

Kristi Potila  
interviewing Joe  
Potila

ME - O.K. first I'd like to  
start out with some  
questions about your  
background like when  
and where you were  
born?

MR. P - O.K. when it was a  
long, long time ago (laughs)  
about 1948 I was born  
on November 2, 1948 in  
Bell Memorial Hospital in  
Ishpeming.

ME - How many children were  
in your family?

MR. P - We had ten kids there  
were 6 girls and 4 boys.  
So uh let's see I have  
two younger brothers and  
three younger sisters page 1  
So I'm somewhere in the middle →



MR. P. <sup>continued</sup> - there

ME - what were your schooldays like?

MR. P. - My first day of school I remember pretty well. That was a bummer. My mother I think she rode on the bus with me to school when I first started kindergarten at National Mine, and when she left me there and I think I cried a little bit. So it was kind of a bumb day for at least the first half of the day, of course then I found out there was some pretty neat to do there so it wasn't so bad after that. And I went to National Mine through the ~~school~~ six grade and then my dad got transferred out to Salt Lake City Utah. And I went



continued

M.E.P. - to Junior High and High School there, which was quite a change because at National Mine, at the time they had thirteen grades actually ~~thirteen~~ kindergarten through twelve grade and I don't think there were 200 hundred people in the whole school. And then out in Kerns Junior High in Salt Lake there were 3 grades 7, 8, 9<sup>th</sup> and uh they had about 3000 kids in the school I think. So then

I went up to until my Senior year, I went to school in Utah and then I came back and finished my Senior year and graduated from National Mine and then just about three years ago I started at Northern as a film major so that's, ~~the~~ really different it's different from all my other schooling because



MR P- its because I wanted  
to not because I had  
to.

Me - When you were a kid  
did you want to be  
a writer and musician?

MR P- When I was a kid  
I wanted to <sup>be</sup> pretty  
much what a lot of kids  
wanted to be I guess. For a  
while I wanted to be a fireman  
and I wanted to be a policeman,  
and for a long time I wanted  
to be a forest ranger or a  
game warden or a smoke jumper or  
something that because we  
lived out in the woods, we lived  
out south of National Mine, and  
we didn't have any neighbors for  
a few years. So all I had to do  
is run around in the woods, and  
I felt pretty much at home  
there, so oh naturally I figured  
I grow up and still be in the woods  
be a forest ranger, or something



MR. P - in fact ~~and~~ I remember  
when I was very young  
we went to Ishpeming and  
visited my grandma and  
I couldn't get over it all  
the streets and the sidewalks  
and everything. I was looking  
at sidewalks and thinking  
gee! these are real sidewalks  
and I thought they only  
existed in little Lu Lu comic  
books I'd never seen a  
sidewalk before I remember  
that the first time of seeing  
sidewalks, but whh<sup>s</sup> I'm  
rambling and getting off the  
subject here. ~~and~~ I don't  
know if I ever <sup>really</sup> thought about  
being a writer until my Senior  
year in High school, because  
I was getting into music a  
little bit then, and then I  
was starting to write things  
down in a notebook, and a  
journal little verse and rhyme  
things and ideas. South page  
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MR P - I don't think I really thought about becoming a writer being a writer until after I graduated from school, and went to that other school that school of experience.

ME - How did your parents influence you on this?

MR P - Well my parents were really supportive of my music when I was a teenager, like all teenagers at some point in your life where your parents say why don't you get involved with something ~~as a hobby~~ ~~as a hobby~~ you don't do ~~anything~~ anything. Well, I was at that point where I wasn't doing much. Then I showed an interest, and I asked for a guitar just out of the blue one day. page 6



MR. P. - They got so excited  
they ran out and bought  
me one, and I played  
with it, practiced on it,  
and learned on it.

