

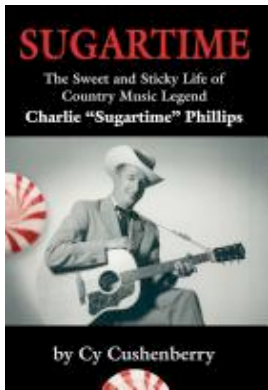
SUGARTIME

The Sweet and Sticky Life of
Country Music Legend
Charlie "Sugartime" Phillips



by Cy Cushenberry





Born the fifth child of poor Texas sharecroppers, young Charlie Phillips stumbled into one of the longest careers in country music history; writing a #1 hit single, receiving a coveted Gold Record, becoming Mr. DeeJay U.S.A. and being inducted into the Western Swing Music Hall of Fame. It's estimated Charlie recorded more than 200 songs during his career and, after 60 glorious years, he is still performing country music for his fans.

Sugartime: The Sweet and Sticky Life of Country Music Legend Charlie “Sugartime” Phillips

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SUGARTIME

**THE SWEET AND STICKY LIFE
OF COUNTRY MUSIC LEGEND
CHARLIE "SUGARTIME"
PHILLIPS**

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Hardcover ISBN: 978-1-63490-517-6

Paperback ISBN: 978-1-63490-516-9

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All photographs from the private collection of Charlie Phillips unless otherwise noted.

Cover design by Todd Engel <http://www.toddengel-engelcreative.com/>

Contents set in Times New Roman 12 point

Cover Photo from the personal collection of Charlie Phillips- 1962 Promo Photo

Book Title created by Therese Kelley

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication Data

Cushenberry, Cy

Sugartime- The Sweet and Sticky Life of Country Music Legend Charlie “Sugartime” Phillips by Cy Cushenberry

Library of Congress Control Number 2015921352

Published by Sugarberry Publications in conjunction with Booklocker

Printed on acid-free paper.

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SUGARBERRY PUBLICATIONS

Prologue

I had known Charlie Phillips mildly for many years and I spoke to him only when we ran into one another. I had no idea he was even a musician as he rarely spoke with me regarding his personal life- just chitchat and small talk. One day while meeting with some mutual peers, Charlie left the festivity. A friend of mine asked me how I knew the great Charlie Phillips. I explained I had been acquainted with him for years. My friend then began telling me about the song “Sugartime” and some of Charlie’s exploits over his long career. I had no idea, as Charlie had always been so humble and would never be seen tooting his own horn, so to speak.

The next time I sat down with Charlie, I asked him questions unmercifully, and he graciously answered anything I asked him. As I listened, I became enamored with his stories and his fascinating life. I distinctly remember asking, “Charlie is there a book I could buy and read about your life?” “I want to know everything,” I said as I awaited his reply. He explained to me that a guy from Europe had once worked on the story of his life, but it’s possible the guy was simply a Buddy Holly souvenir collector. The guy had rummaged through much of Charlie’s extensive collection of photographs and paraphernalia he had painstakingly collected throughout his 60-plus year career, and pocketed anything he thought valuable.

It took months for me to build up the courage to ask Charlie if *I* could be the man to tell the story of his life. Always the frugal one, Charlie replied, “Sure, you can write the story just as long as I don’t have to spend any money out of pocket.” I chuckled a bit and told him he wouldn’t need to pay a dime.

The plan was simple. I was going to gather all of the information on Charlie’s life, put together a few decent chapters, and pay to have a few hundred books self-published. Then I would move

on with my life. How wrong I was in thinking two long careers from such an accomplished musician and radio personality could be crammed into a few short months of life. The can of worms opened quickly when I visited the once, musically vibrant town of Clovis, New Mexico. I spoke to the curator of the Norman Petty Studio, Kenneth Broad, who cordially gave me full access to and a private tour of the original legendary Norman Petty domain.

During my tour with Ken, he asked me if I wanted to listen to something cool. "Of course," I said as Ken expertly slid some reel-to-reel tapes onto the once state-of-the-art music recorder. It was one of the first cuts of "Sugartime" with Charlie singing loud and proud. When it was over, I nodded and thanked him. He then asked me if I heard the background instruments and singing. I hadn't. Ken then told me that the cut he had just played was Charlie Phillips being backed-up by Buddy Holly and a Cricket or two, among others. "Well, I never," was all I could input.

I honestly had no idea Charlie had any association with the late, great Buddy Holly. I sat in Norman's not-so-comfortable chair and stared blankly at Ken and the equipment behind him. I didn't know what to say, after all, *I* was Charlie's biographer and I should have known *that* small tidbit of information before I ever stepped into the studio. But I didn't.

After leaving my grand tour and bidding Ken adieu, I quietly loaded my recording equipment and cameras into my truck. I picked up my cell phone and dialed Charlie, who was at home in Amarillo, Texas. I explained to Charlie I was at the Norman Petty Studio and had completed a journey down memory lane with Ken Broad. Then I quietly asked him, "Charlie, was Buddy Holly and the Crickets on one of your first cuts of 'Sugartime?'" "Oh yes," he timidly explained. Then I asked, "Listen, Charlie, you do know I'm writing your biography, right?" "Yes," he said questionably. "Listen Charlie, if Buddy Holly and the Crickets were on your first record, or Elvis and the Beatles dropped by for lunch- well, you really need to tell me about it." Since that phone conversation, Charlie opened up and

began filling me in on any and all pertinent information regarding his compelling life.

Thinking I was only going to spend around six months on this project, I started having unquestionable doubts the more information I dug up and the more people I interviewed. I remember saying “holy moly” to myself when I had compiled around 1000 pages of notes and hadn’t even begun to touch the surface of his two long careers. With Buddy Holly and the Crickets on Charlie’s “big break” song which landed him a record deal with Coral Records out of New York, to discovering Glen Campbell’s involvement on several of Charlie’s records with Warner Bros. (Reprise) Records, to following Charlie’s appearances on television and radio shows like the *Grand Ole Opry*, Red Foley’s *Ozark Jubilee* and the *Louisiana Hayride*, I quickly realized my little six-month undertaking was going to turn into monstrous project. And it did.

