

Telephone Interview with Ted Goon

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by

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Ted Goon

Ted Goon, known as Mr. Goon Bones, was a hit recording artist in the late 1940's reaching seventh on the Jukebox popular music chart. He is a consummate professional musician who, as he says, started with a hobby that got way out of hand. He developed his Goon-Bones after much experimentation and began a recording career to develop a market for his bones. He tells his story in this telephone interview.

Prolog

This is a transcript of a telephone interview. It has been edited slightly (mostly removing 'ands'). However, it has not been edited against the original recording, and some transcription errors should be expected. Also the punctuation was generated on the fly and is sloppy. The interview was recorded on cassette tape using 'C' noise reduction. A Radio Shack #43-228A Telephone Recording Control was used to connect the telephone to the cassette recorder. The interview lasted almost two hours resulting in two 60 minute cassettes tapes.

Cassette 1, Side A

Introduction

Steve: This is February 2, 2000, and I am talking with Mr. Ted Goon about his rhythm bone experience. He is on the line now. The format of the interview is he has organized some thoughts based on previous telephone conversations (Part 1), and from these same conversations, I have generated questions that I will ask him if he has not already answered them (Part 2).

Part 1. Ted Goon.

Ted: First I will tell you who I really am because some days I don't even know myself. I am, as you indicated, Ted Goon, age 88, who with my wife, age 83, live in a huge apartment with over a 150 units. It is a special type of thing called retirement home with assisted living. These are for quite old people, mostly over 70 who have physical impairments, one or more, serious enough to require some sort of assistance, but not enough to have to be in a nursing home. To give you an idea of the nature of my assisted living situation, I have a multitude of physical ailments that require 19 doses of prescription medicine daily--I said 19 doses. But I am one of the lucky ones, both my wife and I are still ambulatory which a lot of people here are not. I've also found other infirmities developing on me such as problems in concentrating which I hope doesn't

show up too much here. But at any rate that is the background. So let's get on with the business.

About 76 years ago, in 1923, when I was living on a farm in northwest Ohio with my parents, sister and three brothers, I had the extreme good fortune of seeing in person a tent show called a Minstrel Show. I saw and heard a performer in that show playing some things that looked like sticks that combined with the music made the most beautiful and sensational sound I'd ever heard. After the show, I discussed it with my father, and he said I never mentioned it to you, but that wasn't anything so super special because I can do some of the same things. I didn't believe him of course, but he actually carved up some wood into a pair of things that looked like beef ribs. He dried them out, and low and behold, he should me how to hold them, rotate his hand and wrist and forearm and make a rolling, rhythmic sound that he could speed up and slow up and stop and start to play with different kinds of music. I was electrified with the thing, and he says when I your age and a little older, a number of us people could do that. He said, we just didn't follow it up like that man you got to see. He just kept going and he could do a lot more than we ever thought about doing with them. So that was the story, and immediately I decided I had to do that. And with my fathers cooperation, I made first a little better pair of bones--he showed me how to start, and I started doing it over again. Sometime later, we carved out another pair, and I worked until I could do two at the same time and play that magic roll sound that I could actually play with music--not perfectly of course. However, by the time I was a senior in high school, I had developed enough ability with it to play with the high school jazz band. And it attracted a lot of attention.

When I graduated from high school, I worked my way at age 17, to Southern California to accomplish my dream to get an education, a college education and get into business. I got to California and six years later I had accomplished my purpose. In the meantime, I didn't play the bones because working at night and going to school in the daytime and the like I didn't have time for bones. But a strange thing happened. About a year after I arrived in California, through a fluke accident, I was showing off the Goon-bones to a young woman as a matter of fact, and a person heard me, an adult, who just happened to be an impresario in vaudeville. He went to work on me immediately to get me into vaudeville. And he was going to bill me at Ted Goon, King of the Bones--big talk like that. But I was just so set on getting my education that nothing was going to stop it. I didn't take advantage of that. Years later it turned out that very shortly after I had that opportunity, vaudeville died out completely, and I wouldn't of had the opportunity to go anyplace anyway.

Now I'm out in business, and I still didn't take up the bones as a hobby because there was apparently no place to go with it, and beside that the sophisticated thing for young businessmen was golf. So I played golf and by the time World War II came along I was a low handicap golfer. When I was age 30, along came World War II, and like 11 million other people I was in the service. And about two-thirds of the way through I got horrible banged up, my right leg. I was told there would have to be surgery and a lot of rehabilitation, and I would probably be in the hospital for about six months. Besides that I would never fully recover. I really brooded about that for a couple of days, but

suddenly I had a wild inspiration--if I couldn't play golf anymore and I needed a hobby--I would send home and get my musical bones, as I called them in those days, and see if I couldn't personally work out and modernize, so to speak, the ability to perform on those things that could be adapted to the modern music that had come along. Of course, the people who were alive at the time knew that the bones died out because the modern music started coming in around the early '20s and stuff, and the classic, ancient bones nobody seemed to be able to make any headway with them in adapting them to the modern rhythms. So after some surgery, and having the use of my arms and hands I went to work on my project.

The first thing that I ran into was I couldn't for the life of me get a starting point. I kept thinking 'what am I trying to do' when I don't even have or know what rhythm is. I made a couple of telephone calls and things and found out that percussionists didn't know what it meant either even though they played it and did it. But as far as a concrete explanation of what rhythm really was they didn't know. But I lucked out. I came across a library. I had looked at a number of definitions, and saw what I was looking for. It said rhythm--it was an old library--it said rhythm is a pattern of beats or accents that is repeated uniformly. Repeat: a pattern of beats or accents that is repeated uniformly. I had my starting point which I will show you a little bit now. (Ted plays the bones) Can you hear me? (Yes, its faint, you need to come closer) I'll try and talk a little louder. Rhythm - a pattern of beats and accents repeated uniformly. (Ted plays a series of taps) That is not rhythm. It is a beat, but there is no pattern there. I am doing that with my left hand, and when I bring my right hand in a pattern forms. (Ted plays a series of left hand taps with a right hand tap on every other left hand tap). And when I let the right hand come in a thousandths of a second slower another click comes in. (He demonstrates this) And when I add another click - another pattern (He demonstrates). Another click, and so on. There are patterns of beats. Do you think it was loud enough to hear that. (Yes)