They encouraged me  
all the way. They  
were so glad to see me  
doing something besides  
hanging out. So they  
supported me as far as  
writing I really hadn't  
done any writing up  
to that point. In fact  
I don't know if they were  
ever really aware of my  
writing, but both of my  
parents died my father  
died about fifteen years  
ago, and then my mother  
died about six years ago,  
and I really hadn't gotten  
too far into writing  
up to that time, but

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MR. P- as far as playing music  
and pursuing music as a  
possible career, especially  
my dad encouraged me on  
that because he was a working  
man he, he worked all his  
life, he worked as a lumber  
jack in his younger days  
and mechanicing, things like  
that and he worked for 35  
years for Hercules powder  
company, but he always  
encouraged me to do what I  
wanted to do with my life. He  
never said be a working like  
me in fact I think he wanted  
something better for his kids  
and if we had a talent or an  
interest that we could pursue  
he was really enthusiastic  
about it, and he always  
told me that it doesn't  
matter if you make a page  
million dollars or if you



MR. P- just ~~could~~ make enough  
to pay the bills and get  
by. If your doing  
something with your life  
that you can enjoy doing, then  
thats successful. So he en-  
couraged me a lot in that way

ME- Who else might have influenced  
you and how?

MR. P- Ohh. • A lot of people  
influenced when I first  
started playing the guitar.  
Of course I listened to  
the radio and picked up  
things from the radio,  
listened to the songs. That  
was in Salt Lake City that  
I started that and there  
they had a lot of country  
music on the radio. So  
I listened to a lot of



MR. P. - the old standards  
the classics by Hank Williams  
and Jim Reeves and  
Jimmy Rogers all kinds  
of people, and I use to  
I'd learn the words to  
<sup>their</sup> songs, and learn to play  
them on the guitar, and  
I'd sing them for ~~my~~ my  
own enjoyment, and play  
them, and I got such  
a nice ~~feeling~~ <sup>feeling</sup> from ~~them~~  
Some of those songs, I  
guess it started to sink  
to me that maybe I  
could do that I could  
write songs and say things  
that I wanted to say or just  
write something that someone  
else could get a good feeling  
from the way I got a good  
feeling from these songs. Page 10



MR. P - So uh? They influenced  
me and a lot of the local  
musicians in that area  
once ~~at about~~ I started getting  
out and playing with other  
people ~~at~~ they influenced  
me. There was an I  
think the first person  
I ever played with was a  
guitar player named Bob  
Allen and then there was  
a he had a friend who was  
a saxophone player Al Herrera  
and he showed me a lot  
of things. Bob did, on the guitar  
and we played some things  
together just for fun and then  
eventually I got out and met  
working musicians who worked  
in the clubs and the bars  
around Salt Lake City, and  
they influenced me a  
lot. I would go in my page  
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MR. P- parents would go with me  
because I was too young  
to go into those places, but  
they would go with me and  
I'd get up and play with  
different bands. ~~I learned~~  
a lot from those people  
they had a great influence on  
me. I really looked up to  
them, because they were so  
far advanced compared to  
me, in music. So, all kinds  
of people influenced me

I guess during my life  
and a lot of times you  
don't realize how much  
until later when you start  
thinking about it, and then  
of course I read books  
to and that influenced me  
things would come alive  
out of a book and make  
want to try doing that, try  
to write things like that. So  
I've been trying to keep  
involved in that kind of page  
writing + so. So there <sup>is</sup>



MR. P - are so many people that can influence you couldn't begin to name them all.

ME - What is some of the history about the band your in now?

MR. P - The band started in 1975. When I came back from Salt Lake City, and one day Jim DeCaire gave me a call. We got together and we started out with him as a drummer and I play the guitar, and at first we didn't have a base player we had someone who played steel Jim Maskins, and we had a three piece outfit. We started as Joe Arkansas and the Nite Beats which was the name of a band that use to play around here back in the 50's, and Page



MR.P- the guys real name was Joe  
Arkansas, and in fact years  
later we finally tracked him  
down he lives in Des Moines  
Iowa and talked to him on  
the phone, and told we were  
using his name and he was  
thrilled. But anyway after  
a few years we shortened  
the name to Joe Arkansas  
Band, and meanwhile  
Jimmy and I were taking  
trips to Nashville places like  
that we were writing songs  
trying to pitch songs to other  
artists to record, and that's a  
tough way to go because there  
is so much competition and  
so many people down there  
doing that same thing. So after  
a while we got to thinking, well  
why don't we just record our  
own songs write and record  
our own songs



