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Russell: Okay, it's going all right Lee.

Collins: It's going. This is Lee Collins talking here. I was born in dear ole' New Orleans October 17, nineteen hundred and one [1901]. I was raised up town. I was almost born with a cornet in my mouth, my daddy was a cornet player, and my grandfather was a cornet player, they played with the old Tio boys, Lorenzo Tio's daddy [Lorenzo, Sr.] and his uncle [Luis], and I started blowin' on my daddy's cornet when I was around, 'bout six or seven, six or seven years old. And I kept on playin' and playin' and playin'.

Russell: About which street were you born on?

Collins: I was born on Delachaise and Robertson.

Russell: Oh, yes.

Collins: Yeah, and I was raised on Louisiana Avenue between Freret and Robertson.

Russell: Can you remember the first bands you heard, you heard your father's

Collins: Yes, yes, the first, first good jazz band I heard was the "Eagle" band with Bunk [Johnson] with Bunk.

Russell: How did you---

Collins: Bunk was a man that really knocked me out and the first time I heard Bunk I got in my head I wanted to play cornet just like Bunk did. Bunk did. Well, Bunk played down in the lower part of the city, the ole' "Funky Butt Hall" on Perdido Street.

Russell: Oh, yeah, I took a picture of that.

Collins: So, the great friend of my family, a fellow call "Foots" used to work in Poydras's Market. "Foots" was a bouncer there, and "Foots" used to carry me there and let me hear hear Bunk play.

Russell: Well, did he really have great big feet, I think Bunk told me about that---

Collins: Yeah, he had big feet, "Foots" was a bouncer, and he had feet almost as big as the "Funky Butt Hall". (Russell laughs) Yeah, "Foots" was a great man. So "Foots" knew the "Eagle" band and Frankie Duson and [Sidney] Bechet was a little boy then playing clarinet, in his band. So, all the guys ✓ ✓ come, I walked in the place and "Foots" brought me, thought I was Frankie Duson's boy, cause I looked like Frankie at that time.

Russell: Yeah

Collins: Frankie was standing, and we had a resemblance of each other, so they had wore

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Collins: uniforms, I'll never forget that, had on them good old brown uniforms at that time, and I put on Bunk's Eagle cap and picked up his cornet, and start to playing "At the Animal's Ball", that I'd heard him play.

Russell: How old were you, about?

Collins: I was about ten years old at that time. My aunt and I had moved down on Gasket Street

Russell: Yeah

Collins: I wasn't livin' so far from "Funky Butt Hall" at that time. So, my daddy wanted me to be strickly by by the music. So, I knew practically all the old down town musicians were, musicians like Manuel Perez, they read music, but they didn't have that spirit. Those uptown boys had, like Joe Oliver and Bunk, and ah ah all the rest of the boys, there was another boy they called Johnson, wasn't no kin to Bunk, was a good cornet player.

Russell: Oh yeah.

Collins: Ah!

Russell: Joe Johnson

Collins: Joe Johnson. Joe Johnson and Bunk and Buddy Petit, they all played about the similar style, so that kept me going and so 'bout around nineteen fifteen [1915] I was close to fourteen years old, I start playin' with the old Columbia Band, the old Columbia Band, cornet player called "Tige" Chambers.

Russell: Oh Yeah.

Collins: Whose band was gettin' ready to come north and so George Foster was in the band, "Pops" Foster and he told them, says "there is a kid up town, on Louisiana Ave. Play like Bunk--Lee-Collins--why don't you all give Lee Collins a chance, and let him play cornet in this band". So, I joined the Columbia Band very young, very young, used to wear uncle Ernest's long pants, and coat, and

Russell: uh-huh.