Now then, what happened at the hospital was I was extremely sensitive about bothering other patients. I appealed to the big shots, doctors, to get a bed over in the corner as far away as possible from the other people. But a strange thing happened. When I started working with the bones the other patients demanded that I be brought up where they could hear it better. As the weeks went on, the interest developed in what I was doing. That one person that I was wheeled in a wheel chair from area to area to do my rehearsing. But now then what I needed to do was to become ambidextrous if I were going to get the maximum ability to create patterns. I am going to show you a couple of them which I found out in the last two months that I can't do professionally any more. I'll try to do them close enough so you can see what I did in developing this modernization. In this one exercise, here is one drum. (Ted plays a triplet followed by a tap) That's a right handed drum. Here's a left handed drum (Ted repeats with the left hand). Here's a two handed drum (Ted repeats with both hands). Here is a whole drum chorus (Ted plays a continuous roll with one hand while occasionally playing one drum roll with the other hand before getting even fancier). Could you hear that? (Yes, and it sounds like you still got the rhythm to me.) OK. Now I will go quickly to how I was able to apply that ambidexterity to other rhythms. Some Latin rhythms (Ted demonstrates) That was the

Rumba, here is the Tango. (He demonstrates) And this is the Samba. (He demonstrates) This is the Polka (He demonstrates) And so on.

I found out something else when I became ambidextrous. Being able to use two hands at the same time with my brain going two different ways at the same time. I could actually amplify the accents of the melodies. I could do the rhythm and actually do the accents of the melody to the point it seems in some cases like the bones were playing the melody. I'll do two of them, one of them with a simple little thing that we all know - Turkey in the Straw. (Ted demonstrates while humming the melody) Could you hear that (Most definitely) All right then I will take one more step, but that's a simple little ditty, everyone knows it. But what about the complex, the symphony thing. I'll try to show how it goes with the William Tell Overture. (Ted demonstrates as before) And so on. Now by that time, in fact somewhat before that, my rehabilitation was over and they were set to retire me with a modest disability. Just before that happened I was called into the office and asked if I would be willing, instead of taking retirement, willing to volunteer for a special classified assignment for the duration of the war with the condition that anytime I felt I couldn't do my duties because of my disabilities, there would be no questions asked, I would simply report to the commander of the unit and go on home to retirement. So curiosity being what it was, I volunteered and spent the last year in the Army as an assignment in prisoner of war administration.

After the war I got readjusted in business - I was lucky to have a good job to come home to. This time I couldn't get the bones out of my mind because I had worked so long and so hard with them. I decided that since I couldn't play golf anymore, I was going to make a definite hobby of that. So, I thought about all of the things I wanted to accomplish and how I wanted to do it. I started working on it. I started practicing with music records that I bought developing technique. Then I gave free little performances at service clubs, churches and the like of that which seemed to be deeply appreciated. The demand got bigger and bigger, and it began to be kind of a problem at my work. I had noticed a thing that was very interesting. A tremendous demand developed for me to sell those things (bones) to people and at a reasonable price.

I started experimenting with the type of things, woods, plastics, rosewood, and checking the things with professional sound equipment that I had until I had something recordable. It happened to be maple wood from a particular section of Wisconsin (Ted told me in a previous conversation that he never revealed the wood used in his Goon-bones until this interview.) I started making those and selling them as a hobby. When I saw it was going to be a market- I didn't make any money on them because I couldn't make them cheap enough to make a profit. Still it was a valuable part of the experiment.

Steve interrupts: Ted how did you come up with the curve and the length of those bones?

Ted. Oh. That's a good question. It came from my research back along the years on where the probably place where the bones must have originated as they became a musical instrument. Now I know there has been a lot of new information I read in the material that you sent me (Note: I had sent Ted a copy of Sue Barber's paper 'The Bones: Ancient

to Modern.) that was probably superior to what I was able to get. But, the only thing valid that I seemed to get was about 600 years before I was involved there was a percussionist in a traveling musical group, one of several groups in Northern England, that had become known as minstrels, that was the name of the group. And this percussionist experimented with rhythm things he could come up with. He found that taking initially some horse ribs and cutting them to a certain size and drying them out, that by holding a pair of them in his fingers in a certain way and rotating his hands and wrists in a certain way, that he could produce a continuous roll of rhythm that had a lot of opportunity with it in a sense, by playing it faster or slower, this roll, stopping and starting it, he could play it with just about any kind of music that was know of in those days. He was a ... As time when on other people began doing that too. He gave it the name bones. All of those many, many years, 600, down the line in England, the bones as they become know were a viable part of entertainment.

As I learned it, in the 1840's a minstrel group from England consisting of five people came to America to perform and settled in Memphis, Tennessee. There was a bones player. This, without getting into a great deal more of detail, this was the actual beginning of the interest in minstrel entertainment with bigger and bigger outfits. Where the so-called minstrel shows developed which were in a pattern. Two of the biggest ones were the New York Minstrels and the San Francisco Minstrels. The featured player was the bones player who was call Mr. Bones. In the pattern of these big minstrel shows, they were very popular for 70 years after that. The performers were black faced, white people made up in blackface, and they had a 25 or 30 of these people, they all dressed alike. They had an Interlockater dressed up real fancy in white and he was the leader. They had dialog that went on and he looked down the line at Mr. Bones and he said "Who was that lady I saw you with last night." And Mr. Bones says "That twern't no lady, that was my wife." Chickadee, Chickadee, Click, rattling his bones. They had the feature thing was one of those old timely songs where the whole group sings and the man plays the bones. There were quite a few of those shows, but the two most successful shows, they really got big time, were the San Francisco Minstrels and the New York Minstrels where the bones player could actually play with two hands, and he could do that roll with a few variations. At time when on, as I say, the minstrel shows died out because the newer types of music came along and the bones died with it. They were almost completely died out by 1915. There are probably more accurate histories of that by now. Is that pretty much what you heard too. (Yes, but I interrupted you while you were tell about your good-bones.)

