



Willie “Big Boy” Tennant
Interviewed by Anne Kimzey

1. Learning guitar (01:28)

Kimzey: Is that where you learned how to play the guitar?

Tennant: That was waaaaaay before that <Kimzey laughs>. I was down below Plum Branch when I started, down below, you see, you can go- you can keep straight on and see Plum Branch going toward Augusta, but I always [lived at- we lived on this side, this is where we lived [?]], at about uh- maybe three miles below Plum Branch, something like that when I first started playing then. See if I just kept my mind on it, then I would have been alright, that’s right. Yeah, but I wouldn’t.

Kimzey: How did you learn? Who taught you how to play?

Tennant: I just took it up.

Kimzey: Were there lots of people who played the guitar?

Tennant: Well my father, he used to play a banjo. I would listen at him- I would listen at him, you know, he would play a banjo, you see, but he went- he was a hard working man- he went all- he wouldn’t take up too much time fooling with the banjo, but what he could play he could play with a banjo, [and I’m telling you [?] there wouldn’t be, but about five strings on it- on the banjo.

Kimzey: Um-hum.

Tennant: And there are six on this here. I don’t know how he could- could’ve played. They had only five strings on the banjo, but he could have played them, that’s right.

2. School (00:46)

Tennant: When I was going to school, I didn’t go it all, well I didn’t like to go, those teachers would- you would learn those books sometime ago, but now they don’t too much care whether you learn or not, you know, but that’s their job, to teach you, and some of them will learn, and some of them will learn nothing much. That’s the way it goes. Back in those times, those teachers would- they would whip you in the hand

<Kimzey laughs> and you got to learn those books if there was any learning to it, that's right.

3. Playing parties (01:16)

Kimzey: So who did you play music with when you were growing up?

Tennant: Uh, that was my brother-in-law- I mean when I- playing music.

Kimzey: Um-hum.

Tennant: That was my brother-in-law. He's dead now, but there's some people- but there was some fellow at [town [?]], who tried to blow a horn, but he wasn't good. [They couldn't blow good, he could blow a little something [?]], but he wasn't a hard blower, but that fellow- last time [I was [?]] with my brother-in-law, he could play right along with the guitar, and never did get tired of blowing hardly, that's right.

Kimzey: Did you play at parties when you were coming along or at house parties, or at anything like that, did you play?

Tennant: I didn't- I wasn't <mumbles> I don't think I- if I did it wasn't but once or twice, or something like that, wouldn't be over once or twice, so I wouldn't hardly go on with them too much. There would be someone at the party, you know, would break it up, or turn [out[?]] the party, so I wouldn't too anxious about going to them, you know, because it would be somebody there that's going to cut up, and try to break it up- that's the way it used to be- that's right- that's right.

4. Origin of nickname "Big Boy" (00:49)

Tennant: My uh- my real name is Willie- Willie Senior-Tennant- Willie- Senior- now I got a Willie J- I got a son that is Willie Junior, but mine is Senior- Willie Tennant Senior, <mumbles>.

Kimzey: Now when did they start calling you "Big Boy"?

Tennant: That just comes in-

Other voice: <Mumbles> wasn't it-

Tennant: <mumbles> I'm a baby <other voice laughs> but he, uh- there was a man, uh- a tax- a tax collector used to- a tax collector used to, he put that Willie "Big Boy," he put

that in there, so just didn't- I wouldn't- uh-I just let it be like it was, Willie Big Boy, but my name is Willie Tennant Senior, right.