

Part One: Stairway to Whatever



1. Rock the Halls with Bows of Holly

“The levee ain’t dry,
And the music didn’t die,
‘Cause Buddy Holly lives
Every time we play rock and roll.”

—Cricket bandmate Sonny Curtis, 1980

This is a book mostly about Buddy Holly. And his Crickets. The world knows Buddy as the martyred hero of “American Pie,” Don McLean’s #1 rockin’ 1971 saga of dry levees, roaring Chevys, and a golden-age America when rock was young. Long before leaded Zeppelin dreams soared aloft to the stars on ‘Stairways to Heaven,’ rock and roll first honored lean Texan Buddy Holly with his fiery Fender Stratocaster and magic voice. Holly and his rockin’ Crickets brought 1957-59 America and the English-speaking world its first torrid affair with a genuine rock and roll band. After Elvis

Presley's vocals, Chuck Berry's lead guitar and teen lyrics, and dozens of dynamic drummers performed 50s quietude with new molten music, **Buddy's electric guitar and bass-powered rock band the Crickets** gave us our first taste of rock band glory. Buddy also jump-started the Beatles and Bob Dylan. And yes, of course, the Fab Four owe the Crickets for their style, their gung-ho gusto, and their name.

By now, the Beatles' reputation as premier rock band has never been higher.

This'll Be the Day is about the world's first and the world's greatest rock and roll band. If that's a little ambiguous, and you can't pick which band is which, so be it. As Millennium III races toward its frantic finish line, there have been approximately 7,654,321 books about the **Beatles**. This one basically discovers the main Cricket reason the Beatles got here to glorify your life. We'll chirp the praises of our favorite Beatles, too, but mostly we'll tell you about Buddy's you-and-me band of Texan troubadours that conquered the universe first. You'll see.

February made "American Pie's" Don McLean shiver, as he delivered his New Rochelle, New York, paper route. Don can't recall whether he cried, as the grim Ground Hog Night aerial disaster unfolded. Don read about how Maria Elena Santiago Holly became a widow in her mid-twenties. Teenage rock 'n' roll innocence was shattered, as the fun fiesta of the fabulous 50s was blindsided by triple tragedy.

Everyone knows how Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens, and the Big Bopper lost their lives beyond Clear Lake, Iowa, in an inky blizzard in a tiny plane. My student Lisa, 19, said sincerely just today, "Sure, we all remember Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens, and the Big *Dipper!*" Few know all the other Crickets survived, thrived, and revolutionized rock and roll headlong into 2000 and beyond. That's why we are all gathered here, to commemorate **February 3rd, 1959**. It's from McLean's sweet marshmallow melody, and grand and gloomy "American Pie" lyric. Don calls it the day the music died. We're here to show you that it never did. The music lives, thanks to Buddy Holly, and especially his **Crickets**, the World's First Modern Rock and Roll Band.

Bill Griggs, President of the Buddy Holly Memorial Society since 1976, moved to Buddy's hometown Lubbock, Texas, to be closer to Buddy's world. My old BHMS pal Bill has been a track star, champ drag racer, expert mechanic, and retail exec. Bill knows more about Buddy than anyone in the world. Bill's great '94 Lubbock quotable quote? It's one great reason this Cricket book had to arrive:

"Whenever you mention Buddy Holly's name, everybody always smiles."

Some singers vanish, some rave on. Buddy Holly champions the latter category.

Buddy's legacy affected me and possibly you just as much as it did Don McLean and his epic masterpiece "American Pie." Recently Don's monumental Light Metal rock classic song was voted #2 song, ever, at the Smithsonian in Washington—among America's best-loved songs of the 20th century. With sorrowful yestergone verses, and a sugary sweet chorus that could make rampaging rhinoceroses sing along in perfect harmony, McLean's Holly hymn pays homage to Buddy as the man whose guitar-fired band gave us rock and roll. We all take Holly personally.

Personally, I was only a 'lead singer' live twice on TV, both due to Buddy Holly, who is also just a generation removed from inspiring our own kid Jeremy's Sony record, which soared to #1 in airplay (*Billboard*). Our son's #6, '00 "**Absolutely (Story of a Girl)**" with Nine Days sold five million on *Now 5* and might be the catchiest hit of our toddler millennium. Via my first-ever rock history *The Rock Revolution* ('66) and recent *Rock and Roll Gold Rush*, Bill Griggs and I helped induct Velvets' Virgil Johnson, on Lubbock's Channel 10 Live in 1994, into the West Texas Walk of Fame. It's next to Grant Speed's eight-foot Buddy Holly statue. The anchorlady had me sing a live snippet of Johnson's hit #25 '61 "Tonight (Could Be the Night)" to show its universality. That's my first sing-on-TV experience.

In 2005, I happily and Hollily hiccupped on Long Island's Cable Channel 20 through a medley of Cricket masterpieces—"That'll Be the Day," "Peggy Sue," "Oh Boy." We also sung along snippets of "American Pie." My children's-librarian wife Toni read excerpts from Anne Bustard's popular kid-biography *Buddy* (illus. Kurt Cyrus). The half-hour cable show played to a live audience of 200, and everybody spontaneously sang along in old hootenanny style. We discovered kids 11 and dudes 77 all knew the words to Buddy and his **Crickets'** huge unforgettable hits. Then the popular show cycled on repeat cable TV-Land rotation for years, so we Deans did our bit part to keep the Cricket legend chirping eternally. Bet you have, too. This paragraph's point? Holly's music lives. Buddy Holly's Crickets made us all get up to chance—and we ALL got a chance. And his music makes us all still SMILE.

Buddy already means something to you personally, or you wouldn't be here. *This 'll Be the Day* promises you a warm new portrait of the Texan troubadour, with no graphic or disgusting scenes that would have embarrassed our friend Buddy's mom.

Like movie icons James Dean and Marilyn Monroe, the image of Texan Buddy Holly will remain forever young. Buddy's picture we all know and love is the black and white cover of his #11 album *The Buddy Holly Story* that arose in early '59, as the world mourned his untimely passing. It's the picture where he resembles Clark Kent, with Superman's music surging in his glowing guitar. In November 2005, *The Buddy Holly Story* returned to #37 on *Billboard's* album catalog list, a marketplace barometer of the immortality of his timeless brand of longhorn Texan Rock and Roll.

Back in Rock's infancy, the world waited patiently for Ahmet Ertegun and *Rolling Stone* magazine to create a Rock and Roll Hall of Fame big enough for Buddy Holly, whose everlasting trademark songs shatter time and space in innocence, purity, and rhythmic thunder. Any similarity between that B&W picture of bespectacled Buddy and Superman's alter-ego Clark Kent is NOT coincidental. Elvis dazzled starstruck teenyboppers with his looks and hip vocals. Elvis's #1 protégé Buddy modestly declared—"Without Elvis, none of us would have made it." Outshining the King in musical versatility and songwriting savvy, however, Buddy dialed his Fender Stratocaster guitar up to FULL SPEED AHEAD. Soon his **Crickets** unleashed pure Rock to roll on beyond fifty years, for fifty million guitar-powered rock groups.

As Classic Rock and Oldies stations divorce themselves from Buddy's 50s, and pretend seminal Rock is all 60s Stones, Beatles, Beach Boys, Hendrix, Doors, or Led Zep, we can't forget ALL of the above are indebted to Holly for showing the way to the Righteous Brothers' "Rock and Roll Heaven" [#3, 1972]. It took Elvis twice as long as Buddy, and a double-decade career, to become a rock and roll martyr.

Holly's Crickets revamped the planet in a little under a year and a half. You'll see.

If McLean's 1955-71 "American Pie" could revisit Holly's America today, his Chevy levees might be dotted with Toyotas, his tiny towns with Taco Bell and McBurgers and Wal-Mart. Good ol' boys wolfing whiskey & rye might now sip Perrier after a cooldown on elliptical training workouts at Fab Fitness, on their way to three jobs, two mortgages, and a tanking pension plan offering a free cardboard box to live in on the way over the rainbow to Oz—just north of Buddy Holly's tornado town Lubbock. Half a century since 'The Day the Music Died,' our music never truly died. Buddy Holly, in his short mission on this careening planet, made sure the music rocks just as much as ever.

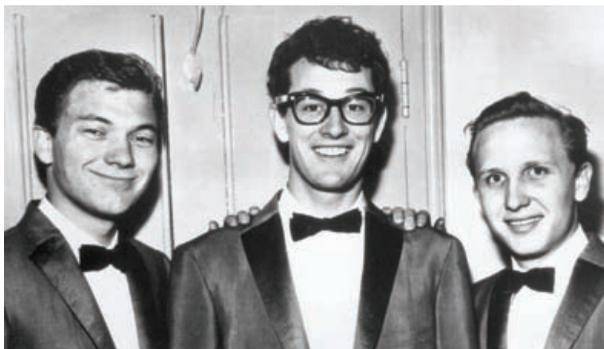
Paul McCartney: "The first song John and I cut? Buddy's 'That'll Be the Day.'"

Buddy's Holly's Cricket bandmate **Sonny Curtis** offers this epic echo—the "levee ain't dry, and the music didn't die/ 'Cause Buddy Holly lives every time they play play rock and roll." Holly's Crickets' debut "That'll Be the Day" nailed #1, '57 in *Billboard*. It's the #1 reason for McLean's "this'll be the day" lyric in "American Pie." We know 14-year-old McLean was so moved by

Holly's death, as he shiveringly delivered February newspapers, that he wrote an entire saga about the early years of rock. In nominating Buddy for some mystic new Hall of Fame, perhaps Don actually nominated him for sainthood.

Buddy's Crickets also scored with #10 "Oh Boy" and cheerleader ode "Peggy Sue" (#3, '57) about drummer Allison's girlfriend. Buddy popularized the Fender Stratocaster guitar, pioneering singer-songwriting and artist-driven record production.

Most rock fans intuitively know this stuff. But did you know that his Cricket chum **Joe B. Mauldin** was the 1st big rock star to popularize the electric bass (1958)? Did you know Crickets' **Jerry Allison** has a left-field chance as Greatest Rock Drummer Ever, via *Rolling Stone* magazine? Did you know 2nd-string '2nd BASS-man' **Waylon Jennings** was voted Country music's #4 artist ever in 2006? Waylon's only topped by **Johnny Cash, Hank Williams Sr.,** and Eddy Arnold. Holly's own history is universally celebrated, but his Crickets' magnificence has been sneakily hidden. But wait. We're working on the problem here.