Collins: To go play in that band. And go to school in the daytime--play in the band all night, all night long, then go to school in the daytime. Thomy Lafon school. Not so far from my home, where I lived at. I lived on Louisiana Avenue. So, about nineteen fifteen, sixteen, The Zulu parade, a drummer by the name of "Black Benny" hired me to play a street parade. In this

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Collins: parade, was Louie Armstrong. I had seen Louie Armstrong play before, but I hadn't seen him, the first time I'd seen him play he was with the Jones's band, they came to play for the dedication of the playground at Thomy Lafon him and "Kid" Rena at that time. But I had never seen him in a band, professional. So Benny hired me for this first parade. The musicians was hard to get I was very young to play for the Zulus. In the band was Louie Armstrong and another cornet player by the name of "Shots" [Louis Madison] and myself, we three played. So that was a great thrill of my life because I hadn't never played a street parade before. Yeah, I had never played a street parade before and it was for a really barrel house club, the Zulus. So, I noticed Louie had a similar touch of Bunk, too; he's playing on the order of Bunk, so ah that just set me right because it brought my style right to me. So, at that time, I thought I was really going good. So Bunk, Bunk was, Bunk was, was playing then spot jobs around I think the Eagle Band ^{had broke} broke up or something. "Tubby" Hall had left and went to come to Chicago, he was drumming with them at that time. Bechet was playing in the Honky Tonks, for a guy they called "Toodlum" [Napoleon Johnson] at Gravier and Franklin. So ah, Bunk had, didn't show up on a job once, he was on his little drinking spree.

Russell: Yeah.

Collins: So, they come and got me to play in the great Bunk's place. So that really made me feel good and ah not because Bunk was drunk and didn't show up but because I had a chance to sub for Bunk, I was commenced to thinking that I was getting someplace.

Russell: Yeah.

Collins: The time I was good enough to go in Bunk's place, because Bunk was the number one cornet at that time. Joe Oliver, at that time, was a butler on Magazine Street. He was playing and comin' out (unintelligible). So I had heard, I didn't hear Joe Oliver play until ah until he come to work for Pete Lala's, Pete Lala's Cabaret. Pete Lala's; it was Joe Oliver and Lorenzo Tio in that bunch playing together, so I used to go I was too young to go into the hall, so I'd stand outside listen at Joe. But Joe, Joe was a little different from Bunk, my man was very powerful. He was nice. So, I kept on goin', kept on goin', and kept on goin'. Until I-- Louie Armstrong's little band, he's commence to duck his little band, and was managed by a great friend of mine called "Little Joe" Lindsey.

Russell: Yeah, I knew him.

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Collins: Called Joe Lindsey and his Brown Skin Jazz Band. So, I joined Joe Lindsey's band, where Louie was playing and Louie was, went in the honky tonk back at that time, and I was playing with "Little Joe" Lindsey's band. So, ah 'bout that time, I got a chance to go, to go work for, go work down in the er district, what they call Storyville now.

Russell: Yeh.

Collins: . Buddy Petit was working with Jimmie Noone and at a place they called Fewclothes place, you heard of that place.

Russell: Oh, yeah, yeah. George Fewclothes.

Collins: George Fewclothes' place.

Russell: Right there near, ah --- Customhouse.

Collins: So, Buddy, yeah, Buddy Petit had joined the Tuxedo Band with [Oscar "Papa"] Celestin they went out Suburban Gardens. So I, I goes out to ah to George Fewclothes in the district and worked for and worked where Buddy Petit was playin' with Jimmie Noone and that bunch.

Russell: Yeah

Collins: So, at that time, there was commence drafting then, drafting for the World War I,

Russell: Oh, yeah.

Collins: Registration was comin' around, and the guys was lookin' for these slackers that didn't, that didn't register for the war, didn't register to go to war, and the guy ask me, say, "Let me see, your registration card?"

Russell: You weren't old enough.

Collins: I was a pretty big boy for my age, I was way, looked way older than my age, because I was tall and slender and had on them big high-waisted long pants of my uncle's. (laughter) So, I told him, I say I didn't have no registration card--I--I say, I'm not old enough to to go to war". And he says, "what you doin' here in here?" And he say, and he gimme about three minutes, three seconds to get--get out. (Russell: laughs) Get out. So I got my I got out the district. Went on back and I joined Jack Carey's band. Jack Carey's band with a young clarinet player just come in, just begin playing was Edmond Hall, and so Jack Carey had had his brother playing cornet with him, "Mutt" Carey, so "Mutt" Carey had went with Ory, back with "Kid" Ory's band.