As days and weeks passed, more and more people became involved with the writing process and most importantly, the recounting of Charlie’s life. I began discovering so many stories told by both country music celebrities and folks who witnessed events as they occurred- many have never been written about until now. Chronicling Charlie’s life story became an obsession when I learned that he, at 80 years old, and many of the guys he knew and played with over the years were either dead, getting too old to remember details or were too sick to speak with me regarding past events. I knew when I eventually called to speak with Glen Campbell and was told they could put him on the phone, but he wouldn’t have a clue who I was or wouldn’t remember anything about Charlie, I was running out of time.

Less than two years after beginning this project, I stopped counting the deaths of musicians who merely passed after my initial and only interview with them. George Jones, Ray Price, Little Jimmy Dickens, Jimmy Young, Joe B. Mauldin, and Jimmy C. Newman all passed away within a seemingly short time of each other and Glen Campbell was stricken with Alzheimer’s disease. With the death of each and every soul, a fire burned hot under my hindquarters forcing me to chronicle and complete this biography with expediency. After

all, if I didn't tell this story, much of the information would be forever lost.

Shortly before finishing this book, tragedy struck. I began experiencing chest pains and recurring heart palpitations. Without going into too many details, my heart had enough and let me know it in a rather abrupt way. Already two years into my planned six-month project and six months behind schedule, I had to take a breather and write in my spare time. Often tragedy strikes us at the most inopportune times, but we grind forward, and we get the job done. The book you are about to read was written with utmost respect and love.

Please remember when reading through Charlie's life story, *most* everything in this book is the truth, *or* the truth as a particular individual recalled it. Since many of these stories have never been written about, it was difficult as an author to crosscheck my facts as I simply had few references to check my facts with. With that being said, use your judgment and take some of the stories to heart and others with a grain of salt.

Many of the "old farts" I interviewed- their words, not mine- truly enjoyed telling me their accounts of Charlie and the music industry. Whether or not their accounts are wholly accurate, at least they told a whopper of a good story and isn't that, after all, what makes Texas so great? To this day, I don't know what really happened at the Alamo. In fact, historians still debate it today. I just know the Texans were outgunned and outmanned and struggled, sacrificed and fought like heck in an attempt to defeat Santa Anna and his troops. "Remember the Alamo!" would be the battle cry when Sam Houston and his troops later confronted and defeated Santa Anna at the Battle of San Jacinto.

"Remember Charlie!" will be this book's motto. Any man who can continuously play country, rockabilly and western swing music to adoring fans for over six decades while simultaneously: recording hundreds of songs, being a number one radio personality, performing on television and radio, playing thousands of live gigs,

writing a number one tune and dozens of other songs, winning a Gold Record, becoming a real estate investor, being loved and admired by countless fans... well, that guy deserves to be remembered. It's my hope you enjoy reading the story of Charlie's life as much as I've enjoyed writing it. Without further sendoff, I give you a big Texas YeeHaw and Howdy!

“Sugartime” is one of the most beloved songs in history. These are the lyrics made famous by the McGuire Sisters. You can sing along if you'd like:

*Well, sugar in the morning
Sugar in the evening
Sugar at suppertime
Be my little sugar
And love me all the time*

*Honey in the morning
Honey in the evening
Honey at suppertime
So be my little honey
And love me all the time*

*Put your arms around me
And swear by stars above
You'll be mine forever
In a heaven of love*

*Sugar in the morning
Sugar in the evening
Sugar at suppertime
Be my little sugar
And love me all the time*

*Now Sugartime
Is anytime*

*That you're near
'Cause you're so dear
So don't you roam
Just be my honeycomb
And live in a heaven of love*

*Sugar in the morning
Sugar in the evening
Sugar at suppertime
Be my little sugar
And love me all the time*

*Be my little sugar
And love me (love me)
All (all), all the time*

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Ladies and gentlemen, this is the story of a good ole’ Texas farm boy who fought poverty and accomplished a lifelong career in the bustling world of country music.

Ponder for a minute, if you will, and pretend you were asked to name some stars from the early days of country music- you might say, Bob Wills, Hank Williams, or Dolly Parton. Or maybe you remember Loretta Lynn and her heartwarming story as a coal miners’ daughter. Yep, we laughed when Minnie Pearl disembarked onstage donning her new hat with the price tag still dangling from the rim. *Hee Haw* and the *Grand Ole Opry* provided us with countless hours of music, entertainment and laughs. Heck, how often do we see Willie Nelson in the news for something or another? Well, one thing’s for sure, we followed our country music stars, their lives and the music they sang.

Let me tell you the story about a country music icon whose songs you've heard, even though you probably don't know his name. Believe it or not, this guy has been playing country music just about every week for 60 years now. Heck, he even wrote a country song that traveled up to No. 1 on the pop music charts for a few weeks, earning him an esteemed Gold Record. He played numerous times on the *Louisiana Hayride*, the *Grand Ole Opry*, the *Big "D" Jamboree* and Red Foley's *Ozark Jubilee*. He's received honors like Mr. DJ, USA, is inducted into the Western Swing Music Hall of Fame and is inaugurated into the Texas Panhandle Association of Broadcasters Hall of Fame.

Ladies and gentlemen, this is the real story of Charlie "Sugartime" Phillips.