MR. P- and while were doing that  
Why don't we write things  
about our own area. So we  
began to do that and the idea  
of ~~novelty~~ novelty and comedy  
come along we thought  
there are a lot of funny  
things in a local area like  
this as there are in any  
small local area around  
the country in New England,  
down south, Louisiana and we  
would just write about our  
particular area, and so once  
we started doing that then we  
thought we were never to Arkansas  
were not from Arkansas why  
should we have a name Arkansas?  
So finally we began to gradually  
change the name to ~~Ark~~ Ark  
and the transition is complete and  
we dropped the other name  
completely.

ME- when you started out page 15  
in this band what kind of place







MR. P- but we also have been getting into  
fairs we played the Saxon County fair  
last summer which was a lot of  
fun, and now were getting ~~calls~~ calls  
for more fairs and things like  
that and even some concert type  
jobs. So its quite a difference from  
playing the little bars that we  
used to play were playing a wider  
variety of things now we play recreation  
shows and things like that we  
played radios we have people  
actually now calling for us to  
do dances or concerts. We  
kind of shy away from doing  
a whole concert thing because we  
have been a dance band for years  
and what we like to do is mix  
the show with the dance. So  
the first set or two we can  
do a lot of show and comedy  
and after that have dance and  
people can dance. So were  
playing a pretty wide variety  
of things now and its much  
more interesting.

ME - Tell me about some of the songs that were on the radio? Page 17



MR. P. - Well our first song we ever  
got on the radio was Smelting  
U.S.A. I think that was about  
three years ago. That wasn't even  
a record at the time we just made  
a tape in studio 8 in Ishpeming,  
and took the tape down to the  
radio station and had them play  
it so we could listen to it over the  
air ~~and~~ and see how it sounded and  
so eventually we did cut a record  
on that one it was on the flip  
side of Rusty Chevrolet and we  
got airplay on both of those although  
Rusty Chevrolet last year did a lot  
better than Smelting U.S.A. of  
course Smelting is kind of a localized  
thing people in a lot of different  
places in the country don't even  
know what smelting is and  
some places where they do that  
same thing they don't call  
them smelt they call them  
Greenion. So they might not connect  
with it, but the Rusty Chevrolet went  
over really well last year well  
being a Christmas song and



MR. P - Everything and any place where there's winter and rusty cars and people who like to drive them. It went over really well and so it was the beginning of our recording career.

ME - How many tapes and records do you think you have sold altogether?

MR. P - Well the Rusty Chevrolet, I think the first year it was released we sold about 10 thousand copies of that and then the Yapanese tape which was about two years ago<sup>was</sup> released we sold about 10 thousand copies of that initially too and now just this year this last fall we released the Culture Shock and it's been pretty phenomenal is the only way we can look at it that first week or so we sold 10 thousand copies actually that was only in a couple days, but up-to-date now I think we've sold 30 thousand Culture Shock and now we're getting and increased demand for the Yapanese a gain and we've sold a couple thousand more of those and were going to sell more the demand is picking up and then we had the 2<sup>nd</sup> week of Clear Camp which also went over really nice this fall and we've sold I think 10 thousand of those so far. So just off the top of my head let's see 25,000 records and 30,000 of the Culture Shock tape



ME.P- and 10 or 15,000 of the Japanese tapes,  
but that 30,000 Culture Shock tapes has  
been within the last 45 days. So if it  
keeps up like that which I doubt  
that it will it will slack off a little  
bit, but I don't think it will drop off  
completely. I'm kind of curious to  
see what we can sell in the next  
year of that so I'm looking forward to that

ME- What places in the country has your  
tapes and records had the most  
effect on?

