

Big Bill Hill interview.

At his church and studio, 2853 W Madison, Chicago.

b. 1914

August 5, 1982, 5pm.

WLEY

Well, I started in 1949, on WLEY on FM radio, and I promoted blues locally with Muddy Waters, Howling Wolf, and later on Elmore James. I'm the first man to bring BB King to Chicago, I'm the first man to bring Albert King to Chicago, and Little Milton, which I work with Little Walter, Homesick James, Little Mack, Ike and Tina Turner, Lightning Hopkins, John Lee Hooker. Smokey Hogg, Big Willie Dixon the songwriter, Otis Rush, Magic Sam used to work at my nightclub, I promoted him quite often, Jim McCracklin out of California, Sunnyland Slim, who's an old friend of mine, I saw him last week, Little Brother Montgomery, the late JB Lenore, Shakey Jake, Lightning Slim, Sugar Pie Dusuntu(?), Billy Erib, Buddy Guy, Junior Wells, Memphis Minnie, many many more down through the years. I worked with blues artists, so many that I can't think of, since when you called me I couldn't think of all the people that I've worked with and promoted, throughout the country. But I spent from 1949 until 1976 in the blues, and from '76 until now affiliated with church work. But I spent my previous years with the blues, recording them, promoting 'em. Wolf, I managed him for about three or four years, I had him to play in Washington DC, at the Washington DC Auditorium, with Russ Salt (?), he was the Secretary of State at the time, we was at that big auditorium. We toured the South for thirty-one days, in fact I turned down an engagement in your home town, England, I had an engagement, I had to turn it down because I had committed myself with a thirty-one day Southern tour, when I received a telegram from overseas.

Which year was that?

I can't recall what year it was, no I can't, because there's so many things happened, but I do know it was in the sixties, maybe around between '60 and '63, somewhere back in that area, I don't know for sure, but I know it was in that neighbourhood.

You used to be a manager, as well as a DJ?

Yeah, I managed the Wolf, I booked, we call it, Muddy, I managed Elmore James. Later on I managed Little Walter, who else? Otis Rush, Magic Sam, I was their personal manager. Several more. I sub-booked John Lee Hooker, I wasn't his direct manager, you'd call up the manager from various booking agencies, if they weren't busy, you'd tell them I got an engagement in such'n'such an area, and their manager would send me a contract, we call it sub-booking. But those guys, Wolf, Otis Rush, Buddy Guy, Junior Wells, I managed them personally.

Would you say that now the blues was less popular than it used to be?

Well, I don't know what happened to the blues. When I listen to the radio, I hear

this type of music I don't understand. But today, we was just talking about this the other day, Chicago is dead for blues. This used to be a major city for blues. This used to be the major city for blues, in my day we kept it alive, but the new jocks that come from the Southern States, they exploited the blues. I know several local disc jockeys exploited the blues, and they knocked it completely out. It was a honour to us to promote 'em, the old-timers, but the new guys wanted to make a fast buck, they wasn't concerned about the destiny of the blues, they was concerned about making a fast buck. And it's been dead as a doornail, in my estimation, for the last three or four years. 'Cause I talked - oh yeah, I managed Jimmy Dawkins, used to call him Fast Fingers Jimmy Dawkins, which he travelled extensively now, all over the world. And Mighty Joe Young, oh yeah, it's coming to me, those guys I used to book. I remember Chicago, you could go out, in one block you could find three or four blues bands, in one block, one tavern to another. Madison Street, Roosevelt Road - just talking about this last week - on the South Side, the same thing. But now, not that I'm in it, I don't even know there's no place that's open for blues as far as I know of, after Eddie Shaw closed his place. He used to play with the Wolf. He closed up a year or so ago.

There's a couple of clubs up on the North side, Halsted Street. Have you been up there?

But that's just a Sunday thing, isn't it? Oh, weeknights?

One's called Kingston Mines...

Oh, Kingston Mines? Oh yeah, I know about that, but they haven't been operating continuously, have they?

I think just in the last few years.