My interest, after the war leading between then and 1949, was simply the idea of developing a bones market and making a fortune selling bones. That is why I experiments with the types to get the best sound and all of that. Of course, to get into any kind of a market I had get into recording because that was the outlet. I began to look around how to do that and whether to work up some kind of group of musician and what not. One evening, by then I was in management of Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, I stopped into a nightclub to take care of one of my agents services, and I saw an organist that was just almost unbelievable clever with his instrument. I had an opportunity and introduced myself to him.

Cassette 1, Side B

When I told him what I had in mind, he was excited as he never had a chance to do some recording. But he was a professional musician, educated in Canada at Queens University, and a lot of ability with that organ. I decided that for my initial thing I wouldn't need more than that organ considering what he could do. He was instantly interested because he had never had any overtures like that, and especially when I told him I would pay the entire cost of my enterprise and cut him in with half of the royalties. So he was really cooperative. I thought we were going to record, and I wanted to record two numbers. I knew we would have to have an 'A' side and a 'B' side on a record. We picked two tunes that had been popular in the late '20s, one of them 'The Sheik of Araby' and the other one was 'Ain't She Sweet'. They had been very popular, but had died out enough that they had become standards, and orchestras played them, but nobody had ever successfully, after all of these years, get anything-a hit out of those two numbers. We thought that was an ideal thing to do, and we worked up an arrangement with rhythm and accents and the melody and stuff on Sheik of Araby that required 80 some hours. That would be the side that in those days that would be the played side and the B side just goes along for the ride. I got the idea thinking about the fact that popular music, the dance music of that time, was almost exclusively swing music which was four beat music. Looked to me like swing was kind of dying out, and I couldn't imagine where it could go in that it had been a one beat in the 1920s. So, I suddenly remembered that I had attended a religious service in a colored Baptist church where they sang and had a tremendous off beat to it. It was two beat, but it was on the off beat, and I decided that I would do that on the B side. I went to the nearest Arthur Murray Studio, discussed it with a dancing instructor to be sure to get an exaggerated off beat to it that would be danceable. It turned out that it could be danced by the New Yorker which was the most popular dance at the time.

We got ready and I am bring this to a head now. I had put in for a patent for the name 'Goon-Bones' that I thought was appropriate for the thing. There had been a little delay because getting something patented - trademark with you own name-- just isn't sensible even though the Ford Motor Company got theirs. There was a delay and while I was waiting for it, two fellows stopped by when we were rehearsing one night after he had finished performing at the night club. They happened to hear us and introduced themselves as owning a medium sized recording company. They were fascinated by that and they wanted to record us. I told them that we would specifically like to do that, but I was waiting on a patent/trademark thing. It would surely be within three months, and if they would come around in three months since we didn't have contact with anybody else. I had tried come to think about it, two of the bigger recording companies, and couldn't even get to talk to anybody. About a month later I was driving home from my office and heard a disc jockey play a brand new record that he predicted was going to be a hit. It was featuring a man called Brother Bones. To try to cut it short, I nearly drove the car off the highway. I had to do some investigative work and found out that what had happened this particular company shortly after they come to see me and waiting for me to be available, had seen this black man who had a shoe shine stand in Long Beach playing some simple old minstrel bones in between his shines. Since they didn't have any

guarantees about my particular situation, within days they had rushed him off and recorded 'Sweet Georgia Brown' by Brother Bones. I wasn't first in a successful thing. He was first, and later used, you maybe old enough to relate to this, Harlem Globe Trotters adopted that for their theme song. They played that where ever they were. Brother Bones was ahead of me. I got well acquainted with him later and he never collected a dime for it because he wasn't setup as a business thing. I was taking great pains that way because mine was a business venture.

Later, I was contacted by another small company that I did not know much about, but they did have a big delivery/wholesale thing of records with a lot of contacts. So I made a semi-commitment on that but I found out I had to be a member to record in my name, I had to be a member of the musician's union. A fellow named Caesar Petrello, do you remember that name (No). He was the absolute czar of the American Federation of Musicians. He had been a first violinist in the Philadelphia Symphony Orchestra as a younger man. When he retired he was president of the union, and one thing was certain with him was that there was not going to be any bones player in the musician's union. And not any saw player. Have you ever seen anybody play the saw (Yes, last September in Iowa). Well there was never going to be a saw player in the musician's union. What happened was when I made my application and got turned down, it just happened that Ferde Grofe, the imminent symphony conductor who made the Grand Canyon Suite and other ... had become a goon-bones fan. He had seen me perform at a civic club where he was a member. He was very complimentary and fascinated. Actually I had worked out with his orchestra a couple of time. Anyway, he was going to be leading an orchestra, I was living in Orange County at that time, and he was going to be leading the city orchestra. He called me and told me, I had told him about my trouble of getting into the union, and said to come over and he would take care of everything. He knew that Caesar Petrello was going to be visiting him in person and seeing that performance, and set me up without any advance notice to anybody to perform in that orchestra. And that's how I got into the musician's union. When Caesar Petrello heard the goon-bones playing with that symphony orchestra music, he decided that there would be one set of bones in. So what I am going to do right now quick, and then bring this thing to a head--I'm going to play a bit of symphony music to show how, or try to show how the accents of the bones can amplify the accents. I going to play a little of a symphony tune called the Pitzicata Polka. (Ted starts to demonstrate) You see, Steve, my big trouble is I can't hold the bones enough to play them like I should. Hang on, now (Ted demonstrates). Did you get that (That was delightful). That kind of shows something significant when you are ambidextrous you can do things that way. We got clearance, and I've haven't kept up with it over the years, so I don't know how if any other player got in after Ceasar Petrello. I had found out that I was the only bones player. That was around 1949.