Chapter 1

On the Road to Texas

If there's one thing you can count on in West Texas, it's the wind, and this day in 1934 was no different from any other. The hot sun bore down from the Texas sky, baking both the people and the crops on this windy, dusty July afternoon. The ever-present singing of locusts could be heard for miles as they broadcast their mating sounds from high atop the sparse elm trees. It was business as usual at the old Donaldson place situated on a small plot of land positioned 5 miles southeast of Farwell, Texas. Two sharecroppers operated the farm- Frank Phillips, a man who labored in the dusty cotton fields and his wife, Katherine Luella Phillips, lovingly known as "Ma Kate," who toiled with her household chores. Well, there was *one* exception on this day. Ma Kate was about to have her fifth child and unlike her other four children who'd been born at home by a midwife, this child would unknowingly and surprisingly be born in a hospital.

Farm life was different in those days. After the American Civil War and the end of slavery, it was common in the South for families to live and work together on farms. Those who could afford to buy a few acres of land would, and those who could not afford land of their own, became sharecroppers. Now, for you non-southerners, sharecropping was pretty much a method of farming where the landowner allowed a family to manage his land to live, farm and raise kids and in return at the end of a growing season, the crop would be harvested and sold. Truth be told, when the crop *did* finally sell and it was time to divvy up the profits for the year, the landowner usually took one-third to one-half of the profits and left just enough money for the tenant family to stay and do it all again next year. Sounds pretty fair, supposin' you were the landowner.

Most folks spent much of their energy focusing on basic survival. Only the brave and hardy could survive in the South during the late 1800's and early 1900's. Crossing the plains and learning to grow crops in a dusty, dry wilderness were challenges faced by almost every poor southerner in those days.

Now, Thad and Mary Massongill were no strangers to work. Parents to Katherine Luella, they worked their days running a successful sawmill, gristmill (a mill for grinding grain) and cotton gin near the small town of Pencil Bluff, Arkansas just up the road from Mt. Ida, Arkansas. Pencil Bluff is pretty much situated smack-dab in the middle of the Ouachita National Forest and just a few short miles from Lake Ouachita. Running a sawmill in the early 1900's was no easy task. Montgomery County, Arkansas was filled with trees like blackjack oak, white oak and shortleaf pine and lumber became an increasing necessity as towns and businesses were popping up across our great nation. When felled trees were delivered to the mill, Thad and his men would load the logs onto a carriage and onto the tracks, ready to be sawn into lumber.

Just to let you know some of the basics and without going into too much technical jargon, the mill cutting was run with an ingenious set of flat belts and friction wheels as the casing between the saw blade and the drive pulley allowed control and movement of the heavy logs. Whoever was operating and overseeing the cuttin' of the logs would maneuver a lever, which would move an ole' black tire back and forth eventually guiding the logs through the saw blade. After cutting the initial slab from a log, boards would be sliced by running the log over the saw and then bringing it back again. It was possible back in those days to make as many as 300 boards in a given day which would be used to build houses, businesses and what-not or even to be temporarily stored at lumberyards.

As one can visualize, with that many logs havin' been sawed each day, a lot of sawdust is kicked up. Hundreds of pounds of dust would be piled outside of the mill and spread around on the ground oftentimes mounded up in dunes higher than a building. Every now

and then a farmer might retrieve some sawdust to spread around his animal pens, but more often than not, the sawdust would just accumulate. The men working these sawmills often covered their mouths with cut-up pieces of fabric tied behind their necks maybe like a kerchief, but do what you will, you're still going to breathe a lot of dust into your chest. Thad Massongill was no exception, and after years of breathing dust into his lungs, began developing congestive respiratory problems leading to a severe case of asthma and a hacking cough lasting throughout his whole life.

Somewhere around this time, young Katherine Luella met a handsome local boy by the name of Albert Frank Phillips and they began courtin'. No one remembers if Frank worked at one of the mills or the cotton gin, but no matter, he and Katherine met and fell in love. With that being said, it wouldn't be a stretch to say the Massongills were no fans of Frank Phillips and didn't think too kindly of him dating their lovely daughter, Kate. You see, Frank and his brother, Bartley, were known locally as moonshiners and had been apprehended for stealing a sack of sugar, a necessary ingredient for making whiskey or moonshine, which the boys had been conjuring up to make some money. One small run-in with the law was all Thad needed to mistrust the boy.

Well, sometimes folks just can't get along! No, we're not talking about Frank or Katherine or the Massongills. We're talking about Germany and Austria-Hungary against the rest of the world, thus spawning The Great War. President Woodrow Wilson declared war on Germany on April 6, 1917, and every able-bodied young man waited until his country called him for duty or they volunteered to go fight.

Within a year or so, Frank Phillips was notified by the draft board and he willfully reported for service, leaving behind his future in-laws and his sweet gal, Katherine. After basic training, Frank was deployed onto a battleship headed for Europe. His battleship was en route across the Atlantic Ocean when, as fate would have it, the Central Powers surrendered to The Allies and Frank returned back home without seeing a lick of combat. Hindsight always being twenty-twenty, it was probably a good thing Frank never saw any

fighting. He was destined to raise several kids who would be fated for success and would later prove their importance to the United States of America.

Although becoming wealthy by any standard in those days, taking his doctor's advice and with his lungs still intact, Thad sold the mills and the cotton gin, packed up his family and moved to the great state of Texas. They arrived in Baylor County in the early half of the 1900's. There in a small town located west of Seymour called Vera, Texas, they took up farming and ranching. Thad decided to set up shop and become a cotton farmer. The clear Texas air agreed with him and seemed to keep his asthma at bay, thus most everything seemed to be going well with the Massongill family.

After returning home from his battleship after World War I, Frank Phillips, who reluctantly but temporarily stayed behind in Pencil Bluff, began missing his lovely belle. The woman he treasured above all others was gone and it seemed the hole in his heart would not be filled. Out of adoration, he packed up his belongings and embarked on the long journey to Texas. The Massongills forgave Frank's former indiscretions and within weeks he was reunited with his lovely Katherine. They were quickly married.