1958 Crickets - Jerry Allison, drums; Buddy Holly, vocals and guitar; Joe B. Mauldin, bass

What can we show you, that other good Holly biographies only hint at? Holly created the rock and roll band with the entrepreneurial spirit of America. He put all components together. Then the Crickets created the basic rock band formation, AND 'invented' the Beatles. Bob Dylan, too. Watch.

Matter of fact, Holly may already be considered the single most important Rock icon to spearhead 50s music, if it weren't for this guy named Elvis. Buddy was among the first eleven inductees into the infant Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1986. The other Crickets were overlooked. Buddy's 1st-year teammates? Songwriter and guitar guru Chuck Berry, 'The Genius' Ray Charles, wild piano men Jerry Lee Lewis and Little Richard and sedate Fats Domino, Godfather of Soul James Brown, silky-smooth tenor Sam Cooke, or angelic-harmonied Everly Brothers Don and Phil. They're all here, too, though we feature one entrepreneurial guy and his terrific Texan band. Elvis is arguably the most important entertainer of all time. Buddy's key role? *The guy who designed the audial blueprint for all rock music to follow.* As much as Russell Beaubien invented the electric guitar in 1920 (more later on him), Holly took that loud lead guitar, ran with it, and Cricketized the prototype for every band in history with his rockin' roster—lead singer/guitarist, rhythm guitarist, electric bassist, and drummer, with bandmates harmonizing. The classic rock band line-up.

Buddy was the instigator, the innovator, the one who mattered most. As much as his music lives, so does his spirit, while rock rolls along, hurdling millenniums like speedbumps. You'll see.

Possibly you heard that Holly played a major role in naming the top three British groups of the mid-60s: Hollies, Rolling Stones [explanation later], and of course the Beatles, whose name morphed Holly's Texan band the Crickets. As mentioned, **Buddy Holly** (9-7-36—2-3-59, aviation accident) is a charter member of the very first '86 Rock and Roll Hall of Fame class in Cleveland, Ohio. In whatever spare time he didn't have, Buddy also helped put Beatle **Paul McCartney's** world back together after that horrible Hallowe'en of 1956 when Paul, 14, lost his mother Mary.

This is the story of a modest guy who danced in the Elvis Spotlight for just 1½ years, and left his fingerprints on nearly every song over the next generation. Holly singlehandedly changed popular music, from somber and rhythmless, to a triumphant twang that conquered airwaves worldwide. And the band played on.

We would only be blessed with one Buddy Holly. The good news? Buddy Holly lives every time we play rock and roll. This intro tells you what you already knew about Buddy. The rest of Buddy's book 'raves on' concerning Buddy's innovations and adventures and legacies that fewer folks have discovered.

Buddy Holly was a very believable rock star, a '57 *American Idol* powered by amazing talent. With horn-rimmed glasses, the Lubbock, Texas lad serenaded whoever would listen. Though not armed with the drop-dead telegenic looks of an Elvis or *American Idol* Carrie Underwood, Holly was nevertheless a genius singer-songwriter who zoned in on his own unique sound, nurtured it into reality, and pulled the rug out from under pastel pop ditties that masqueraded for Teen Idol turf.

It was a 'voice that came from you and me' [Don McLean, "American Pie"]. It was nigh impossible for a kid with a guitar and a dream to ever BE Elvis, but wait a minute—with a garage, three buddies, three chords, some amps, and a victory over Old Demon Stage Fright, suddenly kids all over America, and beyond, had a legit shot at becoming Buddy Holly. Holly sculpted a teenage dream, made it work, and brought Rock to a world busy blowing itself up with hot Cold Wars. Buddy Holly wasn't political. All Buddy was saying—was give rock a chance.

To this day, his **Cricket**s are the most overlooked superstar rock band of all time. Since the world now knows of Holly's greatness, it's time to announce similar spectacular and sensational superstardom of Buddy's buddies in his band. Fifty years too late is better than not at all, eh?

Mainstream Crickets are basically **Jerry Allison**, **Joe B. Mauldin**, and **Sonny Curtis**, with a little help from singer/bassist **Waylon Jennings** and singer and rhythm guitarist **Niki Sullivan**. All of them survived the millennium, and 75% continued to rock the halls as they approached 70 years old. Elvis Costello, who resembles Holly, and Costello's band the Attractions made the Rock Hall on just #19 '89 "Veronica" and #36, '83 "Everyday I Write the Book." Holly's Crickets had three hits in the top 10 simultaneously in 1957, yet somehow eluded the glory lavished on their lead singer Buddy.

So who are the Crickets' secret superstars? It's a hefty roster.

Late 70s *Rolling Stone* readers perused a survey of the top 20 greatest drummers of all time: Results of top three? 1) The late Keith Moon of the Who; 2) The late John Bonham of Led Zeppe-
lin; and 3) **Jerry Allison** of the Crickets. My question—which was one still alive into 2008? The Crickets are not the only great artists unenshrined to 2009; they're in good company with Chicago, Linda Ronstadt, the Steve Miller Band, Herman's Hermits, Three Dog Night, Foreigner, Jim Croce, America, Hall & Oates, Connie Francis, John Denver, or the Moody Blues.

Lead guitarist and baritone **Sonny Curtis** is also a superstar and major Cricket in my eyes, and book. Sonny recorded "That'll Be the Day" with Buddy in 1956, BEFORE Norman Petty's '57 production hit #1. Sonny missed Holly's heyday of 1957-58, but wrote "I Fought the Law" which hit #9, '66 by El Paso's Bobby Fuller Four and was recorded by UK Punk gurus the Clash. Sonny also penned *Mary Tyler Moore Show* theme—"Love Is All Around" [#29, Country charts, 1980, for Sonny].

"Sonny, I heard you were the first star to get a Fender Stratocaster electric guitar, and Buddy took it from there." [Sonny's phone call—Valentine's Day 2008].

"Well, actually," Sonny kindly corrected the rumor mill, "This Welsh TV documentary said I was the first rocker to PLAY one, since Buddy loaned me HIS at that first Nashville session on 'Rock Around with Ollie Vee.' I couldn't imagine why he liked it at first. He thought it was cool, though, and his brother Larry and I thought it resembled something from outer space. Buddy and I were '56 'Elvis clones,' so I explored riffs and licks like [Elvis's guitarist] Scotty Moore."

The fourth superstar to join Buddy, Jerry, and Sonny in the Crickets was Buddy's '2nd-bassman,' an 18-year-old baritone DJ from Littlefield, Texas. He signed him on to learn bass fast, to join the

ill-fated Winter Dance Party. In 1959, Holly headlined this bus tour featuring 1st Latino teen idol **Ritchie Valens**, and DJ-singer J.P. Richardson (the Big Bopper). A nice kid daytime pilot named Roger Peterson manned their 1600-pound Beechcraft Bonanza on the Night the Music Died, and it allowed 992 pounds of people and/or luggage. Woefully tired Peterson wrestled with vision issues and had no night flying license.

Due to getting married to Maria Elena Santiago in August 1958, and moving to New York's Greenwich Village, Buddy temporarily split with major Cricket buddies. Along with Buddy's new Grammy-winning guitarist Tommy Allsup and drummer Carl Bunch, Holly's new troupe was joined by a vet guitarist whose outlaw rep with pal Willie Nelson took him to the #4 position of all time into 2008 among Country legends: newfound bass player **Waylon Jennings**.

Other stars dazzled the touring and recording Cricket roster and troupe over 50 years. Lead singers include **David Box**, **Jerry Naylor**, Gordon Payne, Earl Sinks, plus well-known musicians like **Tommy Allsup** and Carl Bunch, bassist Larry Welborn, backup singers Bill Pickering and the Picks, the Roses, the Tolletts, vivacious June Clark, producer Norman Petty and his wife Violet Brady Petty [Vi]. Others include piano men **Glen D. Hardin** [Buddy's distant cousin] and Dudley Brooks, guitarist Ernie Hall, drummer Bo Clarke, bassists Don Guess and George Atwood. After Buddy died, unreleased Holly tunes were overdubbed by Raton, New Mexico's Fireballs. The Fireballs' #1 "Sugar Shack" was the biggest-selling record of 1963. Lead singer **Jimmy Gilmer** faded it on a world-class Holly hiccup. You don't get to be an immortal teenage idol [some say *angel*] like Buddy Holly without a whole congregation of helpers waiting in the *wings*.

The Winter Dance Party '59 Holly connection bumped four other later major stars toward superstardom, too. Singer-songwriter Paul Anka (#1, '57 "Diana") filled in after the disaster, and wrote Buddy's last hit—#1 UK "It Doesn't Matter Anymore." Tourmates **Dion** & his Belmonts cashed in with debut #22, '59 "I Wonder Why" and Dion's later #1 & #2 '61 blockbusters "Run-around Sue" and "The Wanderer." Dion and Waylon Jennings stayed on the rickety tour bus with a busted heater.

When word of the aerial disaster hit the USA on Feb. 3, 1959, 15-years-young **Bobby Vee** and his Fargo, North Dakota, garage band the Shadows filled in for Buddy at Moorhead, Minnesota's Armory across the big Mississippi River. Bobby's big brother Bill Velline, 18, played dynamite lead guitar, and sang like Johnny Cash. Bobby had the 'cute teen idol' aura and great Holly-echo voice that Liberty Records loved. Holly's versatile 2nd tenor dialed down to Bobby's cool high baritone. Vee became our only major Finnish-American teen idol. Vee hit #1 in 1961 with NYC's Carole King song "Take Good Care of My Baby," while scorching *Billboard* charts with 38 HOT 100 hits, including a #2 and two #3s. The Hall of Fame mysteriously eluded Bobby until 2009, as well as Anka (who wrote "My Way" for Elvis and for Frank Sinatra), but certainly didn't elude the guy 'Shadowing' Bobby at piano.

On Jan. 31st, 1959, young Bobby Zimmerman attended Buddy Holly's third-to-last live concert—at the Duluth, Minnesota, Armory. With riveting green eyes, an Elvis pompadour, and a gaggle of great tunes and prophetic poems swirling in his teenage mind, Hibbing High School's basketball team semi-star Bobby Z (not Bobby Vee) was just 5'8" and 125#. The NBA was not his destiny, though. Putting Folk Rock onto the map WAS. Hibbing's #1 troubadour scored an audition on *piano* with Vee's Shadows as they all debuted toward destiny with Vee's Cricketish #77, '59 "Suzie Baby." Because of a pre-electric problem of portability, Zimmerman's piano gigs didn't work out well. Chunky 'acoustic' pianos were too HEAVY to cart around, and too quiet to compete with electric guitars with amps dialed to 11. Buddy's hero **Ray Charles** later that year popularized the *electric piano* with watershed Blues anthem "What'd I Say?" [#6, '59]. But Bobby Vee and his guitar-sparked Shadows paired up a few months too early, and it was hard to guarantee the Bobby 'Zee' a grand piano at the gig at the VFW Hall or Little League Band Shell or whatever.