A company call Crystalette was the one that wanted to record us and we wanted to do our feature number, the Sheik of Araby and Ain't She Sweet with an exaggerated off beat. We went to the studio, a three hour session, pretty expensive, and we got the Sheik of Araby, what we wanted with the organ and goon-bones. The other side.. At the last moment the assistant to the big wheel at the recording deal had just come back from England where he had seen a new type of electronic gadget to record things where you

had a hollow sound, it was fresher, strange, and he had seen it used in one of the symphony numbers of the London recording company. When he found out that my goon-bones thing was something new that had not been in an exaggerated off beat record, it was still doing the four beat, like the swing stuff. He started right away when he found out it was my experimental thing, he wanted to record that with the echo chamber - this technical thing he had. But my time was running out, however he was so persuasive that I did that. When they played back the masters, the Sheik of Araby was thankfully what we had in mind with the organ and bones, but the Ain't She Sweet had the exaggerated off beat that I wanted, but the echo chamber made the hand clapping that I had put on there sound strange. I was dismayed and wanted to kill that thing quick so it would not be on the B side, and he insisted to wait until later to see what happens on that. He said if that is a total failure, I'll see to it that without charge we re-record it. I said if its going to kill the record what's the use. At any rate, we went out of there with that.

When that record, Sheik of Araby and Ain't She Sweet, was reviewed by Billboard magazine which in those days and maybe even today for all I know, was the bible of the music world. It had the final word of criticism. When they reviewed my record, they said the Sheik of Araby was a fascinating new sound, rhythm, accents and everything, it was new, refreshing, but unfortunately the B side of the record there was a virtual monstrosity. I can't thing of the word at the moment. He said it would kill the record. We just had to wait, and the Sheik of Araby started out very, very slowly, and it took about two months to three months, but it caught fire finally enough that it ended up selling about 400,000 records at a time when 200,000 was a hit. Now Steve, to get things into perspective, at that time, ~~1947~~ ¹⁹⁴⁹, the music recording business was a \$50,000,000 affair. Now as you know it's a \$50 billion affair, you can image what has happened. It didn't kill that. We were very pleased about it, and thinking about recording something else.

~~Suddenly I had a call from St. Louis from a record distributor in that whole wide area wanting to order 200,000 goon-bones. Without me actually knowing what had happened, this incredible thing we learned, a disc jockey who played dance music every Saturday night in the St. Louis area, got curious one time and played the B side. There was a virtual explosion. The B side with the exaggerated off beat and the strange kind of hollow sound went crazy and that record sold... Sorry I gave you the figure. He didn't order 2000 records. I had a contact, my company did, from a record seller that wanted 50,000 on one hand, but I had a big musical instrument outfit that had sold some bones for many years, wanted if I could supply 200,000 sets of bones, believe it or not.~~

Anyway, to try and finish it up, I quickly checked with a company in Birmingham, a wood turning outfit, and another one in Boston, MA. They told me, each of them, that they could do it, but I gave the priority to the Birmingham thing. He called about three weeks later, and said they couldn't do it. He said they could do wood turning like pretzels, but he couldn't make particular shape that I felt that I had to have, that was about 8" long, convex and concave, and concave on the convex and concave in that shape - they just couldn't do it. I had the assurance from the other company and I talked with them and waited another couple of weeks, and they told me the same thing. Believe it or not,

Addendum: when the excitement was over, Ain't She Sweet had sold a million and a quarter copies, at a time when 200,000 copies was considered a hit. R

Steve, I must have been thinking too far ahead when I garbled this paragraph so badly. What happened was this:

P Suddenly I had a call from my recording company telling me excitedly that they had received an order from a record distributor in St. Louis for 50,000 copies of Aunt Sue's Sweet, provided that they ~~would~~ would have a "2 week exclusivity" over any other order they filled. ~~for~~ we quickly learned that a ~~club~~^{disc} jockey in St. Louis who played dance music every Saturday night for a very large audience had decided to play the ~~new~~ "notorious" B side of Shick of Crabs for effect and had received a virtual explosion. It became an incredible hit in the St. Louis area. Then Detroit. Then Atlanta, Philadelphia, New York City. The recording company had to go to New York to find a facility that could handle the orders. Then a huge musical ~~company~~ instrument company with a national distributor who had had bones for sale ordered 200,000 sets of 4 Horn Bones, each with an instruction book.

But was

Now I ~~am~~ in the immediate situation of having a big opportunity for a profession career with my goon-bones, and I resigned from the job that I had and went down that road. Soon the first thing that happened, Ralph Ford turn out to be a washout, he became an alcoholic from the excitement that he never expected to have. And that thing died out. From a lucky break, I found another organ player who was also a virtuoso on the accordion and could play piano, and I got a five string banjo player, ~~one~~ one of the best I'd ever heard and so I had a trio. With just a few weeks of practice, I easily signed a recording contract with Mercury and we go on the road. The road with all kinds of performance, we were booked solid, and in a little less than a years time I could see definitely that my activities was leading my family, wife, two children, down a road I didn't want it to go. I brooded about it, and the family brooded about it and I broke three different contracts that I had, got blacklisted temporarily, not temporarily, but for a long time and went back into business. It was quite a talking thing around the industry as to what peculiar thing had happened. But there was no reason to get into a lot of detail, and so at that particular time of all those efforts I made, I used only for two years, but it was two very fulfilling years. I put the goon-bones away so I wouldn't be tempted to get into that business again, and I went into real estate, not having my opportunity with big time management with Metropolitan in Santa Monica. Seven years went by after I left, I had been in management in a large real estate firm in Santa Monica, the biggest in that area at the time. It was a sole proprietorship, and I felt to give the sole proprietor an ultimatum to either incorporate to protect me and my work or I was going to quit. He put in for incorporation and less that 48 hours before the incorporation would be effective, he dropped dead walking out to his car in the driveway. That whole real estate thing was finished. I stay around to get things out of escrow and things settled and all that.