Frank worked alongside Thad and year after year they produced their crops. Living was good, well, as good as it could be in those days. Frank and Katherine began having offspring. The first of their children was a boy they named Carthon, born in 1920.

Carthon was a go-getter sort of boy. Little did anyone know at the time, but Carthon would live well into his 90's! When World War II began, Carthon would leave his college studies at Texas Technical College (later Texas Tech University) in Lubbock, Texas and volunteer for the Army Air Corps. Young Mr. Phillips became a pilot and flew planes throughout the duration of the Second World War and made a career out of the Air Corps. That lucky son-of-a-gun became a highly decorated Colonel and not only lived through WWII, but also lived to speak about his service in the Korean War

and the Vietnam War. We're getting a little too far ahead of ourselves though.

The following year in 1921, Frank and Katherine had a daughter they named Mary Elaine. Elaine was a spunky young lady with looks to match her sweet personality. Also born during this time was Albert Frank Jr., who the family nicknamed "Bunk," for short. The extended Massongill and Phillips family was growing and Thad and Frank soon became role models of their Vera, Texas community.

After the First World War, economic conditions improved in the United States, but little did most folks know, a dark cloud was billowing over the horizon, which would send turmoil throughout the United States. On October 29, 1929, a day known as Black Tuesday, the U.S. stock market crashed causing millions of Americans to lose their jobs. It is said that cotton crop prices in rural areas fell from around 80-cents a pound to 10-cents a pound! Thad Massongill and Frank Phillips were virtually bankrupted overnight, leaving their families in crisis.

For those of you old enough to remember, there was a television comedy broadcast on CBS in the 1960's called *The Beverly Hillbillies*. The series was about some simple country folks who strike oil on their land and become millionaires overnight. Wanting to see his family have a better life, the patriarch of the family, Jed Clampett, moves his family from Bug Tussle to Beverly Hills and into a mansion. If you're familiar with this series, think of the exact opposite.

Thad Massongill and his son-in-law were completely broke, forcing them to load their whole family into an automobile. They desperately needed to find work for themselves to support their growing families. After moving from farm to farm, opportunity knocked and Thad Massongill uprooted his extended family and moved to Farwell, Texas some 200 miles away. Desperate times often call for desperate measures, but there's one thing that's certain, one never gave up in those days.

Chapter 2

Welcome to Farwell, Texas - A Tumor is Born

With three kids and \$30 to their name, the whole clan arrived in Farwell, Texas. Thad and the family moved onto the old Donaldson place, named after the landlord who owned the farmland and the modest house. Some folks use the term railroad-house, and others say shotgun-house to describe the type of home the Massongill and Phillips family moved into. Unlike homes of today, these dwellings were built with one room connecting to the next much like railroad cars. If you wanted to go into the kitchen, sometimes you'd have to travel through someone's bedroom. A large front porch ran across the entire front of the house. There was no electricity, simply oil lamps for light. A tin vessel served as the family bathtub, which was usually kept outside.

Outback, was an old outhouse strangely located on the southwest corner of the home. Now, that's odd because if you remember, West Texas is known for its wind and, by the way, the wind is almost always blowing from the southwest. If you've ever driven through that part of the world, you'll notice most of the trees are pointing to the northeast as a result of wind abuse. So with the outhouse located on the southwest corner, a pleasant aroma might sweep through the house on certain days.

Coal was the primary source of heat in the winter, but often too expensive for poor folks like the Phillips family. If one couldn't afford coal, other materials could be burned- even cow chips, the

dried excrement from livestock containing just enough grass to keep a fire going in desperate times.

Wood posts and barbed wire surrounded this modest working farm. Dirt roads led to the property where the main house, chicken coop, as well as pens for the horses, were located. There was a water-well on the property located near the windmill. If you needed to bathe or cook, someone had to take a bucket out to the well, pump water into it, and haul it back to the house. God forbid you'd better hope the well wasn't frozen in the wintertime. There was even an underground storm shelter, which wasn't used much for storms, but more for keeping jarred and pickled foods. Though humble, the house had everything one needed to raise a family. And that's just what they did. In 1927, another son and the Phillips' fourth child, Glenn, was born into the Phillips clan.

Farwell itself might not have seemed like much by today's standards, but back in those days it was a nice small-town community offering many of the basics of life. It was a hardworking conservative community situated in what some might now consider the "Bible Belt." As luck might have it, the great state of Texas was in need of a new three-million dollar capitol building to be situated in Austin, TX. The State eventually struck a deal with a couple of Chicago Yankee brothers, John and Charles Farwell, along with some British investors, to trade three-million acres of land for three-million dollars used to build the capitol building. Texas eventually got its fancy new Capitol building, and the Farwell brothers obtained more land than just about anyone had ever seen at the time.

Thus, the small Texas town was born and named after the Farwell Brothers, the original owners of the XIT Ranch, and is located right on the border of New Mexico and Texas. Farwell is about 95 miles from Amarillo, Texas, which is to the northeast and about 10 miles to Clovis, New Mexico, which lies directly to the west. If you walk down Main Street in Farwell and cross the railroad tracks, you'd be in the small town of Texico, New Mexico. The township of Farwell is situated in Parmer County and has close

associations with the famed XIT Ranch, which used to stretch across twelve counties.

Katherine, now endowed with the name, Ma Kate, had not been feeling well for several months. She had been vomiting and was getting stomach cramps something fierce. She had gained a bit of weight and could feel something growing in her abdomen. She feared the worst and began stating the obvious, “she had a tumor.” When she could take no more, she traveled across the state line with Mary Massongill and family to the closest hospital located just a few miles away in Clovis. To her dismay, the tumor growing inside of her was no tumor at all; it was her fifth child who was in desperate need to escape her body. On that blistering July the 2nd day in 1934, Charles Don Phillips was born. Baby Charlie came into the world and was quickly nicknamed “Tumor” by his other siblings.