After an amiable split with the Shadows, Zimmerman switched to acoustic Folk guitar, taking off on a self-imposed hobo odyssey from University of Minnesota's Sigma Alpha Mu fraternity to University of Wisconsin coffeehouses. Seeking a less Alaskan winter, Zimmerman landed in Manhattan's East Village, where average January temps dance at a balmy freezy 32 degrees and stop flirting with zero. Somewhere near the Bitter End coffeehouse on Bleecker Street and a cozy relationship with Folk diva Joan Baez [#3, '69 "The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down"], Zimmerman eased into a sweet folk solo John Hammond contract with Columbia Records to sing and write hip Urban Folk anthems in the Woody Guthrie bard tradition. Via Hammond, promoter Albert Grossman, and lyrical inspiration by legendary Beat Generation novelist Jack Kerouac and poet Allen Ginsberg, Zimmerman's (b. Duluth, MN, 5-24-41) alter ego emerged as **Bob Dylan**.

Despite only 23 singles to Elvis's 151 on *Billboard's* Hot 100, Bob Dylan ranked 2nd in 2007 *Rolling Stone's* Rock Icon Hit Parade, behind the **Beatles** and amazingly ahead of Elvis. November 2008 *Rolling Stone* dubbed Dylan the 7th-best singer of all time. Best known as a poet in DYLAN Thomas's tradition, Dylan credits Holly—via protégé Bobby Vee, as his main melodic inspiration.

And the #1 fab four *Rolling Stone* group the **Beatles**? The first song young **John Lennon** (1940-80, bullet) and Paul McCartney (b. 6-18-42) ever recorded, in an old record demo booth, was Buddy Holly's "**That'll Be the Day.**" Each wanted to be just like Buddy, and John even bought needed glasses. What more fitting tribute to their favorite American rock band could the Beatles find than to name themselves virtually after their heroes the Crickets? Connections will roll.



The Beatles - Ringo Starr, George Harrison, John Lennon & Paul McCartney

Back to Buddy. He's the reason we're all here. I was convinced Buddy Holly was the main ingredient in the story of Rock and Roll way back in 1957. I was 14, dancing to Buddy's debut "That'll Be the Day" on the flat top of a boathouse with a portable record player and a mile-long cord (and girls named Rosemary & Joanie Thorlaksson). We heard Buddy's timeless tune on the radio for the first time from America's North Coast Cleveland, Ohio, beaming to Canada's South Coast—Oxley, Ontario. The song was simply the coolest thing in the world, and it still is.

As an elderly kid, 23, I wrote the first history of rock music, *The Rock Revolution* [Edmore, Detroit, '66]. If you've taken History of Rock at some local college, you might use my *Rock 'n' Roll Gold Rush* [Algona, NYC, '03]. My friend [Judge] Larry Glazer taught me to play rhythm guitar at 15, so he could play Jimmy Reed Blues lead guitar. Later in 1962, Glazer proposed the whole concept of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland in a Detroit newspaper article. I quoted Larry in *The Rock Revolution*, so Larry (b. Detroit, '43) may have started the whole splendid concept. And Larry's piano player's dad **Russell Beaubien** probably invented the electric guitar.

Most of you don't know me from Adam, and you'll forget my name, yet you'll read this whole book about Buddy's Crickets, America's greatest '50s band, because you already like Buddy Holly and he makes you smile. Weep not for my ego. You and I can discover our own essence in taking to heart great musical contributions of visionaries and rock prophets like Buddy Holly or Bob Dylan, or John Hampson. Hampson? John wrote "Absolutely (Story of a Girl)," by Nine Days, and 50,000,000 aging American kids, mostly young girls, can finish his lyric of "I absolutely love her—

WHEN SHE SMILES!” Our son Jeremy Dean plays piano—and John Hampson wrote and sang lead on the song. It’s on your *Now 5* album. Nine Days’ 2007 song “Worth Fighting For” has some Holly-esque hooks and riffs, and I like to think my badgering him about Buddy’s greatness had something to do with it.

This is Buddy’s book, however, and the only time my musical background will intrude is when it can help convince YOU that Holly was the most important rock pioneer of all time. Or that continuously omitting the Crickets’ from the Rock Hall might make bronze medalist for 3rd worst thing in the history of the world. If you still believe Buddy is secondary to Elvis in the 50s, when you finish Buddy’s story, that’s OK, too. In my relatively obscure road-racing career, powered by Nike and Saucony shoes, I was never a good-enough runner to be ticked off about second place. I consider the silver medal an honor, too. So would Buddy. He never wanted to be Elvis. He was very modest, and happy enough being Buddy Holly. I believe, however, Buddy Holly was a nice guy who finished first. Now let’s figure out why he was so tremendous, and why he and invented the rock band and the Beatles. And why that #1 fifties’ rock band deserves to stand with him in the Rock Hall of Fame.

You can’t get much more Heartland than Lubbock, Texas, Buddy’s Crickets’ home town. Lubbock straddles the Panhandle of North Texas, and features Phoenix’s triple-digit furnace Julys and a touch of North Dakota’s Arctic Clipper Januarys. Lubbock was named for East German city Lubeck, on the Baltic Sea, according to John Goldrosen’s great Holly bio *Remembering Buddy* (DeCapo, ‘96, a/k/a *The Buddy Holly Story*, Bowling Green U Press, ‘79). You couldn’t get much farther from the sea than mid-American Lubbock. When Buddy was born there on Sept. 7, 1936, only 25,000 people lived in Lubbock, compared to 210,000 by 2006. Lubbock is a Johnny-come-lately town that worships Texas Tech football. *Rave On’s* Phil Norman says it was named for Mexican War hero colonel Tom Lubbock around 1890, and citified itself in World War I—becoming Texas Tech’s college town built on cotton, hard sober work, and smiling blue skies. Lubbock’s football fans of ‘08 smiled at Texas Tech’s #2 Associated Press college football national ranking.

Lubbock has three universities and seventeen zillion churches. Sixteen zillion are Baptist. Somehow, young teenage Holly’s midnight Oldsmobile radio pulled in Rhythm and Blues from New Orleans, Rock and Roll from St. Louis, and Country music from KDAV, Lubbock, our first 100% Country music format station. Holly’s Crickets’ New Mexico producers, Norman and wife Vi Petty, braided all three music styles together, creating Buddy’s trademark ‘Tex-Mex’ Rockabilly sound.

My home state Michigan had the silver medal in tornado deaths, second only to Buddy’s Texas. For a long time, Lubbock didn’t truly recognize how spectacular Buddy’s Crickets were—and Buddy’s eventual statue stands at dead center of the wake of the monster 1970 tornado that sliced a straight 1½-mile path, cleaving Buddy’s burgh like the “Rock of Ages.”

Pix of kid Buddy show a smiley lad. No glasses. As King of the 6th Grade, faded photos show him a tad chunky—far from his lean, spectacled Rockabilly rockstar look that shines down in unaging black and white, from “American Pie” to eternity.

Holly’s trademark glasses never appeared until late in his Lubbock High School adventure, when 20/800 vision in one eye was discovered. In his ‘59 Fifth Avenue apartment with lifetime bride Maria Elena Santiago Holly, Buddy dreamed of piloting his own airplane one day. Buddy and the Crickets were already avid motorcyclists, and Buddy, like the persona of John Wayne in his cowboy cinema career, was as daredevilish as Evel Knievel (1938-2007, natural causes). Buddy was a have-no-fear kinda guy, and Challenge was his first love. While his band took the rickety cold tour bus, he would charter his own plane to the next gig.

So we're crediting Buddy Holly with bringing Elvis's and the Righteous Brothers' 'Rock and Roll Heaven' back to earth. With a universal 'voice that came from you and me,' Holly honestly expressed every nuance of our teenage triumphs and traumas. Buddy didn't look like Elvis. He looked like a cool guy in your Auto Shop class, or the guy who just outkicked you over the finish line at the Regional Cross-Country Championships.

In reality, Buddy Holly was six feet tall and weighed just 145. He was half-angel and half-imp. A dedicated Christian who donated 10% of his earnings to his folks' church, Holly was never a 'goody-two-shoes.' He loved to water-ski and he lifted weights. Rocking the North Texas halls of Lubbock and Amarillo, Holly and his fun-loving Crickets dabbled in demon nicotine, and even sampled a few midnight brews. Due to heartburn, and maybe an ulcer, Buddy shunned most 'whiskey and rye' that his good ol' boys supposedly drank in "American Pie." Deemed the 'Buckle of the Bible Belt' [Goldrosen], Lubbock actually rejected the President Roosevelt era 1932-33 Repeal of Prohibition. Lubbock remained a dry town until AFTER McLean's "American Pie" scorched airwaves to #1 in 1971. Still, Sonny Curtis's #38 on the Country chart 1980 "The Real Buddy Holly Story" shows Buddy didn't ignore party animals frolicking and growling nearby—

"We played gin joints and had a lotta fun with the women,
We swigged on bootleg beer and played our licks in the sun . . . "

At Lubbock High School, '55 grad Holly's very Christian girlfriend was Echo McGuire. Her devout denomination wouldn't allow her to drink or even dance. She wanted him to go to college, settle down, get a real job with his dad's tile company, and forget about that noisy music. Holly's music, not Echo, turned out to be the main love of his life. Echo's voice of reason and conformity echoes down to the present day. Buddy might have made it singing in his Baptist church, doing Country gigs now and then, and working nine-to-five in some job where he never rocked the boat.

Buddy, however, decided to rock the world.

A Lubbock cheerleader and drum majorette named Peggy Sue Gerron saw to that.

Holly was a bit like you and me, attached to a dream. He saw how Elvis made it when the two met at Elvis's *Louisiana Hayride* gig at Lubbock's Cotton Club. Buddy looked at himself in the mirror, and decided that though he didn't look like Elvis, he sure could sing like Elvis. He also played lead guitar like Elvis's lead guitarist Scotty Moore, and wrote songs Elvis never dreamed of concocting. Buddy also became a rock and roll coach.