Every night? I know Chicago Slim played over there, but I didn't know of any other ... but that's just in one area, but when Chicago had it all over, you could just go and listen to the radio and find out where the blues was going on. You know. 'Cause back in those days, I gave birth to live broadcasting, from various nightspots. But no more. They must be doing it through newspapers, because I talked with Mighty Joe Young a couple of weeks ago, and Jimmy Dawkins called me about two weeks ago, and we used to keep up with what's going on. I mean, I know several other guys, and they don't know what's going on as far as the West Side's concerned. On the North Side, that's a different story, I mean, it shouldn't be limited to one area, big as Chicago is. This is noted as a blues city. St Louis used to be popular for blues, Detroit - but Chicago kept the highest record of the blues of any other place that I know of. But it just certainly died in the last three or four years as far as the West Side is concerned. Madison Street, Roosevelt Road, there's nothing on Madison Street, there's nothing on Roosevelt Road pertaining to blues. Mostly churches have taken over. I remember there was two taverns up the street had blues, a couple up the street here. The next block had about four or five. Little Mack had a night spot, he started preaching, he was over

on 23rd and Cottage Grove, I haven't heard nothing about that in the last couple of years. So, I don't know. The boys aren't doing anything, unless they travel overseas, and how many can go overseas? That's limited. But I mean, local playing, it shouldn't be a problem, even though I'm not affiliated with the blues, it shouldn't be no problem for me to know what's going on. The only place I know of with blues is that Delta... Delta Fish Market, at Kedzie and Jackson Boulevard, and that's on a Friday and Saturday. Other than that, I just don't know. It's pathetic, just pathetic, the way they let the blues go down like this, because blues is a derivation from gospel, with the same similarity.

What do you see as the reason for this decline?

Because it's up to the jocks, the disc jockeys. The old timers is dead, we promoted... Al ^BWenson, he died about two or three years ago, Sam Evans, he died a couple of years ago, and then I went into the ministry, and we was the ones who was promoting the blues. And after that, you had a few other guys who was just capitalising for themselves. Now you don't even hear them talking about no blues. They play blues records, but they don't promote no local blues. If they promote anybody, you get a guy from out of town, but the local boys is starving to death, they have to go and get jobs, you know, because no one's concerned about their welfare. We was concerned about them. I was friends to them, we saw each other at least two or three times a week, whatever they needed, we would come to the rescue, if they had a record, we would promote it. But those days are gone, they're just simply gone.

You used to do live broadcasts out of Sylvio's, didn't you?

Yes. When Elmore James came to town, I'd call Sylvio to get him. That was Lake and Oakland, about 2258 West Lake Street. In fact, Sylvio's was one of the big names in blues, on the West Side, or in Chicago. If it wasn't happening at Sylvio's, it wasn't happening, period. And there were several others, 47th and Indiana, I can't think of the guy, they used to have blues on a Monday, blue Monday parties, can't think of his name now. But that all died out, and then at 16th street, can't think of the name of that place, they used to have blues over there on a Monday. Jimmy Dawkins and a lot of boys used to play over there on a Monday, blues Monday. But that's all gone. And Ma Bea's used to have it, that's all closed up now, I don't know what they're making out of it, it's been closed for the last couple of years. So I don't know who's going to survive the blues, maybe some new jock will do it, but they aren't doing it now. In fact, because their hands is tied. Back in those days we were independent radio announcers, we didn't get a salary, we worked as brokers, we bought our time and we sold it, and we could do anything that was legal, that wasn't violating the FCC rules and regulations, and we had time to promote. But today the jock is a hired person, and he's got to do exactly what he's told.

I didn't realise that. So y u used to buy time, and get your own advertisers...

I still do the same thing today. It's the same way now.

That's a marvellous system. You can do what you want.