Russell: uh-huh

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Collins: So, ah, I gits in ah Jack Carey's band, and told Jack Carey 'bout this young clarinet player that I like. So, Jack Carey said git him, and the clarinet player was Edmond Hall. So we went to workin' with ah with Jack Carey. At that time, ah Jack Carey was playin' "Tiger Rag", which was not on wax then, but they was callin' it "Jack Carey", playin' the ole' "Tiger Rag",

Russell: Oh, yeah

Collins: but we didn't call it "Tiger Rag". So, they taught me, "Tiger Rag", and everybody would say play "Jack Carey". So we was playin' spot jobs. All around Magazine Street all the rice jobs, fraternity jobs, and every where we was doin' good. I was makin' quite a bit "jack" for myself at that time. Very young--I was still was in my teens. Still was in my teens. Playin' cornet. So, then, I stayed with Jack Carey's band for about a year. And I leaves Jack Carey's band and join another band, they call the Young Tuxedo Band.

Russell: Yeah.

Collins: You heard of that band?

Russell: Yeah, they still have one they call---

Collins: Was run by a bass player, they called "Duck" Ernest. So "Duck" Ernest had another cornet player in the band, was Kid Rena. So he was using two cornets--Kid Rena and myself. ✓
✓ a little powerful cornet player, played very high at that time. So "Duck" says "Lee, I'm gonna leave Rena go because Rena is gettin' to drinking too much, and I think that it will spoil you and start you to drinking". I never was a guy could drink much likkor^{liquor}, much whiskey, anyway, anytime a few drinks I'd drink would always made, made me sick. And it show up in my playin'. So, they got rid of Rena, so I could get the whiskey away from me.

Russell: Yeah (laughs).

Collins: So I played around, played around, played around, so I leave "Duck" Ernest's band again and goes back to Jack Carey's band because Jack Carey had got that job where Joe Oliver and ah Ory was playin' at, at Gravier and Rampart called The Winter Garden. Used to be a place there, do did you hear about that place?

Russell: Yeah, that's ah

Collins: Upstairs

Russell: Upstairs, that's the Pythian Temple, they call it sometimes, I think.

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Collins: Yeah. We worked with Jack, Jack Carey say, "See, you all just quit too early", we went about place where we used to call Eagle's Saloon run by Ben Dailey at that time, say, ah Ben Mulligan I meant to say. Say, I'm goin' to work now at the Winter Garden, and so I gets back with Jack Carey's band and get Edmond Hall. We goes back to Jack again and start playing. So I had quite a ball around ah, around the Winter Garden, all the best class musicians used to come and sit in, Lorenzo Tio, ah Buddy Petit, was the King here, young cornet player then in New Orleans, because Bunk had done ah burnt out and went to the country at that time, New Ib----a place they call New Iberia.

Russell: Yeah. How did ah Buddy Petit play?

Collins: Buddy Petit played in a simi---just like Bunk. I couldn't tell the difference between him and Buddy, him and Bunk. Buddy Petit was the, was a cornet that really knocked me out. He really, he really. Then I commenced playin' like, between Buddy and Bunk. Buddy Petit was a cornet player had a great big tone, and a beautiful soul, and he played with ah, great drive, he didn't play many high notes, but he didn't need to make no high notes, the way that guy played in the scales in the staff, obviously not scales was everything. Played--he didn't need to make no high notes.

Russell: Yeah.

Collins: So, Buddy was very good, so Buddy taken a like to me and so he say, "Kid", he say, used to called me then "Little Lee". Everybody used to call me "Little Lee", so he says, "Little Lee", say, you really knock me out, he say, you're doin' good, he say, you studyin' put me in mind of ole Bunk. Well, I say well that's my man, that's the guy I'd like to play like, Buddy, was Bunk so he says, "that's the guy I come behind too, Bunk." He say, "Bunk and Joe Johnson was the man knocked me out." So I leave used the Winter Garden and I go, I go to work that time I played they called--on Deca^Vuter Street. It was run by a little Spanish guy. Deca^Vuter, it was on ^VDeca^Vuter out there around by the French Market. And it was ah, was about three of us played, we had a white guitar, and a white clarinet player, a boy by the name of Sidney Arodin, what later recorded with me with "Astoran Astoran band Hot Eight". I think that's the name. So, Sidney Arodin and the kid, this guitar player, he was unknown guitar, I would like to remember his name, but was a very good guitar player. With piano and drums, it was just a pick up band,

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Collins: with ah that's why I say, that ole' New Orleans had mixed bands, I think before any city, before they ever thought of that. And nobody paid a bit attention to it. So Sidney Arodin and I, we played together. Sidney Arodin and---, and that's where Sidney Arodin used to play this number--what's this number he composed, but he sold it to [Hoagy] Carmichael.