Through friendly goof-around persuasion, Buddy convincingly coached his Cricket bandmates to play certain riffs, cadenzas, and complex drum beats. Through Les Paul's overdubbing concept, Buddy miked himself to sound like BOTH Everly Brothers at once. Like his hero Elvis, Buddy launched himself to Center Stage with a twang, an unearthly echo, and his own trademark **Holly Hiccup**—a glottal stop he acquired from earlier half-hiccup hints in Elvis's greatest hit, "Don't Be Cruel." Written by bowler-hatted Afro-American Broadway songwriter Otis Blackwell, "Don't Be Cruel" ruled #1 for 11 weeks in '56. Blackwell also penned, on the wilder side, Jerry Lee Lewis's swan song, #2 "Great Balls of Fire." Without the fireball song, and Elvis's Leiber-Stoller hit "Jailhouse Rock" at #2 and #1 respectively, Buddy's anthem "**Peggy Sue**" would have nabbed a 2nd #1 hit for Buddy's Crickets as 1957 fell into 1958, and the sleepy past crashed into the wild and crazy future.

This is the story of a rock legend and his Texan band, and why they matter today more than anyone ever imagined. You'll see why. Some of Buddy's songs are some of my best friends. Hokey as it may sound, Dion's words cascade down to the present day with eerie splendor—"Buddy was like the big brother I never had."

Rock and Roll is rarely a place to find role models for your kid. With Buddy Holly, we'll make an exception. He's an example of the flipped adage of "nice guys finish first," even when their trip comes to a sudden stop. On the way to Liverpool.

In the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band's poignant musical sketch of a tap-dancing troubadour named "Mr. Bojangles" (#9, 1971), the guy in the song still grieves after twenty years for his little dog who passed away. Millions still grieve the loss of Holly's plane to a frozen Iowa cornfield, on that inky blizzard night so long ago. It's been over half a century, but the image of Buddy Holly just keeps on growing in the pantheon of Rock and Roll immortals. "Everyday," fans "Rave On" about his music and legacy.

"Buddy Holly," said **Elvis Presley** in 1957, "is *my* favorite singer."

For what it's worth, it'd make no sense for 13-year-old me to argue with the King.

Buddy was not simply a nice guy who finished first. Along with his friend Elvis, Buddy's artistic vision created revolutionary Rock for three generations to love over half a century. Another great Texan tenor, **Roy Orbison** (1936-88), later became Elvis's favorite singer, after Buddy's life was stolen by an aerial disaster that also stole the starry-eyed innocence of a generation of Don McLeans and Beatles and us.

Buddy Holly. Whenever fans think of him, they smile.

As the Cold War heated into a bubbling volcano of nuclear warheads pointed at American and Russian cities, Buddy Holly taught a snarling world to sing. And smile.

Buddy gave all of us the notion, the will, and the gutsy optimism to rock. You couldn't find a better rockin' role model if you tried. This'll be the day we get to Buddy's musical Superman vision. It was better than his Clark Kent specs would have you believe. Lennon and McCartney were listening, and tuning up.

Most of all, *This'll Be the Day* is a love story about Buddy Holly and his beautiful bride Maria Elena Santiago. Though their "True Love Ways" lifetime love dreams lasted only five months, the 'Day the Music Died' only enhances Buddy's mythic image and his Crickets' unforgettable music that lives on, no matter what "American Pie" says. Like Romeo and Juliet, Buddy and Maria's is truly the one story that rock and roll could never forget.



*Elvis Presley and the Blue Moon Boys—
l-r: Bill Black, Elvis, and Scotty Moore*



2. This'll Be the Day the Music Survived

At 14, I believed in Buddy Holly as much as I believed in Santa Claus at five. Now that that both have been gone away from you and me for a long time, we all suspect the infinite truth—Buddy and Santa never really left. Yes, Virginia, there is a Buddy Holly. Every good thing you believed in about rock and roll is attached to his brief life and immortal legend. When in doubt, he was and is your friend. Yeah, I guess it's a leap of faith. Civilizations rise and crumble on stuff like this.

“When you're feeling down,” says the wise character in 2000's rockumentary *Almost Famous*, “go down to the record store and visit your friends.” I am a rich man, because I'm lucky enough to have 10,000 good friends, although only around 100 of them are people. Around 9,900 are songs. Many are Cricket songs that pointed my way out of a stuffy paper bag of teenage boredom in Nowheresville.

Buddy left a legacy and the greatest unheralded band. The Crickets were so important the Beatles tried to become them as the early Quarrymen. **Beatle** John Lennon wore Holly specs at Liverpool gigs, and Paul McCartney much later joined the Buddy Holly Memorial Society. Paul later owned the whole Buddy Holly Songbook (until wrested away awhile by, egad, Michael Jackson, Elvis's temporary son-in-law). The Rolling Stones' first American hit was Buddy's flipside of “Oh Boy”—his immortal “Not Fade Away.” And the Crickets' music never quite does. James Taylor's 2008 “Not Fade Away” rambles along, with my wife's cousin David Lasley singing thirds harmony, they also spin Taylor's sweet Carole King #1, '71 dream “You've Got a Friend.” This non-fading Holly hit is everybody's Buddy.

OK, Elvis was the solo icon no one will ever forget, but was his fine drummer D.J. Fontana ever named among Rock's top three drummers like Buddy's Crickets' Jerry Allison? Did Elvis's cool 1st-string bassman Bill Black and his bull fiddle first popularize the electric bass like Crickets' kid star Joe B. Mauldin? Did Elvis's 2nd-string bassman ever rise to become the #4 Country idol of all time, like Waylon Jennings? Elvis may have been the ‘King’ in Don MacLean's “American Pie,” but no slice of that enticing pie would ever have been served without the prophecy and martyrdom of Rock and Roll's 1st saint, Buddy Holly. OK, almost a saint.

Buddy Holly **AND the CRICKETS** created an entire rhythmic panorama for rock's millennial third generation. Were it not for Buddy's inspiration, we'd be missing essential items in Santa's bag of earthly R&R musical delights—the standard 2-guitar, bass, and drum rock band; the singer-songwriter who sings and plays lead; the garage band concept; the undaunting focus on the guitar firepower and drums; heavy metal thunder, and the Beatles. Polite? Buddy was, but quiet he wasn't. With the restless, brash, overwhelming enthusiasm of a white “Johnny B. Goode” rock dreamer erupting out of a Texas tornado, Holly and his red-hot Fender Stratocaster unleashed the lightning, tore down the Big Sky country thunder, whooped his “Oh Boy” evermore love songs, and lassoed a world corralled by a nuclear nightmare that could be totally conquered bloodlessly with a guitar and a dream.

All Buddy was saying, was give Rock and Roll a chance. John Lennon inhaled Buddy's message when the first fated Beatle recorded a carbon-copy rollicking “Peggy Sue” on his #6, 1975 *Rock and Roll* album, next to his Ben E. King #20, '75 gospel echo “Stand by Me.” For a brief and shining Camelot moment in the bygones of lost, long-ago time, the entire world cheered Elvis's favorite singer, a happily hyper lean lad from Lubbock. Everybody loved Elvis's buddy Buddy's music.

We still do. Without it, some of the following stars would never have happened anywhere like they did. You'll find their Holly happenings hiccupping joyfully (with a little ‘happy that hurts’) all over Buddy's book. They include the **Beatles**, Rolling Stones, Eagles, Bob Dylan, Linda Ronstadt, Creedence, U2, the Cars, Blondie, Jimmy Eat World, the Beach Boys, America, Madonna, Michael

Jackson, Anne Murray, the Dixie Chicks, Juice Newton, Iggy Pop & the Stooges, Bruce Springsteen, Herman's Hermits, George Michael, Paul McCartney, George Harrison, Bowling for Soup, Gene Pitney, Roy Orbison, Simon & Garfunkel, Del Shannon, the Bee Gees, Olivia Newton-John, the Searchers, Tremeloes, Weezer, Elton John, Cyndi Lauper, Keith Urban, or Eric Clapton, Donovan, Gwen Stefani, Beyonce, and Pink. That's just an appetizer. Holly's musical fingerprints and voice-prints cover most of music that masquerades for mainstream rock as today crashes into tomorrow.

You'll see.

Every last one of us who biographized Buddy never got to meet him, but we all came close. I missed his concert in Detroit, Michigan (the Motor City), in 1958.

The closest I got to meeting Buddy was meeting the Crickets (finally) at Detroit Lakes, MINNESOTA, in 1963. Four of us ancient teenagers (19¾ +) drove around North Dakota, up to no good, in my '47 Buick bomb the Green Jet. One was Bob Baldori. Bob later backed Chuck Berry on piano with our rock band the Night Shift, later the Woolies (#95, 1967 Bo Diddley classic "Who Do You Love?"). I saw a sparkly poster on a telephone pole at some woeforsaken crossroads for—

THE CRICKETS

Live, Tonight

The surviving Crickets' gig was 100 miles out of our way. We took a vote about whether to go to Detroit Lakes, Minnesota, or some non-event in Omaha. I was the biggest Holly & Crickets fan, somewhere in the Summer '63 Bullseye, four years after the 2-3-59 crash. My buddies voted me down, by a 3 to 1 margin. We went anyhow. It was MY car.

For five years, I'd been in total awe of Buddy Holly, his music, its aura and legend and magic spell. Few of my friends were Cricket fanatics, as I was. Blues fan Larry Glazer taught me to plunk and twang rhythm guitar when we were 15. All my girlfriends, even one named "Peggy Sue," seemed to prefer Elvis or Ricky Nelson or Jimmy Clanton, all teen idol singers with Hollywood looks.

I believed in Buddy Holly and his forevermore legacy. I was hooked to a rockin' dream and starstruck by my idols the Crickets, so the Green Jet screeched left and blasted east. My three pals Bill Baker, Tommy Cook, and Bob Baldori looked forward to a lakeside pavilion and a dance to pick up girls and guzzle a brew or two.

We also sought a living band, steadfastly trudging on beyond the aftermath. Most Crickets' regulars greeted Millennium Three with a toast of cinnamon and laughter and auld-lang-syne. As we flipped centuries, both 1957 Cricket **Niki Sullivan** and Country legend Waylon Jennings faded into failing health, but Curtis, Maudlin, and Allison rocked on.

Meanwhile, back at a faraway '63 Crickets gig—

The moon showed up, buttery yellow, above a bluegill lake, followed by Crickets. With Jerry's modest drum set sporting a cartoon of three musical crickets, **four** dapper dudes conquered a new generation with their throbbing one-night stand. **Sonny Curtis** twanged lead guitar, carrying baritone lead and back-up vocals. **Jerry Allison's** Holly-style tenor and Lubbock accent bubbled over the modest mike, as he mesmerized kids with easygoing vocals and volcanic drum thunder. **Joe B. Mauldin** brought his trademark bass and grin, and carried the bottom notes gingerly. Their revolving door of Cricket lead singers admitted **Jerry Naylor**, handsome singer/guitarist you can see, accompanied by a Royal Blue sweater, on #42, July 1962 album *Bobby Vee Meets the Crickets* (#2 UK). On a faraway lake beyond the big city skyline, America's greatest band unleashed their thunder rock on the USA's north tier of stolid Swedes and drowsy cornfields. And finally, whew, I was there.