This fateful decision and quick trip to the hospital would later come back to haunt Charlie Phillips over the years. Although he spent the first 48 hours of his life in New Mexico and the next 80 plus years in Texas, Charlie would never be considered an actual Texan by many of his country music peers. Several awards and Hall of Fame inductions would not be granted over the years simply because he was not *born* on Texas soil. Like the old saying goes, “I wasn’t born in Texas, but I got here as quick as I could!” certainly applies to this circumstance. “I’ve NEVER lived anywhere but Texas, and I wouldn’t have it any other way!” Charlie adamantly insists decades later.

Only fourteen years old at the time, the now retired Lt. Colonel Carthon Phillips recalls the day Charlie was brought home from the hospital stating, “Charlie was the youngest of our whole pack and I was runnin’ the cultivator behind our two mules layin’ the crop out in front of the house where we lived. Well, I was watchin’ them comin’ back and bringin’ him down, so I pulled my team closer to the house so I could get a closer look at my new brother. I didn’t stop ‘cause Dad was pretty strict about getting’ the plowin’ done. I can’t remember, but I think I was finishing up that field of cotton – or maybe it was corn- I don’t know. And, so I was lookin’ at Charlie, and we were carryin’ on at the house there and dad said, ‘Well,

Carthon, now you've seen him. Get back on that cultivator there and finish that up before dark.' I'll never forget that." By the time Carthon finally reached college age, he couldn't wait to graduate high school so he could, "get out from behind those danged-ole mules and cultivator and get an education." He eventually did both.

Charlie was, of course, the baby in the family and his brothers and sister coddled him until he was half-grown at least. Other than being called Tumor, one other nickname his siblings had given him was Chick. He cried a little bit at night and sounded like a chicken, or so the other siblings thought. Years later, Charlie sported a new nickname, Scrooge, but we're getting ahead of ourselves again.

This part of Texas did not have irrigation at this time and growing crops was always a gamble of nature. Dry-land farming was the primary method of growing crops, and if it didn't rain, you could starve. Anyone who's ever grown up on a farm knows that every able-bodied person is required to pull his or her weight. So when Charlie became old enough to walk, he was given his first job-gathering eggs from the chicken coop. For you city folks who think eggs come from the supermarket, well, they don't. They come out of a chicken's hindquarters, and someone's got to go collect them. This was one of Charlie's many jobs on the farm for years to come.

Talk about some good ole' home-cookin'. Ma Kate was one of the best cooks that ever lived, 'course everyone says that about their mom. Grandma Mary Massongill was another great cook who had learned to make good food out of just about anything when she lived in Arkansas and gladly trained in Ma Kate. Ma Kate could cook some of the best fried-chicken around. Fruits and vegetables were often pickled and canned in those days. In fact, one farm delicacy was canned tomatoes. The secret ingredient you ask? A spoonful of sugar was poured atop of the tomatoes and the juice just before biting into their delicious goodness.

Now if you're a vegetarian, or one of those vegan folks, or you're just plain squeamish, it'd be best if you just skip the next few

paragraphs. No really, we won't mind, just skip down a few paragraphs.

There we go. For the rest of you folks, the Phillips family and all of their neighbors raised their own hogs. As the hot summer weather subsided, and colder fall weather began creeping in, a very important festivity would take place on the farm called "hog-killin's." As you can already surmise, there were no refrigerators back then, so it was always better to wait until it was cold, and the colder, the better, before slaughtering a hog.

Mr. Cassidy was a neighbor of the Phillips' and was a butcher by trade. After folks from neighboring farms chose the best two or three hogs from their stock, Mr. Cassidy would slaughter them and hang them up in his smokehouse. You have to realize this was an all-day affair for several neighborhood-farming families. The pig carcasses would be hung up, as full-size pots would be brought in to boil off the fat, making chitlins, created from the small fatty parts of the pig.

Some folks even called this festivity a "pig killin' party" because everyone except the pig had a good time. You've got to remember there was no television at the time and for entertainment, folks would bring playing cards or dominoes and maybe play a game of 42. Of course, Mr. Cassidy always had a pint or two of his medicinal remedy to ward off the cold, you see. To top it all off, Mr. Cassidy was, according to himself, a world famous Son-of-a-Gun maker. For the laymen, this is when you take the worst part of the pig, and you make a stew or chili-like stew out of it.

Veggie lovers, you better skip down a little further as we're not quite done yet. Yep, there you go, just a few more paragraphs. Thanks. It's always better to be politically correct these days, don't you think? The Son-of-a-Gun stew mainly consisted of all the meat entrails most wasteful folks would throw away: like the guts, the tongue, the heart, the liver and the tail. To fashion the stew into an edible meal, all sorts of peppers and spices were thrown into the concoction. Mr. Cassidy even separated the stew into three different varieties: The Papa Bear, which was so hot it might put hair on your

chest; the Mama Bear, which was spicy yet tolerable; and the Baby Bear, which was the mildest and didn't have much kick to it. No matter which type of stew you ordered, you were sure to fill your belly with some of the tastiest stew man ever created.

While the adults played their games into the wee hours of the night, it was up to the youngsters to create their own entertainment. There were about a dozen or so community kids, and they'd usually segregate themselves by age. By this time, Charlie and a few of his neighbor friends were at that rambunctious age of doing what boys do best, which is getting into trouble.

Now, boys will be boys and this particular afternoon, Charlie and three of his friends proved just that. This specific incident can only be akin to an episode of the *Little Rascals*. All boys are curious, but this day Charlie, Ted Magnus, Phillip Cassidy and Jerry Don Utsman, all being around ten years of age, bit off a little more than they could chew.