Russell: "Lazy River".

Collins: "Lazy Rhythm". He used to play it and mug it everytime he got drunk. He played it, cause he got that inspiration, used to go sit, sit on the river every morning and blow his clarinet and look at the river in that river is kinda lazy at that time of the morning comin' into town and he used to play that piece. "Lazy River", and I used to play it with him, that way back there before "Lazy River" ever figured, I was when I seen the music of "Lazy River", I had heard of "Lazy River" [Oh, I knew it was Sidney's piece right away. So, Bill, we playin' this little job, and ah the war was on. That 1917, war was on. And ah, made little things different, musicians was half of them was--cause they had a law. "Work or fight Some of us was workin', but I never did work, me, because I always knew all the little hiding places.

Russell: Yeah

Collins: Outside the district, where you could go--where I could go and hide with my cornet play. So, I stayed away, one time I didn't try to work. Joe Lindsey and Louis Armstrong cained me, we all made up their--Louis was workin' out there, and I, they all made up their mind to go to work, to work, and so they carried me out there, and I seen how hard the work wa before I could start, and I slipped off.

Russell: What sort of a job was it?

Collins: Oh, man, it was rolling cement up on a where they were buildin' ships, buildin' ships, and I was, shucks, I didn't care if it payed \$50 a day, I didn't want no part of it, because I still loved my horn, and I didn't want to stay away that long, that long away from m cornet. So, I got away from that way

Mrs. Collins: Just a minute, you want to rest a minute.

Russell: Yeah, you had better rest, why don't you rest awhile.

Mrs. Collins: Yeah

Russell: Yeah, it's goin' already alright again. Machine is shut off and Collins rest awhile

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Collins: Me and that guy [Louis Armstrong] even talks alike, huh? [WR: had played back the tape

Russell: Yeah

Collins: I believe there's something down there, in that New Orleans, that climate, that makes a man you know I was hoarse very young, that like climate

Mrs. Collins: You ready?

Russell: Yeah, it's goin'-----it's alright.

Collins: It's alright to talk?

Russell: Yeah, go ahead, now, uh-huh.

Collins: So, Bill, so Bill, playin' that cornet really was my life. I lived that life I lived that life and I loved it. Well, you really got yourself a reputation playin' cornet in New Orleans. We was playin' in the brass bands, parades. On those parades you met everybody and the cornet players all had their cuttin' contest, so I played in the brass band in Black Benny's Brass Band with Louis, Rena, and myself, regular. In later years, I worked with the Tuxedo Band with Papa Celestin. That is where I got, commenced gettin' some of my best technique of good old funeral marches, we used to play, good old funeral marches, and then--them heavy six eighths like "Gettysburg March",

Russell: Yeah

Collins: In the parades and everything, and it's--in those days everybody second lined and picked out their man, who they liked, who they liked, who they'd like to be and then you got famous by that. It's a funny thing, you played in a orchestra, people didn't pay no attention to you, but as soon as you hit that street, everybody had their eyes on you, especially, see, those that played cornet, they didn't watch nobody but the cornet and the drums, and the clarinets. So, I go to work with a boy friend of mine, I was raised up with Earl Humphrey, one of them Humphrey boys. One of 'em was a drummer, and Percy later later come to be a cornet player. I helped him out. His grandfather taught him [Grandfather Jim], his grandfather taught me for awhile little music, too. Then Willie Humphrey clarinet. So we makes up a band, we makes up a band and together and me played around together a long time, we went to the old LaVida dance hall on Iberville between Burgandy and Rampart, next we were at Fern and we had little Eddie Miller clar----Eddie Miller, saxophone player, used to play at, used to come in and sit in with me every night there. Now then I went to work at Canal and Carondelet with the

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Collins: bass tuba player, ah of the Tuxedo Brass Band -- Eddie Jackson. Stayed up there a long while playing cornet. Ah, one of the greatest thrills of my life, around 1924 I got a letter from Joe, Joe Oliver. Yeah. Preston Jackson and ah and ah, what's that other boy trombone played drums huh, played a trombone, Mary, come here to see me, was him and Little Brother Montgomery?