You do what you want, as long as you within the law, and station policy. Station policy isn't too strenuous, but they don't care much, they don't care what I promote, you know, religious or blues, so I prefer religious music, after spending all of my young life in the blues. I could see it was going down, and I could see what the other jocks was doing to it. You know. Hey, you get out while it's good, you know. And today we just got a big town, and nothing is going on, but every night there was something going on. I used to broadcast from the Seven Dollar Lounge, a few blocks from here. Oh, I was all over Chicago, with Muddy Waters, Howling Wolf, Little Walter, any number of places. I used to broadcast from a hot-dog stand which had a drive-in, we had a band out there. Hundreds of people would come, and eat hot dogs and listen to the blues, the same thing, something similar to what they have up here on a Friday and Saturday, at Davis' place, but we just had a live broadcast. So, even though I'm in the religious field, it hurt me to see the blues go down, because the blues go down if no one is concerned about it. The jocks, the blues would pick back up again if the jocks was concerned about them. They claim it's a dead issue, but the blues will never die. The music they're playing on the radio now, I don't even know what they're playing. It has no meaning, no sound, it has the steady same beat, there's no variation in it, you know. The blues tell a story - it give you a sad feeling or a uplift feeling. Elmore James used to say in his lifetime, 'Lemme set 'em down.' He'd play a fast number and he would dance, and he would get a four-four beat, slow music with a meaning to it, and everybody would sit up there real quiet, and they wouldn't even drink, because they were listening, they was concentrating, and Wolf used to do the same thing. Wolf could sit a crowd down any time he was ready, he didn't have to tell 'em to sit down. He would sing a song about 'My baby quit me, quit me for another man,' and everybody had this same similar problem, and they would listen. But the music today has no meaning, just boomp de boomp de boomp de boomp. The blues tells a story, same as Gospel. It plays on your emotional feelings.

What do you think about the young musicians today? Do you think they can continue the tradition?

Well, his music ain't right, they don't even sound like the blues, because he's using the wrong music to it. Blues got to have a certain type of music - Dinah Washington sang the blues, lotta people doesn't know that. But her beat was like jazz. Joe Williams sang the blues, with Count Basie. Look at his beat. There's a million types of blues, but not the blues that we're referring to. You know? The real true blues, the music's got to coincide with the lyrics. You can't give me a up-tempo beat there, that's semi-rock'n'roll. BB King is the only one who's singing true blues now. Bobby Bland sings the blues, but it's a different type of blues from BB King. Little Milton, he got high class; Albert King, he sings the blues. You know.

it's your music that changes the atmosphere. And Mighty Joe Young, I don't think there's a man alive that know more about that than him and Jimmy Dawkins. It's your music that gives you the blues feeling. So the young artist just don't have it. He's trying to mix it up. He's got the psychedelic sound, he's got the rock sound, but he doesn't have the true blues sound, because I eat in various restaurants, and they play what they call the blues, and even guys in their forties, forty, forty-five years old, know it's not the same type of blues as we used to play. Muddy waters got the blues, he still play the blues. Joe Young is still playing the blues, but Joe's always had his certain type of sound. He never had the true, downhome sound, but he had a high-class sound. The lyrics was blues, but his music was just a little bit different. Joe's a good musician, you know. Do a lot of arranging, and writing. He reads, read and write. But Albert and BB still sticks to the trend of blues. John Lee Hooker, I haven't heard from him in quite some time, I don't know if he's still living...

He was in town a few weeks ago, played Biddy Mulligan's, a north side place.

Is that right? Sunnyland Slim's blues was different from the rest of the guys. I saw him, he came by here a couple of weeks ago. Sunny has always played the same type of blues. Roosevelt Sykes, and all those guys. But the real true blues men is Wolf, Muddy Waters, BB King, and Albert King. They've stuck to the same trend. If you want to fancy it up a bit, you throw in a couple of horns, but they've still got a blues sound.

Why did you change from blues to religion?

Well, a wise man will change. The Bible said, 'What gain is it for a man to win the world and lose his soul? Because every knee must bow, and every tongue must confess.' I don't care who you are and what you are, you got to go the same way. You got to give an account of what you're doing, and you wasn't born to just have your way, you was born to serve and praise the Lord. In fact, I knew the Lord before I even went into the blues, it was like what you call backslidin'. I went out in the world, and I made a lot of money, and there's no way that you're going to keep it. Once you know the Lord and you backslide, there's no way, he's got so many things that he'll put up on you, which people don't even seem to realise, and that's what we preach every night. See, you see a lot of people that was successful, they was businessmen, they had a family, and they was doing very well for themselves, and after a while something happens, and Boom! Lose everything they have. Well there was a reason for it, it wasn't because there was poor managers. It's he promised the Lord something, and He said, 'I want their love, I'll chase them.' I've seen a lot of men be rich, and went down to the gutter. It's because one day he knew the Lord, and he turned his back on Him. It's going to happen. It's going to happen, there's no way out. There's no way out. And by knowing the Lord previously, I got to where if I got a thousand dollars today, I'd need fifteen hundred tomorrow.