All of a sudden about three months later, while I was just getting wound up, I had a communications from the largest high school and college entertainment group in the country called the National School Assembly. What had happened was ASCAP, the American Society of Composer, Authors and Publishers which annually would pick a phonograph record that had stood the test of time. My 'Ain't She Sweet' had remained a best for all seven years, and I collected royalties from it even though I wasn't in the business by virtue of having the musicians union behind me. I didn't know that. I wasn't even keeping up with the recording industry. This outfit had seen me give a free performance at a local high school, had gotten the National Council on Education interested. One of those five members had seen me perform, and wanted to try an experiment for a high type of music entertainment for the high school circuit. They offered me a tour of high school and smaller colleges for two years at a very satisfactory situation with a nice chunk of money in the bank when I got it. Our family had been raised, educated and my wife thought that was a great idea to see the country. It was going to be furious. We'd take first class sound equipment and she would operate the sound equipment with me on stage. As soon as I got the real estate business cleared up which only took a few more weeks, we started out on a tour at Denver University at their big auditorium. We did two years of that and on the last performance, ~~seven~~ ^{ten} years after I had put the goon-bones away, was at the University of New Mexico at Albuquerque. A man collared me ... (some lost during loading of cassette 2)

Cassette 2, Side A

a big wheel in "Armed Forces Entertainment"



He was ~~that big a wheel~~. He explained that he was there in connection with his upcoming graduation of his daughter and had just happened to be on hand to do that performance. He said you've got to do this... I told him I was all through with it and was going back civilian life. You can't go back until you make a tour--I want GI's to get into that. First place I did not believe him. A few weeks later it turned out that he was authentic, and tremendous pressures came up. In September with my wife handling my sophisticated sound equipment that I had with me, and even doing a skit that I had written, we joined

six others and made a six months tour of missile sites and the like in Africa, South Pacific ^{Alaska} and the Orient. It was successful partly because to my astonishment I learned for years a number of the military installations were using a copy of the record of 'Fast Freight Blues'

that was on that thing I gave you (Note: Ted gave me a cassette with 9 of his recordings) and here I was more of a celebrity that I realized. ~~That was it. When I came back~~

~~home.~~ We received ^{royalty} treatment for that six months. Some of those missile sites were fantastic to get into. ^{when I came back home} I put the goon-bones away and that was it. I cut it out of my life completely for fear if I got started again I couldn't stop. Only about once every five years, even more than that, somebody insisted that I take the goon-bones out of storage and do a little informal performance. The last thing was a year ago Christmas at a Christmas party, some people who had remember the goon-bones but had never seen them were insistent. It was at my son's large home, a big shot lawyer in Santa Monica, and he had a set of goon-bones there. I gave them about a thirty or forty five minute concert, and I was really surprised how well it went. I felt good, competent and surprised that I could still do it. I had that in mind when I put the goon-bones in storage again, and a year later when you people contacted me, my first reaction I can't afford to get involved with anything like that--I'll go crazy. I thought well shucks just a year ago I was still able to perform. I like the idea of having enough people interested in the bones to get a project going like Ev Cowett and you and these other people who are really going to consciously build up something. I thought if I could do anything at all to increase the interest and show how things can happen if you make it happen. Partly I think that is because your video (Note: I sent Ted a video with excerpts from Bone Fests I and II) which was remarkable with some of those people. They could go down that same road I did. Study and analyze these modern rhythms that I don't understand because I am out of touch. Do like I did and concentrate on getting something going in that thing. Believe it or not, if you get and its smooth and fresh and clean, there isn't any sound in the world, I'm convinced, as the sound of rhythm when its clean like the bones can make it.

Because one a number personal appearances I made, there were drummers in an orchestra accompanying me, they were just ecstatic at getting to hear right there while they were performing that sound with that music was exciting to them - that pure rhythm. I hadn't become surprised at that because back when I started I've considering the fact that rhythm, clean pure rhythm is the essence of the whole universe. Everything in the universe is in a rhythm. Human beings, normal human beings, when he hears clean, fresh, precise, he feels it. When he hears muddles which isn't clean and precise it upsets him. In any case, that's what I hoped somehow to do. The way I was going to do it--a jolt. A few weeks ago when I got the bones out of storage again, I found out that something had happened to my fingers and something in my mind even, I couldn't hold

those bones precisely as I needed to get clean perfect rhythm, and I couldn't the ambidextrous stuff because I didn't have the connection between my brain and my hand. That's the story, and I don't know how you can use it except to remind them.

Steve. You need to talk to Ev Cowett sometime. I will give Ev your number and have him give you a call. He is very interested in how scientifically sound is produced by the bones. He is a PhD agronomist whose retired. I will do that fairly quickly.

Part 2. Questions.

Steve. When and where were you born?

Ted. Born in western Michigan on a farm near ~~the Pacific Ocean~~ ^{Lake Michigan} (I assume he meant Lake Michigan) in a little old town called Walkerville. July 10, 1911.

Steve. Do you play any other musical instruments?

Ted. No. Well, just a tiny bit of drums. Maybe you call the harmonica--I got to play the harmonica quite well.

Steve. How many good bones did you sell?

Ted. By the time I gave up on the goon-bones, I had sold between 20 and 25 thousand sets of four. Each set with an instruction book. What made me feel pretty bad too was a failure in getting them produced at a profit was that--actually I had contact after I got out of the business with a little over 30 goon bones clubs in the nation.

Steve. Well that was a later question. Tell me about goon-bones clubs.

Ted. I finally met ~~the~~ fellow that was up in North Carolina, I can't remember it was too many years ago, who got the idea of forming a club where you had to have a genuine set of goon-bones with the goon-bones trademark and an instruction book to belong to the club. They had regular meetings, I guess once a month, to compare notes and practice bones playing. If I'd heard there were two such things I would have been impressed, but when I began to get contacts with them and they always want to know what happened, how and why I had got out of the business, it was painful and I couldn't discuss it in detail. Said it was just something that happens in a lifetime. The only one that I followed up was one close to Santa Monica in Malibu. They had a big one out there with about 35 members in it. When I was in real estate and close by they would come once in a while one at a time and I would spend a few minutes with them. When I got back from the final tour, within a few months, I had been recruited by the federal government to work in the Los Angeles regional office on GI foreclosures. There had been about 5500 hundred and they didn't know what to do with them. I had developed a little bit of respect when I was in real estate and they made me a pretty good deal to come in and I came in with the idea of trying to do something for about a year but I ended up thirteen years until I retired.

Steve. When and how did you write your instruction manual?

Ted. I'm glad you asked me that question. I wrote the material in conjunction with my older brother who was a superior pharmacist and should have been an artist by trade. He

made up the sketches for me and between the two of us we made up the instruction book. That instruction book was projecting the music world as it was. When I left the goon-bones area where the music had gone over to a two beat, so there are two things I have to mention. Having left the business abruptly like I did and which made a lot of people unhappy...