Mrs. Collins: Al Wynn.

Collins: Al Wynn, they was kids then, just learning how to play trombone at that time. 1924 I gits a letter from Joe Oliver, Joe Oliver tellin' me that Louis had quit him and was was was goin' to work for Dreamland, but was talkin' about, leavin' and going to Chi--New York City. And say, ah Lorenzo Tio had wrote and told Joe Oliver about the progress that I was makin' on my cornet 'cause Joe had asked whose all about our cornet player down there, that could play like Bunk and ah all the good old boys, Lorenzo told him, say Lee Collins is about the best they got in jazz down there now, so Joe wrote me a letter and asked me how 'bout, how would I like to come to Chicago to work in the Lincoln Gardens with him, he says. He says, I couldn't hardly finish, I didn't even finish readin' the letter (Russell laughs) I got got, go up to Chicago to work with him, I stop readin' the letter. So I went, ran on out. At that time, I talked it over with my first wife at that time, and I say, I got a chance to go to Chicago with Joe Oliver, what, how about me, what you think about me going. And she got knocked out about it, and she say "Jesus", we both, we walked around in a daze for about an hour before we could say anything. So, I go, I makes a bee line right then for Western Union and I, and I goes up to Western Union and I send Joe a telegram and tell him I say I would like very much to come to Chicago and join him at the Lincoln Gardens. So Joe Oliver's looked like before I could get back home, I had ticket there. Joe got the telegram and he sent a ticket and told me to come at once. So I goes to Chicago. First time and to play with Joe. So, I go to Chicago, well, Baby Dodds, and Johnny Dodds and all of them had done quit Joe at that time. Baby Dodds and ah they was workin' down at Kelly's Stable, him and Johnny Dodds, did they tell you about that?

Russell: Yeah. Where was your job?

Collins: Yeah, they were workin' down there, and ah

Russell: Where was Joe playin' then?

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Collins: Joe was playin' at the Lincoln Gardens.

Russell: Lincoln Gardens.

Collins: Lincoln Gardens. Louis was working at the Dreamland, had joined the band at the Dreamland--him and Lil [Hardin Armstrong] was workin' there together.

Russell: Yeah

Collins: So, I guess it was, I guess I come to Chicago and I joined Joe's Band. Well, Joe had George Fields [Filhe] and ah he had a big band, he didn't have the kind of the band he had now, he had a cornet playin with the men by the name of Bob Schoffner. What went later to the Plantation with, with Dave Peyton. So, we had the band playin', they was playin on such all the good ole tunes from New Orleans, so Joe come down and talked to me Lincoln Gardens packed and jammed King Jones was the announcer at that time, and they was jumpin', and Preston Jackson and the other little trombone player what's his name again?

Russell: Al Wynn

Collins: Yeah, Al Wynn, since I been sick, I can't think of nobody's name. Al Wynn ah brought over there in the Lincoln Gardens. So, ah, Joe say, Joe always was a nasty talker, you know and Joe

Mrs. Collins: You had better not talk.

Collins: Joe put me in the dozens [got insulting]. I heard you was there, I heard you could blow, he said Tio told me you a human bee. And I laugh and Joe laugh, and I say well Joe you know, I can't play like you, but I can play, say, what numbers, you know all them numbers you heard me play up there, I say, why I know all the standards like "Panama" and "High Society", I know 'em all the good ol' New Orleans tunes. And all the standards. He say, ah well, you be here tomorrow at two o'clock and we'll have rehearsal. So, I stayed 'til the last note that Joe's playin' and I still couldn't sleep so I went home, living on Cottage Grove and 33rd at that time, 3310 Cottage Grove. So, I went home, I couldn't sleep, because the thrills, thrills about sittin' by the King, King Oliver at that time. I went, Joe called a rehearsal, after we run down about three tunes, Joe stopped the rehearsal and say "Well that's enough", he say, "You got a tuxedo suit, Lee?" I say, "No, man, I ain't got no tuxedo". He say, well just wear your dark suit. He say be to work tonight. He say, you start to work tonight \$85

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Collins: a week. Five 85, I had never had any work where you was paid eighty-five dollars a week, I made it, but, I had never had that kind of salary before, Jesus, have mercy.