You just couldn't maintain, it was like, you hit your hand and jump out of it. You just can't hold on. Last night, I made a speech out there on the sidewalk, about God chases the one that he love, if he don't get you one way, he'll get you another. Now I know a lady that daughter is in jail, she was charged with manslaughter, and now she got it with murder. Shook her baby to death. And another one, son is doing five years. See, he do this to get your attention. Maybe you're flying too high, maybe your education, maybe your money, maybe somebody got your soul uplifted, that you don't even take time to think, God from whence it came, because all good things come from the Lord. So that's why. I got tired of being whipped, I just couldn't seem to accomplish anything. I was going backwards with my thing that I had, you go backwards, and no one can help you, there's nothing no one can do about it. Even a bank couldn't help you, when He's chasing you. Nobody can help you, according to this book. And I've seen it happen thousands and thousands of times, I've seen a lot of men and women that was wealthy at one time, they wasn't extravagant in their living - but they just turned their back on God, and you just can't make it. A lot of guys, Al Green there, he went to the ministry, and that other boy, I can't think of his name, several guys... oh yeah, I got his record here now, In fact he was in the ministry at first - Solomon Burke. He had sold fifteen million gold records, I got a brand new LP on him. He was in the church from a boy, and he got out there and made all that money, and things started happening to him, and he goes back, he just can't stand it. You sell fifteen million gold records, that's a lot of money. The royalty alone will take you the rest of your life. You just can't make it. There's several guys. Archie Dale, he's back with the gospel. Any number of boys, they couldn't make it. Here it is here. Solomon Burke, Into my life He Came, talking about all the money he made, money to burn, he could buy anything he wanted. But he didn't have the happiness or peace of mind. Because he grew up in churches, and he just wanted to see what's in the world, like the average person do. You know, ain't nothing to do with how successful you are, if you came up in church, you want to find out what the other people are doing. And you get out there and you have a taste of it, and he just let you have enough blessing to destroy you. And if you're sensible you come back. He said a wise man will always come in, but if you're foolish, you hear his word and you pay it no attention. He gives you your choice. And I just couldn't stand it any more. It's been discussed. Women call me up now, on the radio, and say, 'Why you playing that silly music?' I say I don't think it's silly. 'Why don't you play the blues?' Oh, that's all the time, all the time. Me and my son have arguments with guys, you know - my daddy have a right to change if he want to. It's your choice. If you want to live for the Lord. Because you're going to have to come before him anyway. Like I told Joe Young, the last time, Jimmy Dawkins, now Jimmy Dawkins read the Bible, but he hasn't come back to the Lord. He knows these things. He knows you got to come before the judgment bar, ain't no

doubt about it. You can talk to any minister in England, you've certainly got to come before... I don't care what you do, I don't care how successful you are, you got to come before him, you got to give account of what you do. A lot of people say, 'Well, I'm just born, when a man is dead he's dead, well that is not true. So I figured what I'd done was good, I came back to the Lord, I thought I was in perfectly good health, I've been back now for just coming up to five years, and last year I was in the hospital. I give Him the best of my adult life. Some people have to come back to him in a wheel chair. I don't appreciate that. The Bible say He call a young man because he's strong, an old man because he's wise. So I enjoyed the fame to an extent, but I was very blessed, I made a lot of money, but I didn't go completely down. I left with a few buildings. This one's paid for. Belwood, it ain't much, I just sent off my insurance on a property in England, Arkansas, I just sent off the insurance today. So I was wise enough and blessed enough to maintain some of it, but I lost much more. I booked bands, and there come a big snow or a big rain, and you lose fifteen or twenty or thirty thousand dollars in a night. I've had that to happen. I remember 1957. I booked at the Ashland(?) Boulevard Auditorium, it hold about thirty thousand people, and I lost my shirt. Snow, snow knee deep, and I had all those bands, out of town bands, and you gotta pay 'em. I've had this to happen. See, that's when you're being whipped. All these things happen to you. Another guy, next week or the week after next, book the same band, and nice, the sun is shining, the moon is shining bright, and your night it snowed. Can't get down Madison Street. That's when he's chasing you, and that begin to start turning something in your head, 'WHY, WHY, WHY?' I saw on the television, when you're sick, first thing, 'Why? Why me?' That's the first thing. Anything that happen to you at all, you want to know, 'Why me?!'. It's just your time. You've seen that, as young as you are, you seen a lot of guys have hit it off big, and after a while they started going backwards. Can't maintain. Because it wasn't meant for you in the first place. Another guy go to the Lord, and he just keep right on moving. Not big, but he maintain. The Bible said, old man David said, 'I once was young, now I'm old, I've never seen the righteous forsaken or a (?) begging bread.' You have never seen a man who's living with the Lord have to beg, or go ragged, or be destituted, never. They just keep on moving along. I remember when I first started making around \$50,000 a year, there's a man living next door to me had seven children, and he's a preacher, and his kids went just as dressed up as mine did. I couldn't figure that out. Seven children, and he sold vegetables, with a truck. Then I started to thinking myself, 'He got help.' Help coming from on high. Which a man with seven children, he'd have to be making three or four hundred dollars in them days, a week, to give them a decent living, a decent education. But by the help of God, he did it. So there were many reasons that I came back; if I hadn't known the Lord in my younger days, it might have been a different story. But by knowing him previously, and backsliding, doing something against what

