

JERRY SCHATZBERG PHOTOGRAPHS

On the Tracks

INTERVIEWS WITH:

BOB DYLAN

REGINA HAVIS BROWN

LEROY HUIKKALA

JERRY SCHATZBERG

RICK DANKO TRIBUTE

**BOB DYLAN WINS
SWEDEN'S PRESTIGIOUS
MUSIC AWARD**



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an exclusive *On the Tracks* interview

LE ROY HOIKKALA

conducted by Lars Lindh

"an' I know I shall meet the snowy North
again - but with changed eyes nex' time 'round
t' walk lazily down its streets
an' linger by the edge of town
find old friends if they're still around..."
—Bob Dylan, *11 Outlined Epitaphs*

Yes, there is actually one old friend still around. LeRoy Hoikkala is the only member of Bob Dylan's early band still living in Hibbing. On the Tracks interviewer, Lars Lindh, met with him and his wife, Bette, in their home in Hibbing on July 2, 1999.

You were born here in Hibbing?

Yes, and my parents are also from Hibbing. Well, one was from southwest Minnesota and the other was born in Hibbing, so they are local.

But you have relatives further back that came from Scandinavia?

Yes, from Finland and Norway. That's my great grandparents. My grandfathers did come from Norway and Finland. We don't do the "roots," we're Hibbing.

So you have lived in Hibbing all your life?

Right.

When did you meet Bob?

I knew Bob pretty much from school and everything. Growing up you see each other. It is a small town. You know, everybody knows everybody in town. How we

got to meet as far as playing in a band was Monte Edwardson—who is a guitar player; who is very good; he still plays today; he is a natural guitar player—we worked downtown, Monte and myself, right across the street (from school), we met each other and we walked to a little job, an after-school job. And Bob was just there one day. Monte and I had been messing around with playing drums and guitar; just jamming a little bit. I had taken lessons for quite a few years. So, Bob just happened to say, "Hey, you guys going downtown?"

We actually walked from school to downtown, so we told him that we were playing, you know, just getting together and jamming around and playing. So, he said: "Hey, I'm playing piano, mouth-

organ, harmonica and guitar. Maybe we could get together and kind of play a little bit."

We said, "Yes, sure."

So we started playing in Bob's garage that was attached to his house, that little garage. We jammed in there for quite a bit, and we got a couple of jobs. The first time he ever got paid to do anything was with our band the Golden Chords.

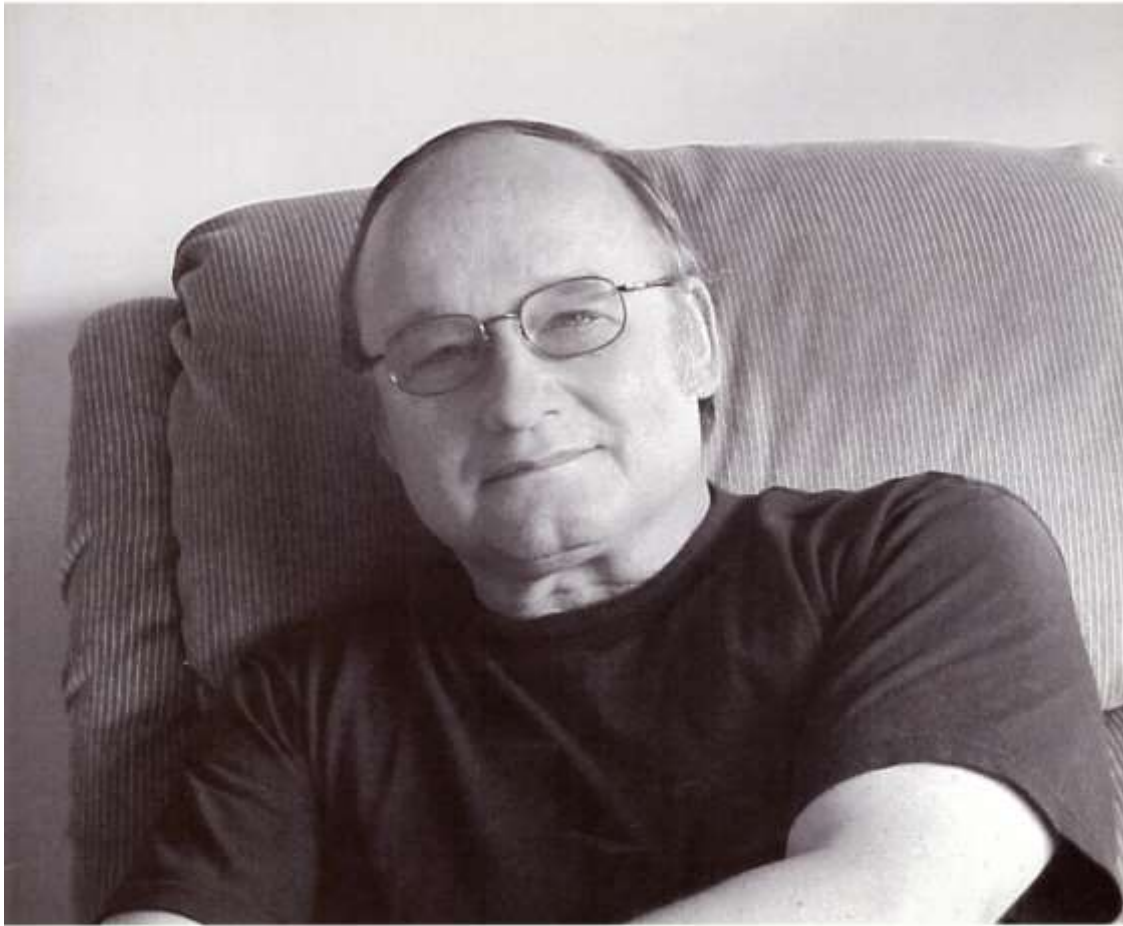
Sometimes we'd go into the house to play, because he had a piano in the house.