Russell: Yeah

Collins: Eighty-five a week, I say. So, I go to work with Joe, and Joe was tickled to death of everything I say, I say I'm, I say, am I alright Papa? He say, "You alright!" So, he say, well, you go on tomorrow you come and get them red beans and rice, I have Stella to cook you a nice dinner, Lee. He say, come on over. He say, so I went over there. So Miss Stella met her at the door with smiles, and say, "Lee", she say, "you Lee eh," Say, I say, Yes, Mrs. Oliver, she say, Joe, Joe, I'm so glad you made Joe, feel Joe sleep now, he's gona wake up. Joe, you made Joe feel good by she says, Joe seems happy now, he got a boy this sittin beside him is just like Louis plays and he says the ole New Orleans stuff...he's happy again. So I am glad that he had happy, so we got up so Joe, and I ate, and Joe said well you sure surprised me, Lee. I say, I'm glad Joe, because I really want to play with you. I say, it was one of the big thrills of my life to come with you in the big time and especially in Chicago. And Joe said "Don't worry, you'll be with me for a long time Papa". So we was working seven nights a week over at the Gardens. So I worked over there, clean 'till the Lincoln Gardens caught fire. The Gardens, on aChristmas Eve night the Gardens had caught a fire and I had been with Joe 'bout seven-eight months, at that time, and practially saved all my money I had made, all but the rent I was playin'. Eatin' at--I had saved a few hundred dollars and I had ever had that kind of cash saved. So, Joe say--Joe called me at home and say why, he say, they haven't got that Garden ready yet, he says I got a chance to go on another good job. He say, what's the good musicians back home because it going to be a big band. And at that time, ah I told him about Luis Russell, I told him about ah about the drummer, [Paul] Barbarin, Barney Bigard, I told him about them. So, they come up there, Joe sent for them. So we start rehearsing for to goin' the Plantation. Gona' be Joe Oliver and myself. In the old Plantation. So, and another cornet player, because they had a big show, Bob Schoffner, (would) use three cornets. Bob was gona play the show down for us, so, it was a pretty tough winter that winter. Oh--I hadn't never seen so much snow in all my life, I was wandering, Jesus, I was falling down, walking through that snow, goin' to rehearsals and I was disgusted because it so cold my horn would

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Collins: freeze up the valves and I'd get there and walk. So I said, "When we go to work Joe?" Joe say, "We go to work in about three weeks," so I got the blues for ole' New Orleans, and the old gang, the good old street parades, and the honky tonks, and all the good old places where we used to play at. So, I slipped off from Joe, and went back----bought a ticket, and went back to New Orleans. Because, I had improved a whole lot on my cornet and technique was better, and everything was better by playing with all fine musicians, too. Old George Filhe on that trombone. So, I go back. Ooh, it was the thrills of their life that I done come back to New Orleans, and I told them about Joe Oliver, that I had played with Joe, and everything, so I go to work at that time in, ah back in New Orleans, in a place they call the "Entertainers" with a very good piano player, Bill, I wish you would of heard him, you would have knocked him out, a boy from Kansas City, called Udell Wilson.

Russell: Oh, I've heard of him. Yeah, Manuel Manetta talks about him.

Collins: Yeah, you, well Manuel Manetta was in the band. Udell Wilson and Ernest Trepagnia on drums, one they call Georgie Boy d on clarinet they're all dead now, all but Manuel, Manuel looked fine the last time I seen him.

Russell: Oh, he said to tell everybody hello from him too.

Collins: Yeah, he did, he looked good, Manuel did.

Russell: He's pretty heavy, but---

Collins: Naw

Russell: He's in good health, though--

Collins: So I go to work, I go to work in the "Astoria", I mean, "Entertainers", "Entertainers" band playin' with this band and this band at that time, was at the talk of New Orleans, we was captured everything. Packed and jammed every night, "Fate" Marable's Band, in there, Zutty's Singleton wife's brother, the cornet player

Russell: Creath, Charlie Creath

Collins: Charlie come and sit in with me. And things was goin' good, things was goin' good. Oh, man, I was feelin' fine, I didn't miss Chicago at all because I was back home, where the jazz is played like I liked to hear it, and everybody was playin' so good around New Orleans at that time, Buddy, my man he was 'bout, 'bout burned hisself out on whiskey then, he wasn't goin' so good, so he come in the, he was a very sensitive guy, he come in the place

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Russell: Oh, you were talkin' about Buddy Petit when you said....