We met some pretty Swedish girls, rocked out to the music, and I almost left one sitting on a moonlight picnic table by the lake on the band's break. I was so gung-ho, when the Crickets chirped their second set intro song "Not Fade Away," that I dragged the poor lass back into the grange hall to their enchanting musical spell. She was 17. Her kid sister was 13 and didn't even know who Buddy Holly was, three years later. Rock music hadn't gotten down to making its heroes sacred yet.

Like today, 1959 and 1963 rock stars could be chewed-up and hauled away to the dump of oblivion—when their two-month-old ancient record was zapped by some Johnny-come-lately new hit song dancing on the razor's-edge of Now.

The way I got to meet my idols was a tad weird. Other kids requested one or two of their big hits—"Maybe Baby," "Think It Over," "Oh Boy," or "Peggy Sue." I slipped Sonny Curtis a list of **38** of the Crickets' greatest hits, near-hits, and wishful hits like "Wishing," "Rave On," and "Take Your Time." Frankly, they were astounded any fan *cared* so much. I ended up gabbing with them for fifteen minutes about Buddy and his semi-sacred rock music. The uncaring moon splashed down into the cool northern lake, spiked with sturgeons. The girl Sherry disappeared into the hot, electric American night with the father of some girl named Maria, and with Maria. Why? The enchanted pavilion turned into a pumpkin at midnight.

So basically, I was wowed, because I saw the Crickets that would inspire the Beatles in the flesh, and they all turned out to be cool guys just like I knew they would. No meeting Buddy himself? No problem. Many kids' illusions about their rockin' messiahs tatter, when they realize some non-Buddy backstage 'heroes' are actually 2nd-string demons nabbed with needles in their arms, or zapped by paparazzi while dragging sub-teen moppets off to sinful sleeping bags in the woods. Buddy's secular sins were more of the occasional odd beer variety, trucked into dry Lubbock from wet Amarillo on the way to the North Pole.

Just like Buddy Holly's Crickets, my buddy **Bob Baldori** almost made the Rock Hall of Fame. Bob played piano for Buddy's fellow 1st-year inductee **Chuck Berry**, at the \$100 million-dollar pyramidal shrine Hall opened on America's North Coast of Lake Erie in 1995. For every rock star who makes the Hall of Fame, 1000 are left out who probably deserve to be inside. Such as, perhaps, you and *your* band.

Take Chubby Checker, for instance. Back in '05, this star of #1 hits like "The Twist" picketed outside New York City's Waldorf-Astoria, arguing that he too deserved enshrinement. Perhaps he does. He's not alone, outside.

Both Chubby and Buddy Holly owed much to **Hank Ballard & the Midnighters**, who followed Buddy's 1st-year '86 enshrinement four years later. Ballard's composition "The Twist" made #28 in 1960, and Checker audially xeroxed the sound and *covered* it to #1. Buddy, too, synthesized the best of the best from Elvis, Chuck Berry, Fats Domino, and Ballard. Buddy's beginning lead guitar lick in "That'll Be the Day" is a fine echo of Ballard's risqué "Annie" songs saga from 1954—and Holly sampled richly from his Afro-American R&B or Delta Blues heroes.

All rock fans seem to know Buddy Holly passed away on the Day the Music Died, February 3rd, 1959, thanks to Don McLean's doleful ditty "American Pie." Not so many know the Crickets still played the Classic Rock circuit, over fifty years later into 2008. Astoundingly, the current Crickets starred their core superstars—Jerry Allison, Joe B. Mauldin, and Sonny Curtis.

At first, newspapers who scoffed at rock in 1959 thought the big-beat music had just suffered a hiccup, and other new stars would fill the breach.

The new stars are gone now.

The wholly Holly hiccup abides. And the music survives.

Buddy Holly lives, every time we play rock and roll.

P.S. I promise this appreciative life of my hero Buddy Holly will jump around a little time-wise, or I'm not doing my job here. Basically, this is the story of the Crickets' rise and triumph and Buddy's tragic martyrdom. It's also the story of the aftermath. Most importantly, it's the story of how **Buddy Holly & his band the Crickets** invented Rock and Roll as we know it. The energy. The rhythm. The metallic blast of the guitars. Though our chronological story leaps from decade to decade, to show how Holly permeates over half a century of rock music, we always zero in on the prize. To paraphrase Buddy's #1 echo **Bobby Vee** (b. 4-30-43, Fargo, North Dakota) in #6, '60 blockbuster "Rubber Ball," Buddy's Crickets' sensational sound just keeps 'bouncin' back to *you-uh-hoo*.'



Bobby Vee (r) and me [1999].

While Crickets' chirping was heard beyond Texas, future Beatles were listening—and plunking guitars and dreams in soot-grey Liverpool sunsets.

I wasn't the only one to fall in love with the Cricket sound at the sacred setting of the pavilion lake at Detroit Lakes, Minnesota. Buddy's main protégé and baritone vocal stylist **Bobby Vee** married his lovely bride Karen Gergen at Holy Rosary Catholic Church at Detroit Lakes, Minnesota, on my 21st birthday, December 28th, 1963. It's a day I somewhat remember, though I was at a wild party in the OTHER Detroit, the big ol' smoky Motor City maybe 750 miles southeast, where balmy winter nights average 15 degrees, not zero.

By now, you realize this Holly appreciation is personal. I'm writing this for only about 987,654,321 people on earth who just might feel the same way if they could deeply inhale the Crickets' bouncy sound, and groove to their eternal wave length that created both the first true rock and roll band, and the Beatles. Dylan, too.

You'll see.



3. The Legend, the Man, the Band

Though Buddy's life ended in tragedy, it certainly didn't begin that way. How do you grow up to have more fun with your music than anyone anywhere? Maybe you start in a happy home in the Heartland. He was born Charles Hardin Holley on September 7, 1936, a blessed laborious relief to Labor Day labors of his mom Ella Drake Holley. Mrs. Holley was a hard-working Christian lady closer to sainthood in most eyes than nearly anyone this side of Mother Teresa. She married 25-year-old short-order cook Lawrence 'L.O.' Holley in 1924. Brothers Larry and Travis Holley debuted in 1925 and 1927, respectively, and sister Pat arrived as the stock market crashed into 1929. Buddy buoyed up the dregs of the Depression with sweet song and an impish smile.



*L-R: Skeeter Davis, Mr. Lawrence Holley,
Waylon Jennings, Mrs. Ella Holley*



*L-R: Bill Walker, Mrs. Ella Holley,
Skeeter Davis, Mr. Lawrence Holley*

When our first child Lauri Lia Dean was born April 14, 1967, Mrs. Ella Holley was kind enough to send us a copy of the RCA album that country star Skeeter Davis (#2, '63 "The End of the World") recorded for her hero—Skeeter Davis Sings Buddy Holly. Mrs. Holley sent us photos from the February 1967 Nashville session, which includes Tommy Roe's producer Felton Jarvis's skillful version of Buddy (and now Skeeter's) "That'll Be the Day," "Maybe Baby" (with a "Peggy Sue" beat), "True Love Ways," "It's So Easy," "Oh Boy," "Think It Over," and others.

Seems the youngest kid in his Texan neighborhood often got stuck with the affectionate nickname 'Buddy.' In Holley's/Holly's case, it couldn't have been more appropriate. Every BUDDY who ever heard his music felt like he really WAS their Buddy. As the last lad in family of four kids, Buddy got spoiled a bit, according to Buddy's brother Larry [1-14-08]. Buddy's family, like those of Jerry Lee Lewis, the Everly Brothers, Ray Charles, Little Richard, Chuck Berry, or Sam Cooke, earned their musical stripes via heartfelt hymns of their Bible-Belt Baptist upbringing.

Every single member of the first class of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame was a Southern Baptist* [*OK, OK, Afro-French Antoine 'Fats' Domino had a Catholic conservative religious background]. Not only that, each one of them was either Scotch-Irish or African-American, and in Berry and Domino's case, a tad French from the cradle of Rock and Roll—New Orleans, Louisiana. New Orleans was the hot Crescent City, home of the 'Let the Good Times Roll' Mardi Gras [*Laissez les bontemps rouillez*], long before the 2005 monster hurricane that stole the levee, the Chevy, and nearly Fats Domino, 78, who was miraculously airlifted out by helicopter.

Lubbock, Texas, need never fear a major flood. Don't ask about tornadoes. Nestled next to Denny's and the LaQuinta Inn, the Holly statue shrine and West Texas Walk of Fame is built over a block mangled by a recent tornado. Odessa, TX, retired high school principal Virgil Johnson was the first Afro-American inductee to a Walk of Fame roster of North Texan superstars like Waylon Jennings, Mac Davis, and more Crickets than stars in an inky Texan Milky Way midnight sky.

About that flood. Flattish Lubbock is perched upon the Yellow House River, a lightweight fork

of Hank Thompson and the Brazos Valley Boys' Brazos River—no Amazon itself. **Hank Thompson** (1925-2007) lived a long time for a rootin-tootin' honkytonk bar belter. He was the mentor for the two favorite stars, Johnny Cash & Buddy, among my Dearborn High School's football team. Henry Ford's Dearborn, Michigan, is a puff of pollution away from the Motor City, and a long, long trail away from the Pecos and Tumbling Tumbleweeds and Western Swing music that brought us Rock and Roll. Hank Thompson gave protege **Johnny Cash** a wry and booming baritone singing style, and Thompson gave **Buddy Holly's** Crickets their first tour with the big guys of Rockabilly in 1956. Thompson scored 79 Country hits from 1948 to 1993. Hank's 1952 "The Wild Side of Life" hung onto #1C for 15 weeks, or #1(15)Country charts, in 3-52 (March 1952):



The kind of world we all imagine Buddy came from (Amarillo, Texas, a few miles north of Lubbock).



Aerial view of Lubbock, Texas, c. 1958.

Billboard Song Numbers & How to Read Them

I furnish you lots of numbers to prove Buddy's music's importance. Here's how to make mincemeat of their confusing complexity. If numbers aren't your bag, please hurdle all these numerals. Jump back to simply *words* about Buddy. They also prove how wonderful he and his band's songs were—

We use *Billboard* magazine's official charts, tabulated by **Joel Whitburn & Record Research** in super books like his *Top Pop Singles, 1955-2006*. We use four big charts: On the **HOT 100** chart, songs show month and year of chart entry, such as "**Peggy Sue**," **#3, 11-57**. "Peggy Sue" entered the charts in November 1957, but didn't peak at #3 for perhaps a month or so. It's the **ENTRY**, not the **PEAK**, date.