The back of the Cassidy place had an old well out in the pasture, which had long been forgotten. It had some sort of cover over it, and the boys had always been curious what was underneath it. They knew there was a hole there, but they wondered how deep. They guessed the hole was probably 150- 200 feet deep. Now, they had been told to stay away from it, but their curiosity got the best of them, as they wanted to see what was at the bottom of this old well. One of the boys had a brilliant idea and said, "I'll tell you what we do. Let's pour some gasoline down this hole and we'll let enough of it get on the bottom. Then... we'll drop a match down, and it'll stay lit so we can see whatever's down there so deep."

So the boys walked to the barn and borrowed a couple of gallons or so of gasoline. Being as smart as they were, they knew to pour the liquid into the center of the hole where it would drop directly to the bottom. They thought they were brilliant because they didn't get any gas on the side of the hole. Yup, they were too smart for that. After the container of gasoline doused the opening, the boys all gathered in a circle around the gaping hole and someone said,

“Ok, it’s time.” So one of the boys struck a match and dropped it down there, with all four peering intently at the bottom, of course. “Ker Whoom!!” A big spray of shotgun-flames disbursed up into the air!

Since all four boys were standing over the blast, the heat and flames scorched their hair, eyebrows and skin on their faces. Blisters immediately popped from their skin. Phillip Cassidy didn’t have any eyebrows left on his face! Charlie still claims this incident was “the most stupid thing I’ve ever done.” Now, no one was seriously hurt, but what do boys do when they implement a plan so stupid and don’t want others to know what they did? They lie. But, unfortunately in this case, the four keen and penetrating minds couldn’t think of a lie good enough to hide their battle scars. They all got their butts whooped when they arrived back home. Keep in mind there weren’t any “timeouts” in those days.

Even the oldest and wisest of the bunch, Carthon, pulled a death-defying shenanigan as a youngster. He and his cousin, Oscar Finch, cleverly nicknamed Foskar Orange, decided they’d make a giant yo-yo out of two latched coaster wagon wheels using a rope as the string. Their new toy was so big and they maneuvered the oversized yo-yo up the ladder of a thirty-foot windmill. They decided they’d drop it from the top creating a fun new game with the world’s largest yo-yo. Thank God Frank Phillips chanced upon the two crazy boys. Just a little knowledge of gravity would have sent the holder of the yo-yo string plummeting thirty feet to the hard Texas dirt below. “I guess I owe my dad my life,” Carthon said, “because I was gonna hold that string.” There were more ways to get into trouble growing up on a farm and ranch!

With Carthon being the oldest boy and Charlie being the youngest, a special brotherly bond was formed as Carthon always looked out for his younger sibling. “Charlie was always my favorite brother,” he explains as he describes Charlie being kicked around by his other two brothers, Bunk and Glenn. “I tried to put a stop to it,” he laughs, “I just wasn’t there enough.” Well, brotherly love.

Always trying to create a good time, the youngsters would sometimes create their own rodeos and try and ride the dairy cows roaming on the property. Jerry Don Utsman always seemed afraid of everything, so the boys would often try and talk him into doing something he didn't want to do. They ganged up on him one day stating he was "gonna hafta" ride one of the cows. Sometimes the cows would buck and sometimes they wouldn't. They talked Jerry Don into getting on one of those calves and sure as heck, the steer kicked him straight up in the air and he fell face-first into a pile of cow manure.

Now, huntin' rabbits was another pastime. There were so many jackrabbits back in those days you might trip over one if you didn't watch where you were going. These critters were truly a menace and if left unchecked, would eat up a crop. Offering ample cover for the rabbits, plenty of prairie grass was present in West Texas before irrigation came along, so it gave the boys something to hunt in their spare time. As a matter of fact, just a few years before Charlie's time, the jackrabbit population began to soar, and some say it was a godsend. After the onslaught of the Great Depression, it's speculated many folks would have starved to death had it not been for the large population of jackrabbits and cottontails.

Around the time of Charlie's birth, a momentous catastrophe struck the Texas Panhandle as well as its adjoining states. The Dust Bowl of 1935 sent a devastating shockwave through the farmlands of the South. Newspapers at the time coined the phrase "Black Sunday" describing the black rolling blizzards of dirt, which swept through the country- killing innocent folks and burying properties. Farwell, Texas was greatly affected by the dust storms. Many years after the origin of the dust bowl, communities were still being swept by high winds and heavy amounts of dust.

Sweet milk, now called whole milk, was served at almost every meal. One of the primary chores was milkin' the cows. There were many times as a young boy, Charlie would take a bucket out into the middle of the cow lot with the West Texas gales blowin' something fierce. He almost couldn't see across the dirt roads, as

he'd stumble down the path and set the bucket under the cow and begin milkin' her. Grime and cow manure would be blowin' everywhere and yes, even into the fresh milk. Milk would simply be poured through a cheese strainer to sift out the impurities. "It's amazing in this day and time people worry about disease. If kids were raised on a farm like I was- well, I guess they'd get such an immune system..." Charlie recounts while also stating, "Well, my God! How are you still alive, people often ask? I think that's the reason people raised on a farm, lots of times, have longevity."

The cows still needed to be milked in the morning and at night, as they were an important aspect of the working farm's crop. Of course, it was never pasteurized or homogenized, as it was drunk in its natural form. Milk was sold for drinking, but just as importantly, the sweet liquid could be churned into butter. Ma Kate, or any other able-bodied person, would let the milk sit for a spell and allow the cream to rise to the top. Once fermented enough, you'd skim the cream off. The leftovers would be poured into a wooden butter churn, and you'd begin to churn the liquid, and churn and churn until the top portion of the milk turned to solid butter.