I promised Him, then he just wouldn't let me continue to be successful, But a man who have never known the Lord, it's a different story. I can tell that to anybody. If you once knew the Lord in your young life, and then you decide in your older life that you're going to go out and see what's going on around the corner, you're in trouble. But if you never knew the Lord, he don't hurt you half as bad. So that was my problem, I just couldn't stand the pressure, got tired of losing, and then you have domestic problem, that's where it come in. Domestic problem. I never threw away my money - I wish I had have threw my money away. You see a lot of guys that live big, you know, big cars, lotta clothes, I didn't do that. But it still went. It still went. And broke ain't but broke. Lawyers. Lawyers. Marraiges. Everybody you marry want to sue you.

So you don't play any blues at all now, on your show?

No, no. I wouldn't do it. I'll never play no more blues. Because you don't continue to lie to God.

You think the blues is 'lying' music?

No, I said you don't lie to God. I lied to Him before, when I went back to the blues and I was very successful, on television, I became number six in this country, Dick Clark recognised me, I sent talent from my television programme to him, and then something happened, and when it happen, you know about it, no one will have to tell you when you're being whipped by the almighty God, you know it. Just like when you was a kid, when your father told you he was going to give you a spanking, and when he did spank you, you knew what he was whipping you for. The same thing over here. You know what you're being whipped for - it's because you was told to do something, or you promised to do something, and you reneged on it. So no, I wouldn't, all the money in the world... No, Davis, on the fish market up here, he offered me an hour television programme last year, twice, if I would play the blues. But as bad as I want television, I told him no.

I didn't know you'd been on television before, when was that?

I went on television in '67, till '72. I had a dance programme, Red Hollerin' Blues, Channel 26. I had people from France, they came over and taped the programme, and I heard a lot of boys say they played it back in France. I was on Channel 26 in the Board of Trade Building, about five years.

Who used to play on that?

Well, I was playing blues and rock'n'roll...

Live bands?

Yeah, oh yeah. We received four or five hundred letters a week or more. Easily four or five hundred, mailed from all over the country, you know. But then something happened, boom! I don't know what happened. I was independent, a broker, I bought my own time. That time was costing \$300 an hour. And they wanted me to work with the station, and I didn't do it, and they switched my night-time to day-time. And my audience in the daytime was not a working audience - they put me at two o'clock

on a Saturday. Now this will really make you start to thinking. On a Saturday, the working woman is shopping. The woman who's not working doesn't have no excess money to spend, she's watching, so what good is her? I lost everything I had. When I was on that night-time from ten until two, on a Saturday night, I was number six in the nation. But this is the way that He's working with you now. Everything you touch seem to go wrong. They changed me deliberately. And I lost my audience, I lost my buying power, I lost my sponsors. And a sponsor will not pay no \$150 a minute, and he ain't getting no results. And I was selling like crazy at night-time, they put me on the day-time, I wasn't drawing flies. And that really started me to thinking. See, I had to be whipped and drugged before I came to my senses. 'Something's wrong. Everything I touch is wrong.' And I just couldn't stand it no more. So I'm back. I don't make half of the money, but I still maintain. At least I have peace of mind. I mailed five cheques out today. Thank God for that. You make that big money, after a while, who you going to borrow from? Ain't nobody going to let you have it. All your so-called friends ain't going to let you have it. But I still salvage a couple of friends, Carl Jones, he's a steward friend of mine, Jimmy Dawkins - I can get money from them, even though they don't know when I'm going to pay them back. That's what you call a friend, and not you can borrow money from someone, and they let you have it because they know that you're good for it. But if you say, I don't know when I'm going to pay you back, and he let you have it, it's because he believe in you. I think out there I still have two or three left. But anybody that got money can borrow money. But when you don't have it, that's the time you can find out who's your true friend. So maybe some day some young guy will come by that really, he's gotta love the blues, he's gotta know the blues, he gotta feel the blues, he gotta talk the blues, walk the blues. I know Spann, he play the blues, but he's never felt the blues. I can tell when a person really feels something. When I get out there in church, they can get up and shout andsing; they don't feel what they're doing. You got to feel what you're doing. This thing become a part of you. So the blues is dead in Chicago, and throughout the country, because I still get magazines. They may be booking blues in big auditoriums, but I'm talkin' about local blues in the various towns. It's just not there no more. Rock'n'roll, and pop, I don't know what they're playing today. What are they playing today? It's not blues...