Collins: Yeah, Buddy come in and he hadn't heard me since I left; he hadn't heard me since I come back from Joe Oliver. So, I asked Buddy to play a bit, play, come and sit in and play; so Buddy come and sit in, so he didn't play so well at that time, so he didn't play--the effects of whiskey had really brought him down; sounded like a different cornet player altogether. So, Manuel Manetta was a very sensitive guy too; he wanted me to come back and take that horn back and play. So, I just, I hated to turn him down, I hated to do this, I had to ask Buddy--I'll come back and play. So, Buddy sat on the bandstand and looked at me, Bill, and he made me start drinking, and I got drunk. Because he made me feel bad; he started crying. He said, "Lee", he say, "I'm so glad to see you playin' like that, he say, "you are you put me in mind of myself like I used to play". I say "Buddy, you play good yet. You play good yet, Buddy." So, ah, I played around Entertainer's, Entertainer's, and I commenced to making a very, very good name for myself, playin' there. So, I got tangled up with this, Bill, you know I have to take it easy, Bill.

Russell: Yeah

Collins: Take it easy because my badder days is here, I guess. It may be one of my last (Good?) days of talking.

Russell: You want me to turn it off for a minute, Lee?

Collins: No-----Yeah, turn it off for a minute.

Russell: Okay

[Machine off]

Russell: Yeah, it's going again now, Lee.

Collins: So, in this Entertainer's was run by two Sicilians, Johnny Lala and Joe Lala. It used to be named the old Hundred and One Ranch, where Joe Oliver used to play.

Russell: Yeah

Collins: And all good boys, in the good ole' days--packed every night, packed every night; we closed everything down in that part. So, I got tangled up (laughs) -- I can tell it now, because it's a long time it's been a long time--I got tangled up with an awful fast girl at that time, by the name of Albertine. And so, everybody was telling stories at that time about

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Collins: Birthdays, and that's how come me to get off cornet to trumpet. So, I said, you know one thing? Monday is my birthday. And this was in, was near about the spring of the year; My birthday is in October. I said it, is my birthday. So Manuel Manetta the saxophone player, used to work for Werlein's selling their instruments, selling them band instruments. So they wanted to know, the girl wanted to know what to buy Lee for a birthday present; so Manuel Manetta say better get him a good cornet--good trumpet; he say, get that short cornet out of his hand, and get him a long trumpet. So, they went down and bought me a Artist Model Buescher, one of the prettiest trumpets I've ever seen in my life. And on my birthday, slipped it in my chair, got me off to the bar to get a glass of gin and Big John to serve me some gin and say, when I come back the band hit "Happy Birthday" and presented me this trumpet. And I put the cornet down, I'd been playin' since '25, and start playin' the trumpet.

Russell: Uh-huh, 1925.

Collins: Yeah, so I played at the Entertainer's quite a while, about two years. I leaves and goes to Dallas, Texas and Prof. Cook--Prof. Cook in the band, dancing man, Charleston man. We go there, and we take the band with me and nice living around there, and I come on back to New Orleans, and I went to work--let's see, whose band I went to work with? I think, I made up a band of my own, and back to the LaVida Club. Then I leaves there and goes on the Astoria with Davy Jones' Band. Davy Jones was ah the greatest... one of the finest musicians I ever worked with in my life. Oh, that man was great. He could play sax, cornet; he could play anything just as good as anybody. So, Astoria Hot 8. There's where I went with, the Astoria Band, I start--we recorded that band; I went and got, my boy that played clarinet with me, Sidney Arodin.

Russell: Had you had another clarinet in there before? Or not?

Collins: Yeah, we had a clarinet ah well, he wasn't much of a clarinet player--alto saxophone player-- he played a little clarinet; "Wiggles", they called him.

Russell: Oh, yeah.