#1 C means Country [once C&W, or Country/Western] charts.

#3 RB means Rhythm & Blues charts.

#3 AC means Adult Contemporary charts, begun in '61, after Buddy.

#5 UK means *Melody Maker* magazine's United

Kingdom/Great Britain charts. Date is song's peak date in UK.

Numbers aren't here to memorize. They also show how many people loved Buddy, his buddies, and his timeless tunes that outlived a raggedy old millennium.

Hank Thompson was a big friendly dude with wild-titled politically-incorrect monster hits like “Squaws Along the Yukon,” (#2C, ‘58), “Waiting in the Lobby of Your Heart” (#3C, ‘52), and honkytonk beer ode, “On Tap, In the Can, or in the Bottle” (#7C, ‘68). How did young Holly join Hank’s tour? A long road.

Back in Lubbock, Buddy and Hutchinson Junior High pal Bob Montgomery did a ‘Holly Hayride’ live gig on KDAV radio at tender age 15 or so, with help from Amarillo DJ guru Hi-Pockets Duncan. Somehow Holly scored a contract with Decca, but they ditched Montgomery. Buddy and the Three Tunes cut his first Nashville record with Country uber-producer Owen Bradley at Bradley’s Barn—“Love Me” on Jan. 26, 1956. It didn’t vault to the top, but did shimmer with hot licks of star guitar guys Sonny Curtis on lead and Grady Martin on rhythm. Famous session guy Martin sparks Elvis tunes, and picks Marty Robbins’ Tex-Mex riffs on #1, ‘59 “El Paso.” Buddy’s road to the big time, however, screeched to a dismal detour, for 1956 made Elvis, not Buddy, a superstar.

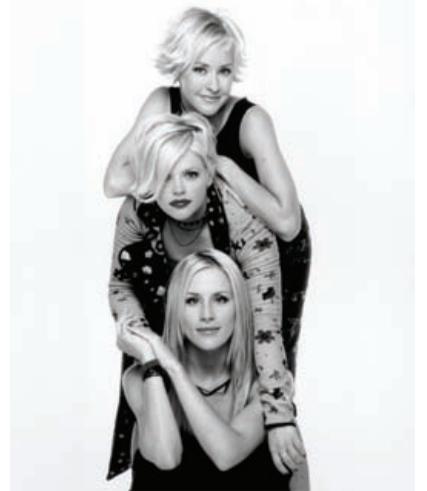
Sonny James, whose ballad “Young Love” hit #1 in 1956, and Hank Thompson knew young Holly (19) had a one-in-a-million voice, though. They signed him up to open for country stars Faron Young, Cowboy Copas, and young **George Jones**. Buddy’s original session in Nashville, with great guitars and steady stand-up bass musings of Don Guess, omitted one key component—a drummer (Doug Kirkham’s listed on ‘percussion’). By October ‘56, a mysterious Thompson tour coalesced somewhere—gig dates are lost in the swirls of yestergone bye-bye Miss American Pie.

In this magical mystery tour, they brought the 2nd genius, 16-year-old drumstick wizard and Lubbock High pal **Jerry Allison**, to boost the beat of Don Guess’s big bull fiddle, with Sonny and Buddy’s hot licks on guitar. Thompson was so impressed with his opening band of kids juiced with sizzly Texan energy, that he signed them up for a January 1957 winter tour of kids Bill & Hillary Clinton’s Little Rock, Arkansas, plus 14 other dates at burgs like New Orleans itself, plus Jacksonville and Miami, Florida, Savannah, Georgia, and Charleston, South Carolina. No bus froze up, and nobody had to fly in a dinky plane to escape a Cold Blue Norther lambasting North Dakota, from the Yukon River in Alaska’s icy backyard.

Early 1957 rose into a hopeful swoon for Buddy’s band. After local unrecorded gigs, Norman and Vi Petty’s Nor-Va-Jak Studio in Clovis, New Mexico, began coaxing out Buddy’s new sound. It was a hundred pedal-to-the-metal miles away to the northwest. Nor-Va-Jak flipped the dials in Buddy’s direction. Hits came out.

The Crickets’ dream was born in an “I Like Ike” America just signing on for a no-nonsense interstate grid to iron out old Route 66 up in Amarillo, Texas. Perforating Amarillo, interstate Highway I-40 traded restaurants like Buddy’s local favorite drive-in the Hi-D-Ho, with the big sign **CATFISH—FRIED OKRA—MALTEDS**, into a whirl of Bigfoot Ronald McDonalds, fire-sauce Taco Bells, and neat & clean Wal-Marts out beyond where lost Norman Rockwell towns were fading away.

Happiness for Buddy Holly and the Crickets would not come from a standard Nashville setting. In some ways, Buddy Holly was a rebel. Like Willie Nelson and Buddy’s bassman Waylon Jennings, Holly & the Crickets were among the first of the ‘Texas Outlaws,’ playing rip-roaring Rockabilly THEIR way. Joe Ely & Lloyd Maines and the Flatlanders continued the Lubbock musical tradition into the 80s, and daughter Natalie Maines fronted the **Dixie Chicks** (12-million-selling Grammy ‘98 album *Wide Open Spaces*). Biggest female Country stars into the millennium, the Chicks were among first to criticize



The Dixie Chicks of Lubbock, Texas.

President George W. Bush's steering of the 2nd Iraq War. Chicks' million-selling albums temporarily tanked, among conservative Country fans. By 2007, USA agreed with the Chicks on war's agonizing duration. Chicks rallied their troops to a 4th Grammy award via their '06 headstrong "Don't Want to Make Nice." Buddy Holly was headstrong, too, and never, ever, did a song about politics—controversial political songs escaped 50s rock and roll. George W. Bush was headstrong, too, and Texans have been known to say what they feel. President Bush strongly opined that his favorite singer was Buddy Holly. Zillions of democrats agreed. Politically, Holly was a diplomat, not a boat-rocker. Lubbock doesn't do boats.

Buddy Holly was the first rock superstar to hear a sound he wanted in his head, and bypass the record producer to get to his musical vision.

Buddy Holly was the first do-it-yourself rock and roll superstar. His accomplices? The Crickets.

Little Buddy, in His Dennis-the-Menace Little Kid Phase

In Texas, it's not a good idea to jump the gun. What about the little-kid Buddy part? But, of course. Buddy Holly didn't emerge, fully grown, from a half-shell on the Aegean Sea, swathed in sweet sounds of bouncy fleecy chords, a rampaging rockin' beat, and a goodtime groovy voice that came from you and me. He didn't start telling his terrific teenage tales at age six. He was no prodigy like Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, composing at three, and nailing his greatest hit "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" at five, back in some Austrian Never-Never-Land.

Buddy first debuted at age five on violin with brothers Larry and Travis and the family. Buddy won the talent-show prize, but alas, older brothers insisted he got the most applause because he was so cute. Larry mentioned they oiled up and muffled his bow, so Buddy's world-class smile and sounds of non-squeaky silence won the day, the prize, and a later shot at glory.

The center of Lawrence (L.O.) Holley's family, beyond his tile business, was over at their Tabernacle Baptist Church. The modest roadside house of worship is unadorned with gothic balustrades, Richardsonian Romanesque marble, or snow-white New England moonlight steeples. Holly's mom and his siblings sang in harmony to Baptist hymns, clinging with "Amazing Grace" to "The Old Rugged Cross" with religious fervor, schooling Buddy in heavenly melody and a message of eternal love. Sonny Curtis wrote—"He was a good ol' boy, and he had a good Christian soul." Did Buddy believe rock music could save your mortal soul? Maybe, baby.

The real Buddy Holly story begins with his missing birthplace—



Buddy's birthplace at 1911 6th Street in Lubbock, TX. Buddy's father played a major role in the 12-foot extension on the back, to accomodate Buddy's brothers Larry and Travis and his sister Pat.

The Mini-Mystery of How Buddy Holly's House Ran Away One Night

Ever seen pix of Elvis's modest two-room shotgun shack birthplace in Tupelo, Mississippi? Only-child Elvis and his folks lived there till he was a teenager, before dad Vernon Presley moved to tough Memphis projects, due to his jail time for a bad \$4 check for buying chickens or something. Buddy's boyhood home? Holly's was wider, longer, whiter, and had a cute porch buttressed with two steroid-strong 4"x 4" pillars. Holly's family home was located at 1911 Sixth Street, on a block



Elvis Presley's birthplace, Tupelo, Mississippi.

A fixer-upper guy, they claim, moved it out of town and altered it beyond recognition.

You can't make this stuff up. No one knows exactly where the 1000-square-foot house went. And you thought Bobby Darin's "Mack the Knife's" Brooklyn mugs knew how to keep mum about some goon's cement shoes in the East River, attached to the poor deceased thug on a riverbottom of old boots and clammy clams.

Where Buddy's house disappeared to is your guess and mine. It doesn't disturb Holly's meteoric rise from woodshop class at Lubbock High to rock-star, in a hurry to catch the Stairway-to-Heaven commuter flight, and a #1 million-selling hit on his Crickets' first Brunswick release.

Mystery surrounds the legend of Buddy Holly. Too much is out of print. One great book (Goldrosen) and a good one (Philip Norman's '96 *Rave On*) paint Holly's All-American Lubbock childhood, and timeless hit tunes that blueprinted a half-century of rock's greatest rollers. Bill Griggs's 2004 encyclopedic *Buddy Holly Day by Day* and his fanmags *Rockin' 50s* and *Reminiscing* are equally tremendous in scope. Holly is featured as my favorite singer in *The Rock Revolution* ('66) and 100+ pages of my '03 *Rock and Roll Gold Rush*. All of us loved the legend that was Buddy Holly, and strove to honor him. Some biographers wriggle with hogwash. Ellis Amburn's '95 *Buddy Holly—A Biography* wastes verbal talent and descriptive expertise. He sensationalizes Buddy's earthly pilgrimage into a perceived bacchanalia, with facts solid as Swiss cheese. Holly never claimed to be a saint, just a singer. Buddy just never did major scandal, no matter how tabloid titillators crank out frenzied fiction hustled as torrid truth. Or half-truth. Buddy was actually just a guy who went to church with his family, had a couple rock-star romances among warm and friendly groupies adorning his tours, and then met the girl of his dreams. After he lost his childhood sweetheart Echo McGuire.

Buddy didn't believe in stalling, while falling in love.