Steve. What was your favorite recording and why?

Ted. It had to be Ain't She Sweet which was a surprise. When it started with that disc jockey and when it was over it had sold a million and a quarter records. The Shiek of Araby when it was the A side had sold a little over 400,000 when 200,000 was considered a hit. Ain't She Sweet became the international thing, and I was getting royalties from all over the world for 25 years. That was a big thing. As far as the skill in playing the bones, the Shiek of Araby.

Steve. So your best recording is the Sheik of Araby.

Ted. From a musical standpoint but there was a little waver of tempo in it by Ralph Ford that I had to give up on at a later time. When you go to pick something, the first record that I made that was when I heard the master played back at the recording studio at Mercury was a thing called A Smile will go a long, long way. The sound and the rhythm and the arrangement just thrilled me to pieces. I didn't have to wait long to think that record was going to be a hit with the sound I dreamed of getting. I had a call from ~~Martin Block~~ who was the nation's leading disc jockey from New York and he had just gotten the record and it was the most remarkable thing he had ever seen where three instruments, organ, bones and banjo, produced the greatest sound he'd ever seen for three instruments without dubbing. He featured that thing for one whole broadcast. I knew that was going to be a smash hit. It was not, it did not become a smash hit.

Paul.
whiteman

The other side of the record that I put on like Aint She Sweet became a hit. I collected royalties, Fast Freight Blues. I hope you haven't fallen asleep. When I was working out and practicing with Barney Lance, the organist, and Harold Fisher, we were going to ~~play~~ ~~sing~~ in Capistrano at an outdoor restaurant with a couple of other musicians. It was outdoors and right near a spur of the railroad tracks. In the days of the steam engines, an engine fired up and started to pull out - a chug a chug a chug, and spinning its wheels, and chug a chug. It had a load of oranges he had picked up and he was going. I looked over at Barney and Harold and the diners were familiar with the sound that had overshadowed everything, and all of a sudden, Barney is playing a melody he had dreamed up at that moment, Barney Lance, about the sound. I was playing the bones with my accents ... (he made sounds like the steam engine). That thing pulled away, went around the corner, got around a canyon and faded out. We were playing though the other musicians had quit playing. The diners leaped to their feet and roared- about a hundred and fifty of them in that big place, their appreciation for what they'd heard. Barney Lance and I, I had the same working agreement where I did the expenses and split the royalties. We went to my house after the performance, and by daylight we had written a tune about what we had just done called Fast Freight Blues. The tune has a whistle. We found that the retired president of Southern Pacific lived in Orange County that was nearby, and they had a whistle over years as far as the public was concerned with the particular

sound, their trademark, on all of their trains around the country. He gave us the actual notes and we used that on the record. Here again you can't tell in the music industry, but to punctuate it, ... Well that's a good story. What it reflects is ~~another premier arranger~~ I got acquainted with and he was a goon-bones fan, and I asked him if he ever had a record that was just what he wanted. He said that he had. He had a thing that was so important that he rehearsed it with his orchestra over and over again in the studio. When he got the master played back for him he realized that he had the sound in the thing that he had actually dreamed of over the years, and was so excited. On the B side was a thing they had just a ^{lead sheet} ~~tune~~ like these musicians do, but not a complete arrangement. When it came out the beautiful thing that he had dreamed about was a complete bust, and the B side was "Lisbon Antigua" which is one of the top tunes of all times. That's why I've never tried to take any credit for being a genius. All I can say is that I had the unique experience of having a hobby that got out of control.

← The experience of a record comparison and arranging. I got it from Nelson Riddle, that is.

Steve. Who holds the copyrights on your records.

Ted. That's another thing that I've done research on a couple of times lately. The Crystalette Company, that first company, were two gangsters. I didn't know that at the time. As thing went of and years past, at least one of them got ^{himself} ~~themselves~~ killed, and that copyright thing became muddled. There has never been a copy like advertised on TV. As far as I can find out all of those copyrights have expired, and anybody with a used record they can use and uses high fidelity equipment can make a number out of it. What I've been told is that the living people who made the records are not getting a cent out of it. (???)

Steve. I noted that you recorded with Del Wood. Somebody said she was a regular on the Grand Ole Opry until recently. How did you find her.

Ted. I'm glad you asked that question. She is one of my favorite people. I had a letter when I was active in that two years, and she told me about herself. She had had a hit record and she had realized her dream of getting to be formally a member of the Grand Ole Opry. She just wanted me to know that the entire technique she had adopted in playing the piano was based on studying my records. The way I accented it and the way the goon-bone clicks came out. She said that style of playing became her trademark. There was another piano player, Joe Fingers Car, that she had been second to, and she became rated even about him. She was the top piano player. She wanted somehow to meet me, and if I would be willing to visit with her. It made me feel like a big shop which I wasn't. I told her I was going to be down in the South in three or four month on business, and I would call her and maybe we could get together for dinner and a visit. I called her, and not only did we have a dinner visit, I met her in the recording studio. I always carried with me my bones, but never, never used. Without any rehearsing, we met in a recording studio in Nashville and recorded two numbers, ~~I have forgotten what they were now~~. There was no collusion in making up an arrangement, nothing. She just played a few chords of her style that she had gotten from the goon-bones and it was so much ... "Waiting for the Robert E. Lee" was the number. [→] I just sensed what she was going to do. I could tell by the patterns that she was making with the piano. We made that and what things can happen in the music business. I hope you bones players keep an open mind as to what can happen. At that recording studio there were two guitar players.

The other was "Kishkadee" that band.

while he was practicing some
chords

They were just going to chord. I saw this real young guy, a real hillbilly. He was humming a melody, a simple melody on the guitar. I asked him about that, have you done recording where you do things like that. He said "Oh no, I just do them chords." I can do them as good as anybody. He said what happens when I play these chords and I'm hearing the melody, strange things come into my mind that don't aren't part of the melody. It's maddening. I said you're going to have an experience today in this recording session that we're about to go. When I give you the signal which I will do twice, you're chording on the guitar, I want you to ^{go} ~~go~~ ^{loudly} eight bars on whatever melody that comes into your mind that seems to fit. He said, if I did that they would fire me and I would never get a job again.