Anyone else besides you, Monte Edwardson and Bob?

No, it was just the three of us at that time. I played drums.

Where did you play?

It was at the National Guard Armory.



LaRoy Hokkai—a member of Bob Dylan's early band, the Golden Chords. Photograph by Lars Lindh.

a pretty big building. We hired the police department, because you had to have the police, we hired people to collect tickets, we sold tickets, made tickets. We hired someone to clean the place up and everything, and we made money. It was kind of fun. It was one of those things where you put a lot of money out and do something; try to fix a Saturday night rock opera or "jam," and a lot of kids came. That was probably the first time Bob ever was paid to do anything musically.

Was it a dance or more like a concert?

It was a dance. There was a wide-open area, no chairs, nothing, big stage, that's all.

Was that a one-time show?

Yes, that particular one. That was kind of how we got together and started playing.

Then we played that talent show, you know, where we actually won but lost, because the kids went crazy (but the judges) gave it to someone else that tap danced, Bob was a little detached on that one saying, "We should have won, you know?" Because, in fact the audience was with us, but they gave it to someone else. We came in second. *(He laughs.)*

That was the three of us as the Golden Chords. The reason we called it the Golden Chords was because Bob was really...he could really chord with the piano and the guitar, really chord beautifully. He was really a natural at chording. And my drums were gold, sparkling gold.

So, we said Golden...Chords, that's how we got the name.

What tunes did you play?

Ah, some of the Little Richard tunes, [like] "Jenny, Jenny." Some of the southern type music, the blues songs...a lot of Little Richard. Bob loved Little Richard, so we did a lot of Little Richard stuff.

It was kind of new for the kids around here. We used to sit together with a reel to reel tape recorder at night and tape the AM-stations that came in really good at night. We taped it so we could listen to the new songs that didn't come along here. Hibbing was kind of a backward area. The last to get in.

So we listened to the songs from the AM radio, taped them and then Bob

ON THE TRACKS



The Rockats, 1958. From left, Ron Tadda, Jim Proppnick, LeRoy Hakkala, Monte Edwardson. Photograph by Louis Proppnick. Above photo and "Rock & Roll Hop/Golden Chords" advertisement (next page) compliments of Dave Ergle, author of the best book on Dylan's early years, *Dylan in Minnesota: Just Like Bob*. Zimmerman's *Blues: Ruling Tones* (ISBN #21480) 2 lbs., \$19.95.

would play them, because that was more the type of songs that he liked; the bluesy songs. We listened to Shreveport, there were a bunch of DJs down there that we listened to.

Was Bob kind of the leader?