The girl of his dreams was **Maria Elena Santiago**. She was four years older and worked at Peer Southern Music at his Decca/Coral/Brunswick label, and Buddy *proposed to her on their first date*. Sort of. And that's the most shocking thing about Buddy Holly. Buddy's romantic tastes were just as active as Elvis's, and just as run-of-the-mill as any guy from football-frenzy Texas Tech Lubbock, who grinnily admired sprightly cheerleaders like Peggy Sue Geron. Buddy hid nothing in his love life, regardless of ri-

that greeted our 1994 pilgrimage with two toothy Rottweilers by the beautiful barbed-wire fence, and the Unwelcome sign next door. Holly's birthplace lot was a blossoming field with Texas bluebonnets with buzzy bees attached, dazzling daisies, tweety meadowlarks, and hopefully no slinky reptiles in the high grass.

Apparently one dark mysterious night, pinpointed somewhere between 1959 and 1994, Buddy's boyhood home developed legs and hightailed it to the Rio Grande, or somewhere east of the Andromeda Nebula in outer space.



Gary Busey and Maria Richwine as Buddy & Maria Elena Holley at the last farewell.

diculous falsehoods. The splendor of Buddy's legacy, however, lies in the magical power of his quintessentially awesome music.

The proposal? Oh, yeah. Actually, he casually knew Maria at Coral Records, then first took her to lunch in Manhattan and didn't propose. This whole episode gets nearly a whole chapter in the belly of Buddy's book here. After lunch, Buddy & Maria Elena shopped awhile by Tiffany's, and he bought a few guitar picks and Maria some modest jewelry—not an engagement ring. Then he took her to P.J. Clarke's Pub nearby. At dinnertime, Buddy ran out and bought a rose from a street vendor. Then the impetuous and starry-eyed teen idol asked Maria if she'd like to spend the rest of her life with him. After catching her breath, she said O.K. Requisite I-love-yous were exchanged, and they launched into their happily ever after.

Sadly, their happily-ever-after only lasted a half year.

Buddy, man on a mission, was in a hurry. Sleepytime Lubbock brought easy tranquility to denizens of scorching summer noontime, but to Buddy it brought restlessness. Like Dr. Martin Luther King when 'moderates' told him to *wait* longer for integration to work, Holly had little patience for those who laze along on the syrupy status quo. Buddy's byword was NOW. His ammunition was Rock and Roll.

Like Dr. King, Buddy was crucially responsible for integration of his entire nation and beyond. Holly's integrated musical genius sifted the frantic frenzy of Little Richard ("Slippin' & Slidin'"), mellow Cajun Soul of Fats Domino ("Valley of Tears"), and Chalyпсо Everly-Style Soul of Mickey and Sylvia ("Love Is Strange," "Words of Love," "Listen to Me") to go with his Country music heroes. Holly was an original genius. He melded the best of all new styles. Just like the Beatles covered Holly and Chuck Berry, Holly sculpted his Crickets' style on masterworks of Elvis ("Don't Be Cruel" in Buddy's "Rave On"), Chuck Berry ("Brown-Eyed Handsome Man"), and Ray Charles—a new genius whose tunes Buddy was planning to sing on a 1959 album that never happened. Holly synthesized the best of the best, and added a couple of happy-do-lucky hiccups. Then he turned up his Fender Stratocaster guitar to maximum thunder. With Jerry Allison's percussion tattoo, Buddy skated the skies. Holly was America's most innovative total creator of new Rock and Roll.

How important was Holly? Did this kid from the high prairie really create the whole juggernaut of rock music? Let's leapfrog the Big Pond for the answer.

Herman's Hermits of Manchester, England, were the first British Invasion group to actually sound like a British Invasion group, with a Midlands-ish accent. The '64 **Beatles**, Stones, Dave Clark Five, and all did a nifty audial Xerox copy of American musical mentors like Buddy, Eddie Cochran, Jimmy Clanton, or Elvis. After two 1965 USA #1 hits, "Mrs. Brown, You've Got a Lovely Daughter" and goofaround ditty "I'm Henry VIII, I Am," the Hermits launched a top ten tune here with the most Holly Hiccups per line ever recorded. Its title indicated how much better Holly's records were than everyone else's—#7, 9-85 "Just a Little Bit Better."

Peter Blair Noone (b.11-5-47) sang lead, unleashing torrents of "wo-uh-ho-uh-ho" streamlined Holly Hiccups. They sent millions of Yankee teenyboppers scrambling for Hermits' records. They gazed gaga at blond-haired, blue-eyed 'Herman,' who looked like young John F. Kennedy and sang like Buddy Holly.

The teen idol phenomenon was nothing new. The same swoon followed Buddy's two premier protégés, too—**Bobby Vee** (#2, '62 "Run to Him") and **Tommy Roe** (#1, '62 "Sheila," resembling "Peggy Sue's" little sister). Each teen heartthrob was abundantly handsome, so Pre-Beatle teen moppets swooned and stormed the stage. Teen idols at that time were often Bobbys & Tommys, rarely a Robert or Thomas. The fewer last-name letters, the easier to recall. Vee took Buddy's high baritone sound; Roe shifted Holly's tenor into higher 'Irish' tenor range. Roe's second hit "Susie

Darlin” (#35, ‘62) covered Holly’s only major lifetime imitator, Surf Rock’s profound predecessor **Robin Luke**. This triumvirate of tremendous tenors is so important they deserve their own chapters, so hang on.

Were it not for Vee, Roe, and Luke, the Crickets’ magic sound might never have been unleashed. The **Beatles** often appeared behind Roe & Vee and two other 1960-64 singers in my “Great Singers” chapter in *Rock and Roll Gold Rush*—Texan **Roy Orbison** (1936-88) and Michigander **Del Shannon** (1934-90). Out of this batch of talent nurtured by the music of Buddy, his Crickets, and Buddy’s good friends the **Everly Brothers**, an entire British Invasion breathed new life into rock and roll. With Buddy’s melodies filtered through Buddy-fan **Bob Dylan’s** lyrics (inspired by Beat Generation novelist **Jack Kerouac**), the 60s exploded into a sonic rainbow.

Chuck Berry was lyricist and lead guitarist, and Elvis the face man with a great voice. Holly’s Crickets, however, brought the glory of rock to the people in a four-part package. Three-fourths of their enchanting sound was driven by flashy guitars; the other fourth of their thunder was steered by Cricket drummer and rhythm-master Jerry Allison. Jerry’s #3 rock drummer rep in *Rolling Stone* was boosted into 1981 by deaths of Led Zep drummer John Bonham (d. 9-25-80, alcohol poisoning, rated #2) and the Who’s drummer Keith Moon (d. 9-7-78, alcohol poisoning, rated #1). Moon died after seeing the debut of Innovisions’ movie *The Buddy Holly Story* about his hero drummer Jerry Allison. The Oscar-nominated part of Buddy is played by **Gary Busey**. Jerry bounced to #1, with Rush’s excellent Neil Peart (b. ‘52) rising with #44, ‘81 hit “Tom Sawyer.”

Great rock music never dies. The resurrection of a supergroup’s mothballed rep in this paragraph begins now. Led Zeppelin, its live career down for the eight count, surged back to Stage One on Dec. 10, 2007, as singer Robert Plant, guitar guru Jimmy Page, uber-bassist John Paul Jones, and JASON Bonham, 41, son of the late ‘Bonzo,’ rocked the comeback rafters in London. Then Plant did an ‘08 album with Bluegrass star **Allison Krauss**. Thanks to Buddy Holly & the Crickets, a **band’s** total impact might now be as important, or even overshadow, the popularity of a lead singer. The 50s were Elvis and Little Richard. The 60s were the Beatles, Stones, Led Zep, and the Beach Boys. But the Crickets’ career spanned 1957-2009, at least.

Beatles **Paul McCartney** and **John Lennon** became songwriting partners because of the shared grief of losing their moms at early ages. Exactly a month before Buddy Holly and Maria Elena tied the knot, with Pastor Ben Johnson presiding at Buddy’s Lubbock’s home, John Lennon’s mother Julia Lennon [“Julia” in the 1968 #1 *White Album*] was struck and killed 7-15-58 crossing Menlove Road in Liverpool. According to expert McCartney biographer Barry Miles in ‘97 *Many Years from Now*, Julia Lennon first gave up little John at five to Sister Mimi and Uncle George. On returning from visiting them she was hit by a speeding late-for-work cop, who escaped jail on a reprimand. Sometimes when attacked by grief, it’s best to counterattack with a therapeutic dose of what Sir **Elton John** calls good ol’ “Sad Songs” that ‘say so much’ [#5, ‘84 for Holly-fan Elton].

Very soon John and Paul, manfully commiserating the recent deaths of their mothers, scrunched into a cheapo Liverpool recording booth. They ground out a scratchy cover disc for 19 shillings [appr. \$4.44]. They recorded Buddy’s hugest hit, with an in-yer-face approach to the reality of death—“That’ll Be the Day” [“that I die”]. Paul’s 20 Forthlin Avenue home had a “pocket-handkerchief lawn and lavender hedge.” On July 22, 1956, Buddy recorded “That’ll Be the Day” the first time to no success, but Buddy’s mom was there for him all his short life to experience his arena triumphs and legacy. On Halloween 1956, 14-year-old Paul McCartney’s unfulfilled life was shattered when his Mother Mary [think #1, ‘70 “Let It Be”] left this life from a long, painful illness undetected until too late—but now battled with pink-ribbon battalions of noble 10-K walkers worldwide. Meanwhile, back in New Rochelle, New York, Don McLean, 12, was learning to fold newspapers and dreaming of “American Pie.”

Buddy Holly and the Crickets were the rhythmic connection that linked the 50s and the Beatles' 60s. In Banjo Jack Williams' words, Buddy Holly was promoted to glory on Feb. 3, 1959. In my words, the Crickets hung out on this buzzing planet awhile, and their impact is just now getting realized.

Here's where you come in. We need more background stories before the jigsaw puzzle of the Rock Revolution is complete.

Meanwhile the Cold War planet was bellowing and clanking and snorting and growling about war and politics, while Buddy Holly's Crickets were out conquering the world, using guitars for guns. For a song. Lennon was listening.

You'll see.



Jerry Allison, Buddy Holly & Joe B. Mauldin



4. King Buddy in the 6th Grade

Our USA's rebel track record is pretty shabby about kowtowing to monarchs. We created this place to avoid an 18th-century English one named King George III. Before we get too serious with this holy Holly stuff, we'd better tell you about how Buddy was elected the King of the Sixth Grade. It's because he was the coolest kid.