Disco...

Disco, it's got the disco beat, and one record you can drive to the middle of 95th Street, on one record, it must be ten or fifteen minutes long. Some gospel is like that. Some gospel is seven to ten minutes long. I can't play 'em because I got too many announcements to make. And a jock that's got a lot of sponsors can't play no record that's ten minutes long. I run four hours a night, and in the first hour I have to pick the shortest records I can find, two and three minute bracket, to get out, and then after twelve o'clock I can throw on a few longer ones. People

call me up for requests, and the average person calls me up for a request, roughly eight minutes, ten minutes, I say 'I can't play it now.' Have to wait until after twelve o'clock. Then I can play it.

You broadcast from here?

Oh yeah. Every night. From 12.05 to 2 am. All my broadcasting years, from 1949, I don't think I spent a year at a studio. I've always broadcast from my own. On my own equipment. It may not look like much, but it's mine. I've lost a couple of sets that was stolen. It's expensive, but at least people can come to see you. It is expensive. By being a broker, an independent producer, gives you the right to do these things. I had that privilege when I was hired by another local station, they gave me that privilege, because it popularise the station. Because when you're at a ball game, or a fight, it makes the station popular. So that's what helped me out a lot, broadcasting from all these various places. I did alot of it in the gospel, but I'm not doing too much of it now. But the last couple of years, I used to do a lot of it. Remote gospel. Everybody holds up something, cost. They don't look at the results. Now I have been here since about four o'clock this afternoon, and I had several calls - it's because they hear me every night from here And I imagine that I'd get much more than that if I was here to answer the phone. I get down here about four or five o'clock in the afternoon. Should be somebody here at nine o'clock every morning. It's because the phone just ring, ring, ring, ring. Yep. So what are you going to do? You going to write a book, or what?

Yes. I intend to. My money's running out, but I'll be here for about another month.

Then you going back to England to start your book, eh? Whatever happened to this boy and his wife...? He used to write Blues world. Boy, I can't think his name. Him and his wife. They followed the blues extensively. If I could call his name, I know you read about him, because his magazine went all over the world. He was affiliated with Alligator records, he was affiliated with this other record company out on Lincoln avenue. I think the record company that Koko Taylor was on, Hound Dog Taylor - I forgot about Hound Dog Taylor =

Are you thinking of Jim O'Neal?

Jim O'Neal, that's it, him and Amy, yeah.

They're still around. I tried to telephone them today, but there was nobody in.

Are they still around? yeah, oh, I knowed them for years, Jim O'Neal and his wife, Amy O'Neal. Yeah, he kept up with the blues. I know his magazine went all over the world. He used to send it to me, but he don't send it no more. Blues world magazine. I didn't know the boy's name at Alligator, I was thinking of the guy who's Delmark...

Bob Koester.

Bob Koester, that's right.

I saw him today.