Any folks who've ever churned butter before knows it's a tedious and muscle-building exercise but is worth it in the end, because the treat-of-all-treats is created- BUTTERMILK! This is why some folks say real buttermilk is better for you- because all the fat's taken out. But it might also be the exercise achieved from hours of churning. Charlie vividly remembers, "I've done hundreds and hundreds of hours churnin'- hundreds of hours. I should look like the Hulk, as many hours as I did crankin' that darned ole' separator, which, the early ones didn't have electric motors. You had to turn 'em by hand."

Carthon, the eldest of the Phillips boys, had a couple of show pigs that were given to him by his father. He cared for and nurtured those pigs, but arrived home one day to find the pigs had gone missing. He looked up and down the farm trying to locate his sows, but couldn't find hide-nor-hair of them. It turns out his dad, Frank, had traded his two pigs for a young Thistle Tail mare (Slang for a long-tailed "mutt" horse aptly named because the common Thistle

weed often became entwined in its tail). Of course Carthon named the horse Thistletail and cared for and rode her until he went off to college. "God I loved that ole' mare," Carthon reminisces. The killin' and tradin' of animals was common for farm folks.

It can be said that little Charlie Phillips was also an animal lover from the get-go. Frank and Ma Kate joked he'd name all of the animals on the farm and make pets out of them! Horses, pigs, cows, goats, chickens, it didn't matter; Charlie would make them his favorite. One of his first pets was a goat named Gracie. Gracie was about as domesticated as any goat could be. She foller'd Charlie most everywhere he went around that farm. One morning at breakfast, the family looked out of their window to find Gracie had climbed on top of their brand-spanking new 1941 Black Ford automobile so she could get a better look inside the house. She wanted Charlie to come out and play! Scratches appeared all over the fender and hood of that new car. Well, needless to say, that was the end of Gracie's stay at the Phillips home as she was traded to a neighboring farm simply for scuffing the paint off of the new vehicle.

William "Willie" Dannhelm and his wife were the Phillips' first farmhands and although just employees, really became a part of the extended family. They enjoyed Charlie so much they even named one of their children after him years later. Knowing Charlie's love of animals, Willie brought home a small dog and gave it to young Charlie as a gift. Midgie was a mixed-breed white and brown spotted dog with medium length shaggy hair. An early photo of Midgie shows her riding on the back of Charlie's tricycle like a circus performer. Charlie fell in love with Midgie. She perhaps started his lifelong love of dogs.

Every boy during this time deserved a good horse and Charlie had one of the best. The Calloway family lived on a neighboring farm in proximity to the Phillips family. Mr. Calloway was a Commissioner for Parmer County and highly regarded in the local community. His son owned a beautifully trained horse named Paint, who was as smart as a whip and could perform a variety of tricks as well as respond to a few commands. Tragedy struck Mr. Calloway's

son on a cloudy Texas day as lightning struck his boy while riding on their tractor, killing him instantly. As one can imagine, the death shook the small community, but no one was more devastated than Mr. Calloway and his family. The loss of his son prompted him to sell their beloved Paint in order to perhaps alleviate the memory of his son's association with the fine horse. Frank Phillips bought Paint from Mr. Calloway and gave him to Charlie, who provided the horse with a loving home for many years to come.

Paint proved to have a penchant for mischief as he demonstrated a very special talent for a horse- he could open doors! Who could count the times Ma Kate would be in her kitchen shelling peas or cooking dinner and Paint would quietly slip up behind her and give her the surprise of her life? She would often turn around to see Paint standing in the middle of her kitchen. Paint never liked to stay penned, so many a time he'd open up the gate and wander around the farm. As mischievous as Paint was, he also proved to be a great companion and often took Charlie into town for school or leisure. Townsfolk reminisce seeing Charlie tie Paint up to a post outside the schoolhouse.

Although maze, corn, grain sorghum, cotton and Sudan grass seeds were the staple of the Phillips farm, Charlie began his first business venture breeding and selling English border collies. Many years later as a hobby, he was the first to bring the Australian Silky Terrier to the Texas Panhandle. For a young whippersnapper, the dog breeding business turned into quite a lucrative income producer. The revenue from his dog occupation allowed Charlie some light luxuries possibly other children his age couldn't afford. As a young man, not yet a teenager, Charlie purchased his first guitar for \$10 at a pawnshop on a trip to Muleshoe, Texas. Charlie remembers the very worn F-hole guitar seemed to have a neck like a two-by-four and required a pair of pliers to thread the strings. "I never learned to play that danged ole' guitar very well," he'd say.

Saturday was a special day for the Phillips clan as it meant the family could "go into town!" as many folks might say. The majestic growing town of Farwell had all of the amenities a small community could ask for. The Parmer County courthouse was

situated in Farwell and served as the county seat. The town sported a post office, churches, barbershops, a lumberyard, the Santa Fe Railroad depot, grocery and variety stores, a coal yard, lumberyard, a bank, and a movie house. Like many towns of its day, most local shops and businesses were located right on Main Street, which crossed over the railroad tracks and continued as the main street into Texico, New Mexico. Texico even had a three-story hotel fittingly named the Texico Hotel housing a post office and a drugstore with a big marble soda fountain.

Saturday was the most important day for town folk and farm folk alike because the business owners of Farwell would hold The Merchants Drawing in the afternoon. As each person entered one of the many town businesses, tickets were handed out where one would tear off the stub and place the other half in a container. A drawing would be held for cash or often store merchandise sometime later in the day. The pot might get up to around \$50, but boy that was a lot of money in those days. The town would explode with kids running up and down the wooden planked and newly formed concrete sidewalks and streets.

