Virgil passed away July 02, 2014.



December 27, 2013: Plunking on my Geezer-tar

Other Teenage [Hobbies](#)