Here in America, that's no easy feat—KING. In sixth grade in Dearborn, Michigan, I was only the 4th-fastest runner, and was defeated in my semi-tragic bid to wrest away the vice-presidency of our class from lovely blonde Sue Davis, definitely a Peggy **Sue** in training. How did Buddy get elected KING in a nation whose first president, George Washington, turned down the monarchy and virtually invented a term for an individual who presides over a group of loosely-connected states—a *president*? Well, first of all, in rock and roll, ALL things are possible.

Buddy's early life is spattered with adventures you'd expect from a kid at the top of Texas back in James Dean's frenzied 50s. Bill Griggs' collection reveals a nifty portfolio of photos showing dozens of different Buddy Holly's, all showing an eager cute kid on his way up in a hurry. No surprise. Dad Lawrence (L.O.) Holley, on Goldrosen's bio's p. 117, towers over six-foot, 18-year-old Buddy, and seems to rise to maybe 6'4" and beyond. Buddy's mom Ella Drake Holley, arms folded, beams her characteristic Mona Lisa smile. When in 1990 they cleaned out the Holleys' last home because Mom Holley had passed on at age 88, they found a 1967 letter from me in her collection—a letter where I said I'd love to do a Buddy bio someday. I am the royal King of Procrastinators. No time like the Big Now, eh?



Buddy Holley, age 4.

Buddy Holly was born at 1911 6th Street in Lubbock, in that house that disappeared a chapter or so back. At twelve months, thanks to the Griggs photo panorama, little Buddy was 100% angel, bearing a smile that put to shame a San Antonio sunrise in May bluebonnet season. From 6½ pounds at birth, Buddy 'ballooned' to a lean 150# in his rock-star phase. For my '03 rock un-cyclopedia *Rock and Roll Gold Rush*, I chose the cute pic of Buddy at age four (p.574), smiling like he wants to scratch up that spiffy new shirt, climb a tree, and fire crabapples at passing UFO's. By five, his pix showed him as an apprentice buckaroo, replete with cowboy hat, boots, and a pony older than the 200-year-old Galapagos tortoise where explorer Capt. James Cook carved his initials and the date on the shell.

Like you and me, Buddy majored in marbles, applied tomfoolery, and baseball all the way up in grammar school at Roscoe Wilson Elementary School in Lubbock. At age five, Buddy won a five-dollar prize at a nearby County Line talent show with his brothers by playing "Down the River of Memories," according to brother

Larry (Chap. III). Remember, his older and wiser brothers greased Buddy's violin bow to be inaudible, but *they* lost the contest and *Buddy* won the five bucks. This is no big deal until you realize that five 1941 dollars is like a HUNDRED dollars today for a kindergarten maestro. The Holleys moved five times in 12 years, like most searching Americans chased by mortgages with big teeth.

Buddy took piano lessons from a local teacher for nine months at some vague age close to ten or twelve, about the time he became King of the 6th Grade. Buddy got so he could dump the written musical notes, and play pieces by ear, but then he quit abruptly, says Goldrosen, even as he was getting proficient. I know the feeling. At twelve I took lessons from church organist Mr. Tank on

Melborn St., and never practiced. Tank was amiable and non-threatening, though, babysitting my disinterest and glomming his hard-earned pay with a hearty laugh. I owe him a lot for his patience, and he taught me the John Schaum book of chords along with pop songs. Out of those non-learning experiences, Buddy and I learned a lot. We learned how to put melodies and chords together. We also learned that practicing was overrated.

POPULARITY was the 50s' byword in Midwest and Southwest American towns. Buddy always seemed to have it. There was nobody who didn't like Buddy Holly. Behind those modest glasses, here was a kid with a cheery chuckle, a chummy chap slap on the back, and three up-&-coming shenanigans up his sleeve. When the rest of the world looked DOWNwards at slurpy gutter mud and dog poop, Buddy Holly skimmed the blue Texan skies, and saw happy vapor trails of effervescent bubbling hit records. His friendly demeanor, with-it laugh, and musical talent won him many friends. When Elvis hit the stage, Buddy was mesmerized. When Bill Haley's #1(8), '55 "Rock Around the Clock" became the first rocker to crunch #1, 19-year-old Buddy hit the peak of his yearning to hit the big time. He knew he'd open shows for both big stars, just as soon as he put the right package of musicians together.

Buddy's older brother Larry was tall and tough and funny, but kind as could be—advancing Buddy a zillionaire's \$1000 for a fancy guitar when Buddy chose his final career. When Buddy was six and Larry 17, papa Lawrence (L.O.) Holley ditched Lubbock temporarily for semi-suburb Wolfforth six miles southwest. Phil Norman says they used oil lamps, and needed an outhouse, for 40s plumbing was often a city luxury. Buddy's dad held a large litany of jobs, and did them all pretty well. L.O. Holley worked for L.D. Thomas [Little Dog or 'Pup' Thomas]. Varied job skills classified L.O. as Tailor, Carpenter, House Framer, Short Order Cook, and house flipper. I de-capitalized 'house flipper,' because Buddy's five moves around the same Lubbock turf covered 12 years, like my dad's family did in Windsor, Ontario.

Buddy loved baseball, had a dog named Alonzo, enjoyed Cub Scouting, and rode horses as a kid. His pix feature fancy Roy Rogers duds, as he croons atop a sleepy pony. Norman says L.O. used spanking-style discipline on his two older boys. No one considered it '30s child abuse—just normal 'parental guidance.' Buddy was so cute, though, that when he goofed off L.O. laughed at his antics, and let him off with easy read-in-the-corner incarceration. With corner books and fantastic tales, Buddy emerged as a strumming dreamer, concocting "Johnny B. Goode" stages and super sensational scenarios. Buddy admitted he didn't need to run the world, but someday, he vowed, the world would "know the name of **Buddy Holley.**"

Bob Montgomery was Buddy's first buddy in the music biz. At Hutchinson Junior High School, Country and Western guitarists 'Buddy & Bob' dazzled classmates with their dynamic duo of country and bluegrass songs. Their up-to-date business card read 'Buddy & Bob—Western & Bop.' They fractured the ego of their Lubbock High School principal with a risqué version of "Too Old to Cut the Mustard," Ernest Tubb's #5 C, 1952 classic in a long-ago world before the Niagara of Viagra hit TV screens (TV hit Lubbock late in the mid-50s).



Hutchinson Junior High School

Two '55 Lubbock paths to getting the cute girls emerged as junior high escaped into high school—sports and popular music, which usually meant Scots-Irish Country & Western, now called Country music. Holly was OK at all sports, but wrote a 1953 'A' English composition on how he wanted to

someday be a pop music star. In “My Autobiography,” Holly shows wit and charm. He cites various academic disasters that befell him, and how he accidentally dinged up the car, and got hit by glass in a baseball incident. His last paragraph is more positive—

“I have many hobbies: hunting, fishing, leatherwork, painting, and playing western music. I have thought of making a career out of western music if I am good enough . . . I like drafting and have thought about making it my life’s work.”

Then Buddy adds the punch line—“Well, that’s my life to the present date, and though it may seem awful and full of calamities, I’d sure be in bad shape without it.”

We see his modesty, his wry and droll humor, his gift of understatement, and his rockin’ dream tempered with the reality of a drafting/architectural day job. Wow. Notice he didn’t say *Country* music nor Rock and Roll, because in ‘53 Rock hadn’t taken shape yet, and ‘Country-Western’ music had two centers—Nashville and Texas—so Buddy and other cowboys knew which one was home.

Buddy was skilled at leathercrafts in his spare time, emblazoning guitar straps and billfolds. A regular Texan kid, Buddy hunted and fished with Larry and Travis. Like every other Halloween conniver, he set gutter leaf piles on fire and threw eggs at deserving perceived villains’ homes and cars. No angel, Buddy. Part-time mischief maker, even. But he was never nasty or vicious or thoughtless, and he cared about his rep in the Tabernacle Baptist Church. And his mom unconditionally loved him.

Buddy and Bob’s “Western & Bop” card forecast their foresight into where hit songs were headed. Bluegrass and Country were sidetracks on Buddy’s way to rock and roll. Like Elvis and wildman ‘The Killer’ Jerry Lee Lewis, Holly admired great SOUL music in both black and white packages. Buddy marveled at his Bluegrass heroes as much as he praised great Rhythm & Blues artists whose barrelhouse Blues carried on clear nights all the way up from **Fats Domino’s** Delta destination New Orleans, Rock and Roll’s birthplace. Holly knew he’d someday braid these ragtag musical elements together into his own trademark sound that hammered the big TWO and FOUR backbeats like they were never hammered before. Bad-boy Beatle John and girl-magnet Paul would be listening a little later into 1957.

English-Scottish-Welsh-American Buddy Holley was OK with whitebread country music he played, but he also enjoyed vintage Bluegrass by the Scottish-American mandolin maestro who created the genre—**Bill Monroe** (1911-96) and his Bluegrass Boys. Indeed, among the rarest and most treasured of all Holly backroom lost tapes, and Buddy’s first ‘record,’ was Monroe’s #5C, 12-46 Bluegrass classic “Footprints in the Snow.” It’s the only one featuring a Buddy Holly belltone soprano vocal, a year or so before his voice hit its eventual mid-range tenor.

Holly was a great and gifted country singer, but due to a fluke in the HOT 100 charts, he astoundingly NEVER showed up on the *Billboard* Country charts (“That’ll Be the Day” nailed #2RB on the Rhythm & Blues chart). Strangely, Buddy made the Country Hall of Fame, too, but as *songwriter*. His gifted singer-songwriter guitarist **Sonny Curtis** (b. 5-9-37, Meadow, TX) hit with 13 country records, with #15C [Country charts] ‘81 “Good Ol’ Girls” leading the way. Sonny wrote #9 hockey penalty-box classic “I Fought the Law” for the ‘66 Bobby Fuller IV. He also recorded famous *Mary Tyler Moore Show* theme song “Love Is All Around” to #29C, 7-80. Cricket lead singer **Jerry Naylor** (b. 3-6-39, TX) scored 11, like #27C, ‘75 “Is That All There Is to a Honky Tonk?”

The Crickets’ most gonzo country star had his first record produced in 1958-59 by Buddy Holly—**Waylon Jennings**’ (1937-2002, diabetes). Cajun “Jole Blon” [‘beautiful blonde’]. Country Ivy League star (Brown University) **Mary Chapin Carpenter** mentions “Jole Blon” in her rampaging Cajun whoop “Down at the Twist and Shout” of #2C, ‘91 bayou fame. Waylon kidded that even French-American Cajuns had no idea what language or dialect he was singing in “Jole Blon,” but they liked his deep growly baritone and outlaw guitar twang so much that America gave Waylon 96 more chances to score. His 15 #1s and 96 Country hits bamboozled and hogtied competition from