As a special treat, the Phillips children were often purchased a pop with flavors like Ni-Hi flavored soda and Crown Cola, which cost a whole nickel. Little Charlie's favorite beverage was Nu Grape soda, which he thought tasted just like real grape juice. Haircuts were administered by Bob Kiker, who was a local barber, and although he was a professional, the boys often thought their haircuts looked like a bowl had been placed on their head and cut around. Charlie could always be seen around town with a big straw hat creased down the middle, like Hopalong Cassidy, who was his fictional childhood hero. He donned a pair of cutoff shorts, always hand-me-downs from his older brothers and was usually barefooted. He'd frequently head into all of the stores, but as a youngster, he never had money to buy nothin'.

Occasionally, maybe once a month, the family would pack together inside their automobile and head ten miles west "all the way over" to the big city of Clovis, New Mexico. Previously the home of

Native Americans, Clovis is situated high atop the Llano Estacado Mesa on land that is as flat as buckwheat pancakes on a level griddle—much like its immediate neighbor, the Texas Panhandle. The Atchison Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad ran through the town making it the primary hub for both people and commerce.

Folks would ride their horses or drive their automobiles for miles to do their shopping or to experience the merriments in one of the biggest cities in the area. High above the New Mexico skyline stood the magnificent ten-story Hotel Clovis building, exhibiting a beautiful cream-colored Art Deco exterior and deemed at the time, the tallest building between Dallas and Albuquerque. Many evenings were filled with various types of entertainment where showbiz greats could often be seen at some of the area's many nightspots. Among these, the Hotel Clovis had a magnificent ballroom with an unforgettable crystal chandelier hanging from its ornate ceiling. The swanky ballroom brought in such greats as Hank Williams, Louis Armstrong and Glenn Miller. At this point, no one would ever guess Charlie Phillips would be playing here in the very near future.

Sometimes Ma Kate and Jerry Don's mother, Ollie Utsman, would gather the extended family together and head to the city for a whole day of shopping. Ma Kate and Ollie would send the kids to one of the three local movie theaters, specifically the Mesa Theater, whose cinemas only cost a dime to view. The kids would sit there all day watching a double feature and eating big five-cent bags of popcorn. With any luck, the double feature might include a western.

Clovis sported large department stores as well as intimate family-owned businesses. Folks still remember businesses like J.C. Penny, the House of Music, Levine's clothing store, Woolworth, Barry's Hardware, the Busy Bee Café, and Montgomery Ward, which even had a second floor with an elevator— a big deal in those days. Charlie swears his very, very frugal mother would spend the whole day shopping and would only leave Clovis with a small package of bobby pins or possibly a pair of unmentionables. Maybe those gals were just window-shopping, or maybe they just needed a much-deserved break from the kids.

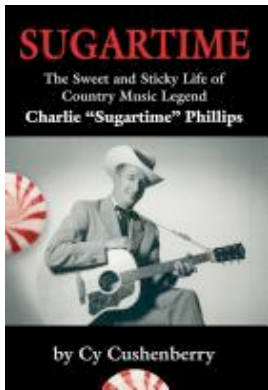
Right next to the Mesa Theater was a local joint called Coney Island, which was a shotgun-type diner with a long narrow row of barstools, just wide enough to fit the bar, the stools, and a couple dozen people. Like its New York counterpart, their specialty was hotdogs, and the kids would get their fill of the most delicious frankfurters costing a whopping 15-cents per dog. No matter what the festivities in Clovis, it was always a grand treat to visit. “Some of my fondest memories during my childhood were right there on Main Street in Clovis during the 40’s and 50’s,” Charlie recalls, “it was my New York City.”

Every now and again, the Phillips family might enjoy the luxury of a vacation. There weren’t very many fancy two-lane highways in those days, so most folks of that era stayed within driving distance of their hometown on most occasions. Carlsbad Caverns was in proximity to Farwell, so one time the whole family crawled up in the car and headed for southern New Mexico. Located in the middle of the desert and hotter than blue blazes, the Phillips household drove up to the yawning opening at the mouth of the caverns and began their long descent down the winding and treacherous raw path. Charlie, still a young boy at this juncture, began crying after a couple of hours inside the cave and his older brothers, Carthon and Bunk, carried him on their shoulders through the remainder of the cavern. “I think that’s the scariest I’ve ever been,” said Charlie, decades later. “I was never so glad to get out of a place in all my life,” he adds, “to this day I’m kinda claustrophobic. I’m wondering if that ain’t what caused it all.”

When asked about a small scar on his forehead, Charlie reminisces about another infamous road trip taken years after the Carlsbad trip, to Ruidoso, New Mexico with his family once again crammed into a 1937 gray Chevy sedan. Child-locks hadn’t been invented yet, so most families purchased sedans with only two doors, so the kids didn’t fall out of the backseat! Anyway, the initial plan on the Ruidoso trip was to take some family vacation pictures with their new Kodak camera, which was a big, solid-incased box weighing quite a few pounds. Before arriving at their destination, whoever was driving, slammed on the brakes and the heavy camera flew through

the car hitting Charlie, who had turned around and was standing up between the seats, square in his forehead. He laughs about the event now while touching the scar.

Growing up in West Texas was certainly an endless adventure. There was nothing too terribly special about eastern New Mexico or West Texas for that matter. Farm folks and city folks all intermingled with each other forming a very tightknit community. Residents just moved on with their daily lives. No one could have possibly anticipated the sudden surge of musical talent creeping upon Clovis and her surrounding towns. An unsuspecting movement was sliding in like a thief in the night. It would soon steal the hearts of millions worldwide.



Born the fifth child of poor Texas sharecroppers, young Charlie Phillips stumbled into one of the longest careers in country music history; writing a #1 hit single, receiving a coveted Gold Record, becoming Mr. Deejay U.S.A. and being inducted into the Western Swing Music Hall of Fame. It's estimated Charlie recorded more than 200 songs during his career and, after 60 glorious years, he is still performing country music for his fans.

Sugartime: The Sweet and Sticky Life of Country Music Legend Charlie “Sugartime” Phillips

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