See, when you get with the Lord, all the people that you know, they don't associate with you. If I was having the blues out there, some of them said last night, said if you was having the blues out there, you'd have Madison Street, the police... but when you're talking of the Lord, they look at you like you're crazy. Same as Noah, when Noah was preaching about it's going to rain forty days and forty nights, people thought he was crazy - 'That old man's crazy.' The same thing, they see me, they think I'm crazy. I'm not crazy, by a long shot. I just found out that there's only one way. And if I make a million bucks, or ten million bucks, and when I die I go to Hell, I still haven't accomplished anything. But each is his own, I don't knock, I'm not the type of preacher that I knock, I go round the blues boys, I go round the alleyway, drinking, I go round the garages in the alley - 'Here come the preacher,' they say. I say, 'Well, keep on drinking what you're drinking, and thinking what you're thinking, because I don't have no heaven and no hell to put you in, but I'll tell you what the Lord say.' You know, I don't ram it down their throats. I talk to Joe Young and Jimmy Dawkins, but I don't ram it down their throats. It wasn't meant to be. When a man come to himself, and he change of his own free will and accord, but it's no use me to try to force you to do something when you haven't made up your mind. Because I was out there, I played the blues, I promoted the blues, I drank, I smoked. I don't do those things no more. But I give you the same privileges I gave myself. I had to come to my senses, I had to make a choice. But I had blues boy's that come here. Homesick James has been here. Jimmy Lee, he used to play with Little Walter, he was round here about a couple of weeks ago, Scotty - they come by. Jimmy woulda been by. Jimmy always call me, send me a card when he go into various countries, England or France or Germany. Last time he sent me one I think he was in France. Sunnyland Slim, he came by. So we still together. I just hope that one day they'll change, and come to the Lord. But if they prefer not, then that's their prerogative.

You used to own a blues club, Copa Cabana.

Oh yeah. Copa Cabana. We cut a couple of LPs there, Willie Dixon, Sonny Boy Williamson, oh yeah, I used to manage him, Buddy Guy, Little Walter, Howling Wolf, they all recorded on that same night. Each one did a song, you know, about six cuts on the LP, twelve a side, and the six boys did the twelve from the Copa Cabana club. A very big LP. Davis, if you ever go up to Davis, up here at the Fish Market, ask him to play it. I introduce that record. Up there where they play the blues every Friday and Saturday, ask him to play it, say play that record that Bill Hill introduced. (Three small girls come in. "Hello. How are you? Have a seat. I'm busy right now, I'm doing an interview.") So when you go by the fish market, ask, his name is Davis, the guy who own the place.

There's an article in the Reader about him this week, did you see it?

Yeah? What'd it say? The Reader used to be a big newspaper one time, I don't know...

It still is.

Yeah? They had several radio station that used to advertise, alot of radio stations. Anyway, you ask, his name is Davis. Say that record that Bill Hill introduced, the one with Muddy Waters and Howling Wolf at the Copa Cabana club. He'll play it for you. I can't find it, I'd buy it myself, but I can't find it. He's got it up there.

How long did the club last?

Mmmmm. From '63 until about '67. Until that riot came, and they were burning and looting Roosevelt Road. It became very popular. That's where it started happening, at the Copa Cabana club in 1964. In '65 and '66 you could see declinement, and you were doing everything that you can to promote. I mean the competition, I never had no jocks that could give me competition - but it just wasn't meant for me, you know. And that's where I could see that something was wrong. Even if they stole a lot of money, I caught several people stealing, but that's to be expected, when you employ a lot of people. It just wasn't meant for me, I don't think. I look back over my life. It just wasn't meant for me, and I had several preachers that tell me the same, years ago. Bishop Poole, he got one of the biggest churches over here on the West Side, he used to tell me, 'Boy, you should come with me. Because you're not going to be successful doing what you're doing. And that's bad, when you know about the Lord, and when you don't do His will. See, if you don't know too much about him, he not going to bother you, but if you know him, it's like Jimmy, I tell Jimmy Dawkins. Jimmy know the Bible, Jimmy very good on the Bible. You know Jimmy Dawkins? You know his son had a fatal accident. Yep. Very fatal. 'Cause once you know Him and you don't keep his commands, boy oh boy. But if you don't know him, then you aren't in such big trouble. And I knew too much about the bible, and wasn't doing none of it. But like I said before, I will never knock the blues, I can always talk about it, in fact I was talking about it last night - they was, I don't bring it up. The people bring it up, because the people, they knew that I was one of the big promoters in the blues, and they said last night, if we was having the blues out here on Madison Street, you couldn't get down the street. But now, people pass by and look at you like you're crazy. When you out there singing and praising the Lord, they think you're crazy. So that's just about the size of it. I hope that my little information will be helpful for you.