ME.P- I think the New England States  
have picked upon it a lot. Vermont  
has been one of our best. We really  
have had a <sup>really</sup> good response from  
Vermont, but then the more people  
that hear about it then the more we  
spread out and we've had some good  
calls from Free Port Illinois and I  
think Pennsylvania and Wisconsin has  
really been the greatest all over  
Wisconsin. They've been great they really  
got excited over what we've done. They  
have invited us down and we've gone  
down to Green Bay, Wausau and made  
appearances at radio stations and people  
came in and bought tapes and wanted  
autographs and things which was  
really something new to us



MR. P- because they didn't know us in any other way than through our tape through our music and they look on us as recording artists. You would get that reaction in different areas of the country and at home you're just you an ordinary person. ~~Well~~ Well we've had one of our songs reviewed by the Bramenan (View) which is a man who does tip sheets for radio stations across the country and he did a review on the Second week of Deer Camp and after that we got calls from California and from Texas and Oklahoma and places like that, New Jersey. It's really going over ~~that~~ well we've wondered how much of this content of this tape would be understood by people around the country it being so locally oriented, but comedy is comedy and as far as the Second week of Deer camp they have Deer hunting all over the United States and that's why we get such a good response from places such as Texas and California, because of that response from all the different places in the country were looking to really promote that one next year and try to get some nationwide play, we have reached from coast to coast but page 21  
its in just certain locations



ME. P - What we want to do is cover the whole United States and see what happens. We think it will go because we've had such good response from places all over the country.

ME - Have you heard any criticism about your music?

ME. P - Yes, and that was nice to hear because the way we figure it if you start drawing criticism then you must be doing something and you must be becoming successful or something the biggest criticism we've got ~~is~~ I think has been the grammar we use on the tape believe it or not the grammar I think has been the thing people have criticized the most. I think some English departments and some people who may think that kind of language or grammar doesn't give an accurate picture of ~~the~~ people in this area there's always been a thing in this area that because of our accent and the way that we talk people seem to think that it sounds uneducated or ignorant which isn't the case at all. For instance in the name Da Yoopers spelled with a Da if you listen to people speak a lot of people in this area they would say it that way instead of the "the" they would say Da it has nothing to do with a lack of education or a lack of sophistication it's an accent that is kind of a blend of Canadian, Finnish, French, Swedish and what we talk about in ~~the~~ one of our songs is kind of along those lines of the U.P. being a totally unique place and it's just our area it's ~~our~~ own actually and if you listen to people from the Louisiana Bayous for instance one of our songs got picked up years ago by ~~22~~



ME. P - crazy Cajun music and the president of that company who was a very successful and very creative, intelligent person is from the Louisiana Bious and to listen to him talk you would think that he never had a day of schooling in his life, but he's a very intelligent and a very successful person and when you listen to people from Nashville or down in Texas a lot of times you would never think that person had a P.H.D. in anything or even a high school Diploma because of the accent, but the accent doesn't reflect the intelligence or the education its just a cultural thing and as far as criticism of that the way I look at it is every lyric that we have on the tape or any of our songs any of those lyrics can be put into quotes because those are characters who are in those songs and its just like Mark Twain if he has Tom Sawyer speaking he doesn't have him speak perfect English with perfect grammar because Tom Sawyer wouldn't talk that way so he has him talk the way he would talk and he puts it in quotes so thats my answer to that kind of criticism is that its just the characters speaking and just take every lyric there and put it in quotes and no problem

ME - What are some goals that you would like to reach for the future?

MR.P - Well I see goals as stepping stones to something else. I don't see them as ends to anything so I have I guess I could call them



MR. P- Short term goals because theres always something beyond that. And I make a good living doing what I like to do. I want to write, oh I'd like to write a hit song a number 1 best seller and I'd like to do other kinds of writing to, but I like fiction writing and I ~~could~~ even have a story right now sent out to a publisher magazine and I'd like to become a published writer in that way. Mainly just like to do what I like to do for a living and not have to work somewhere ~~to~~ just to make money to pay the bills and if I can do that I'd say that's a goal that's worth reaching. Ultimately I think the ultimate goal is to be able to look back at the end of it all and say I lived my life the way I wanted to and I did what I planned to do. I made it work pretty good I guess and to look back and say well maybe we didn't change the world or set the world on its ear, but at least it was fun.