Collins: Theodore Purnell. So we go to work, we go to work in Astoria and so ah, takin' little Danny Barker--I put him in, he'd never played music; I brought him into the music world. We go up there, and I went to work for Beansy Furia and I stayed up there and played

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Collins: until I joined Lu [Luis] Russell's band in New York at the Saratoga Club; in '29, I leave New Orleans and go to New York City with [Luis] Russell's band. In Russell's band, I-- I come back here and went with Dave Peyton's band, Regal Theatre -- Dave Peyton's Band. I've been on my own around Chicago ever since.

Russell: Yeah

Collins: But, there was no happier days in the world playin' like good ol' New Orleans days, when they had good ol' real ragtime, Funky jazz music there (laughs). But it's a funny thing, Bill; New Orleans ain't got it no more, they ain't got the jazz. I don't know---

Russell: Yeah.

Collins: The young kids, the young boys don't look like they...they don't want to follow the ole' timers; they don't wanta play that kind of music.

Russell: Yeah, the different styles...

Collins: But ah, some of the boys, like my boy, Tony Parenti, another good boy--they all trying to carry the tradition of New Orleans on, they all trying to go for that good jazz band; and I really think that true old jazz is the music, is plain ol' American music, will never get old... will never get old -- and my -- another good thrill in my life, when my wife right there, Mary, Little Mary, her and I got a chance to go to Europe.

Russell: Oh, yes.

Collins: That European trip was a great experience for me.

Russell: You played with Mezz? Who else was in the band?

Collins: Mezz Mezzrow, Zutty Singleton, the great jazz that--I think--we'll always say that regardless of your disposition he's the greatest jazz drummer in the world..Zutty..I want you to hear some old records; did you hear them records I made of Mezz? Zutty got drive. And then my health failed, right then bad. I went from worse to worst.

Mrs. Collins: Tell him about the band you played with in France; about the French boys.

Collins: Huh? Yeah. (coughs) What French boys, baby?

Mrs. Collins: Well you know...the band that you played with there in France () and the musicians in the band.

Russell: Was that Claude Luter, or which band?

Mrs. Collins: No, Claude Luter wasn't-----

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Collins: Claude Luter, the Frenchman, was a good saxophone player, a good tenor saxophone; put me in mind of Coleman Hawkins. What was that boy's name, Mary?

Mrs. Collins: Guy LaFitte

Collins: Guy LaFitte, Guy LaFitte, he was...

Mrs. Collins: And the piano player...

Collins: The clarinet player was...

Mrs. Collins: The piano player.

Collins: The piano player was a boy named, what's his name again?

Mrs. Collins: Claude Bolling.

Collins: Claude Bolling.

Russell: Yes, he has a band of his own, sometimes.

Collins: He played just like Earl Hines in Earl's good days.

Russell: uh-huh

Collins: Sound just like Earl. That was my--that's my jazz piano player, Earl Hines; when I say Earl Hines, that's covering a whole lot of territory.

Russell: Yeah.

Collins: So...

Russell: Well, Lee, we don't want to bother you with any more questions and I think that covers your life pretty well there.

Collins: Yeah, there..but..I'd love to live to play again, Bill.

Russell: Well, I think you can.

Collins: Ah, no Bill...

Russell: I'm glad to see you sitting up here.

Collins: I don't think I'll ever play no more.

Russell: Your voice is good and strong and you're as ever, I think.

Collins; Well, I feel bad at all times.

(Machine off for short interval of time)

Russell: Okay, it's on.

Collins: Okay.....I want to say this to my great old friend, Barbara Reid. "Hello, Barbarie.

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Collins: I'd sure love to live to see you again, baby. Remember the good ol' days at the Victory Club when you and Bill and the gang would come to see me, it would knock me out. It would do me all the good. You people were a great inspiration to me, and I always think of you, Barbarie, and I haven't seen you since the good ol' days up in ah up in the Jazz Club in the Roosevelt Hotel. So, be sweet; hope to see you dear old day. Your ol' friend, Lee Collins." And don't forget little Mary; Mary want to tell you hellow there--tell her hello, Mary.

Mrs. Collins: "Hello Barbara, I wish you were here with us. And, we often talk about you."

Russell: She had a lot of fun in those days.

Mrs. Collins: Yes, indeed.

END OF REEL I, TRACK II, 6-2-58
Lee Collins