Cassette 2, Side B

He did that on both numbers that Del Wood and I did and that guy became a celebrity. That was such a hit in those records, the disc jockeys talked about it. We didn't get a million record hit, but the record did sell over 400,000.

Steve. Who was the guitarist?

Ted. I forgot years ago. He became a hotshot up there. I used to keep up with music in general for several years by taking Billboard magazine.

Steve. Your brochure mentions television.

Ted. I had a number of television appearances one with Steve Allen. As a matter of fact, you shouldn't make me remember things as I will take it out on you. I made up four numbers when I decided I was going to get out of the business to be my last four I was to record for Mercury. I didn't tell Mercury that I was leaving until I actually recorded them. While I was working on the arrangements, I got a call from Steve Allen who I had met, and he wanted to know if as busy as I was if I could accommodate him on a particular thing that was of vital importance to him. He was on a national network, NBC, and he said they were ragging the hell out of me because I can't get studio responses to my thing. Lot of applause and the like. He said I remember a couple of years ago before I got to NBC you appeared on my record show and I remember what the audience was to that. He said can you do me a favor - can you perform and he named the date which was like two days. I was about two thirds of the way through our arrangements, but I took a chance and we took the date with Barney Lance and Harold Fisher and performed on his show Tiger Rag. I was making Tiger Rag knowing that I was getting out of the business for one purpose. I had hoped to make a record that would be so complex, furious that it would give all of the other bones players a challenge to match that. So I worked hard and I rehearsed hard and we didn't have it quite ready yet, but I took a chance and put that on the Steve Allen show. The applause that number got broke the NBC decibel machine record.

Steve. Ted, at Bone Fest IV this September, I play it and issue a challenge for everyone whose there.

Ted. Do that. Get a kick out of it. I would sure like to be there to see it.

Steve. Maybe it could happen. Who knows.

Ted. Wait a minute, I want to tell you something now. I wasn't pulling people legs. I was very impressed with some of that bones playing on your video. That Ev Cowett is good, and has a full measure of things going. They have just tremendous talent, and I am going to guess whether it gets into a wave of popularity will be how somebody is able to work it out with current music which I can't understand at all. I would sure hate to hell to do it now like I did fifty years ago. On the other hand, just because I couldn't think about it, I sure wouldn't put it past those. I wish they could. I hope the message if you do play this for them, just to stay with it, get ambidextrous, and how are you coming along. You said you were making some headway.

Steve. I am trying to practice thirty or forty minutes a day. Hopefully I will be a good two handed player by September. I am going to write an article based on this interview that will be in the third issue of the Rhythm Bones Player. I'll send you a copy of it so you can review it in about three months. Do you remember the black plastic bones that were patented by Joe Birl. They came out in 1945.

Ted. I got into plastic bones because that was a way to make a profit on it. If they get working with high quality recording equipment there going to find that for some kind of commercial thing it isn't going to work that way. I was fortunate to be able to work with a person who was an expert in handling sound equipment. For my goon-bones to be able to end up with that one type of wood when it was produced it sounded like wood. Plastics and too hard a wood just gets high clanking. Its actually, for the most part, offensive. That's a problem in itself. That's why I'm glad to tell you that its maple, its not oak, its not rosewood, its non of those harder things. I almost sent a sack full of bones that I experimented with... I experimented with thirteen types of wood that I had made, shaped up and tested. I told my son and his wife ^{who have her} that I'd like to send it back to you people and let you use them for whatever purpose ^A you want.

Steve. How did you test your bones?

Ted. We would play music, where it was good music, clear and play whatever bones I was testing and get the sound. That is where the experimenting came.

Steve. So it was listening equipment and not scientific equipment.

Ted. No, you are right about that. It was just the sound. And believe me, at least I found it, I made dubs and played it for friends and played it for professional musicians. When I told you I had a couple of thousand hours of study, research and practice, I wasn't exaggerating. That was the gall darndest thing you could get involved in. I can't imagine many people getting so emotionally involved in a thing. I think that I was born with a feeling of rhythm or what not that I just loved to hear anything that has clear, fresh accents or thymn patterns. When I have to listen to something that doesn't have it it bothers me.

Steve. Have you heard of Percy Danforth. He popularized the bones in the late 1900's. How about Nick Driver, John Burrell from Boston, or any other bones players that you knew.

Ted. Percy sounds familiar. That Brother Bones thing, but that died out. There never was another bones record to my knowledge that was successful. When I finished, when I

did that last session for Mercury, there were eight recording making bones records. None of them had been successful, and I said when I made that arrangement on Tiger Rag just to say to any future bones players and companies, this is what you have to compete with.

companies

2

Steve. I am going to quote you and put that in the article. Tell me about ~~Doc Stratton~~ from New Orleans.

(I believe)

Doc Stratton

Ted. He was in the New York Minstrels, and considered in his time to be the most prolific with it. After I got out of the service and had to go back east on a thing for the insurance company... I had called and found out that he was still alive. He was in his 80' and lived in New Orleans. I was near there in Baton Rouge, and I paid him a visit at his home. It was exciting to see him. He was like me, 80 years old and in those days its worse that it is now, he was apologetic because he couldn't do some of the things he wanted to do. I made the biggest mistake that I could of made. I didn't even have my bones with me. He asked me to play some things, and I played them and he seemed to get sick. His housekeeper, combination housekeeper and nurse came in. I went out of the room and waited a while. She told me he is crying and sobbing. You shouldn't have played the bones for Mr. ~~Doc Stratton~~. It never even occurred to me that... I thought he would be happy to see what had happened. It was a painful thing.

Another experience, and I'm going to feel like a jerk when I hang up. Just when I was almost ready to give up the entertainment industry for personal reasons, I had a call who introduced himself as Bill Holden. Do you know who Bill Holden was, the famous actor (Yes). I thought it was a practical joke, and I said yes Mr. Holden and I am President Eisenhower. What can I do for you. It tuned out that he wanted me to come out to the Paramount Studio where he had an apartment and bring my wife and join him and his wife for lunch. He wanted to play some bones for me. I had already known that he was a goon-bones fan, and when he was in between takes at the studio, he always had a set of bones in his hip pocket, and he would entertain the people around him. They thought that was cute and he had some publicity it. He gave me some news that was not the most exciting thing he could have given me. He said he had just returned from a visit to India, I can't remember what the nature of it was. He had met a wood turner there that was a real expert. He was going to be there for a little while and he had his bones with him. He actually had evidence quickly that this particular man and his company could actually make the bones with the particular shapes at a price that would be very competitive and make a nice profit. What he wanted to see me about was would he like to join with me in the manufacture of the bones and he would take 49% and give me 51%. He said maybe we could make a bones record together. All I knew about him was what I had read in the paper. I had never heard him play the bones. I wanted to hear him play, and he said no. I have been waiting to hear you play. I want to see you play Tiger Rag. I couldn't image exactly why. But he had the record there, and I played ^{w/ him} Tiger Rag. I wasn't paying attention. My wife said that before I finished his face turned white. When I finished he looked up at me and he had a sick look on his face. I can't remember the exact words, but it was something like "My God, Mr. Goon Bones, everyone one of those thousands of clicks you had in a definite pattern. Patterns that matched the accents of the melody. He said I would have suspected you had dubbed and dubbed on top of them. No, I said there had been no dubbing. That's is exactly what's on the record. He couldn't get rid of me fast enough. I never heard again from him. This happy thing, when he told me he

wanted to go into business with me, how flattered I was. It just came as a shock that he wasn't going to be making records with me. What he heard was, from the beginning of that record to the end, the thousand of clicks he heard were precisely what was on that record. Because it was memorized. That arrangement was made up that way. It was not a casual thing. Every record that I made except Del Wood record were arrangements, that were carefully made accent by accent, beat by beat, to where it needed accenting the bones would accent it more. That's what ^{Paul White man} Martin Block featured on that goon-bones day. How precise everything was. That just knocked him out. ~~He was thinking he was going to play bones, rattle the bones together.~~

Steve. I have one silly question to end it all. Who is that guy in the Mexican hat and white wig on you school tour brochures.

Ted. On that school thing, you know you asked a question that you should bring up on your project. I started out on that school thing with the requirement that all I needed was a middle of the ratings. There were like four from good, very good and superior. One thing I had noticed that I didn't mention on my long thing, on my hobby prior to making records I recorded every single show that I made regardless of what it was or what the audience was. I took it home and I studied it. I studied the reaction of the audience as I had the applause on it. What sort of tunes, melodies were preferred over others and that sort of thing. I had dozens of these performances. In my personal appearances later when I won the school thing, I had thought to myself, I had already noticed that about one minute is the maximum that anyone can play pure rhythm and hold an audience. Believe it or not. You just can't go on indefinitely. In making up numbers for the show, I started out with a theme of Ain't She Sweet and that identified myself. As I performed, I had a Latin costume for doing Latin tunes, a hillbilly costume for doing Turkey in the Straw. I had a thing with the goon-bones at Carnige Hall with a cut away coat and a white wig. I used a voice that imitated that famous piano player with the sissy voice, Liberace. So that's what went. When I finished up it was all educational. What made the show popular with the music teachers, it was an education in rhythms. Various rhythms that students could actually see performed in one 50 minute program. When I started out ^{I got} ~~getting~~ very good ratings on every show. And I just worked on the weekends making little adjustments, I did a thousand and 34 shows all together, believe it or not. I did two or three a day where the high schools were close enough to do that. Then in various places they would join in a city auditorium. Every rating after the first couple of weeks was Superior. Curiously, the National Council on Education really shocked me when after the first year, they upped my fee measurably. It was an exciting thing.

^{sophisticated}
I had my own sound equipment even though schools would have thousands of dollars of sound equipment, I used my own sound equipment that had been tested and retested with four speakers put up on stage - I had experimented with that before I went on the tour as to how sound actually carries. Steve that is something people don't even realize. On the Armed forces entertainment thing, the one thing that made the smash hit was I had the high class sound equipment in every single show no matter where I was, out in the sticks. Those GI out there, lonesome, signed up for thirteen months, they don't see anyone from the outside. They sit in and see and hour and a half of entertainment that sounded like that. They just raved. I had learned that in the school thing. That's another thing peole

should pay close attention in developing the thing you want to bring up to a professional level is to get that sound.

Steve. Ted, I have nothing else to ask. Do you have any closing statement to make before we hang up.

Ted. Just one thing. From the video that I have. I was really impressed with the talent of some of those bones players. At the same time, I was thinking they have a head start. But how would that work with this current popular music. I can't even understand this popular music. I have a fear, thought my fear is unfounded because I had such problems, that the bones weren't going anywhere. I am just convinced as sure as I'm alive that if I hadn't spent all the time of refinement and things that I wouldn't of had the experience that I had. I think they are on the right track. But keep thinking. Connecting it with popular music. And work in some of the higher class music to boot. I just can't help but think that bones sound which is a pure sound can come back just as sure as heck. I was disappointed ... I figured that when you sent the video that I would see something that I would recognize from records, but I didn't see that. What I saw was talent, talent to burn out there.

Steve. When you see the video from Bone Fest III you will see more talent than in Bone Fest I and II.

Ted. Good, good, good.

Steve. Well on behalf of the Rhythm Bones Society formed September 1999 in Brightwood, Virginia, I want to thank you for time and I suspect you will have a pretty big telephone bill. Note that Ted sent the Rhythm Bones Society a cassette with 9....

End of Cassette 2.

Epilog

(The following is approximately what I told Ted after the tape ran out) ...of his songs, two sets of Goon-bones, one set for me and one set for Everett Cowett (RBS Executive Director and responsible for Bone Fest I and II and a web site called Rhythm Bones Central), a copy of his instruction book. A copy of the front and back of the Dot record 'The Great Millions' that included Aint She Sweet, a copy of the cover of the Mercury record 'Rhythm on the Bones', Jukebox rating from 1949 showing Ted ranking seventh, two flyers from his school tour and his Artic Circle Certificate from his military tour.

Ted, I will make a copy of all of these materials and donate them to the American Folklife Center of the Library of Congress.

Ted Goon, 18800 Florida Street, Apt 377, Huntington Beach, CA 92648, 714/596-2445.