Yes, kind of, but he wasn't really close to anybody. I don't think he ever had a best friend. He was kind of a loner, as we all were kind of loners. We'd hang around the motorcycles, the Harleys, and ride in our convertibles. He had a convertible like mine.

When we decide to play we used to go to Collier's Bar-B-Q, Van Fridt's owned it. On Sundays they were closed but they still had to clean up the place, do the potatoes for french fries and everything. So we used to go down there—it was right off the main street—and we'd bring our instruments in there, set 'em up where you walk in, and leave the

door open. The kids could hear the music from Howard street when we jammed.

Was Bob playing piano then?

He played guitar and a little harmonica, at that time.

What we kids used to do on weekend nights in the summertime was cruise the streets with our cars. That was where the kids used to hear us when they were (cruising or) walking up and down the street. That's one of the fun things we did together.

Did Bob write any of his own songs at this time?

He changed a lot of songs. He listened to a song and he changed them. He didn't like the way they read, just like a lot of the songs that he's recorded. I use to say that he wasn't copying someone, but he took the basic song and if he didn't like the lyrics he just changed

it to what he wanted. He was a natural. He is a great songwriter. Some songs he didn't change, others he changed to his own liking.

Did you tape any of those songs?

Yes, but I don't have them anymore. Too bad! You know, Bob was just my friend, and he still is. When he became famous it was like a different person. He has his life and we don't communicate now. We were friends and we played in the band and all of a sudden he went ...and now he's a different person.

One of the big things that we really enjoyed was James Dean. We went to Steven's Grocery and Confectionary to look at all the magazines of James Dean; how he got killed in that car accident.

Did you go to Lybba's Theater with Bob?

Yes, we went to movies related to music all the time. James Dean, Brando

...things like that. It was usually John Bucklen, Bob and myself.

Did John Bucklen ever play with you?

He was kind of a beginner. Actually all of us were beginners. But he didn't play with the band, no. Bob jammed with a bunch of guys, but that wasn't (as a) band. Then in the end it broke up. We didn't really form a band. We played as the Golden Chords here and there and then Bob went to Duluth and got some friends there that played more blues and jazz type of music. Then he took off to Minneapolis.

What about Jim Propotnick?

I don't think that Jim ever played with him. Jim played in the band we had after, called the Rockets. That became the first rock 'n' roll band on the whole Iron Range. That was how I met Betty, when we were playing at a street dance.

Did you continue to play?

I played with the Rockets for many years. We did have a recording contract

Select Finalists In Frolic Talent Contest

Finalists in the Hibbing Winter Carnival Talent Contest were selected at a preliminary contest in the Little Theater of Hibbing Memorial Building Thursday afternoon.

The four top entries in the two groups will perform prior to the Winter Frolic Queen Coronation at 8 p.m. Thursday in the Little Theater.

The winners Thursday were as follows:

Group I, ages 11 and under — Glenda Zuback, wader, square dance group, consisting of Jim Gerow, Bill Griffin, Steven Zuercher, Shirley Kirshing, Deborah Yrtapla, Judy Koski and Glenda Zuback; Georgine Simonson, dance; Suzanne Plesha, dance; and Linda Christoffersen, singing.

Group II, ages 12 and over — Rosemary Pellicciotti, 13, Keeneta, acrobatic; Raymond Reed, 13, Hibbing, pantomime; Bob Zimmerman, Montie Edvardsson and Le Roy Haikkala, Hibbing, piano and song; and Stanley 14 and Jim Griska, 11, Hibbing, tap dance.

Newspaper clipping. This results of Frolic Talent Contest.

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with Aladdin Records, but they went bankrupt so we never really made anything. I played for quite a few years, and I loved to play jazz. I liked to play drum-solos. Buddy Rich stuff.

I played in different bands until I was 20. First one night a week, then two days a week. Then you reach a point where you are just playing and working, and that is no good, so I said this is enough: I'm all done.

Does the name Dennis Nylen ring a bell?

No, but there were a couple of other guys that played—Karakash, Fabbro and Marinac. That was it. At different times Bob had different guys. They were just playing, no real bands.

I mean we were just friends as kids and did our thing together. I was in his first band you could say, that was actually a band. We played at Moose club. I think Marinac played with us that time.

Do you remember in which room you played at the Moose?

There was a piano there. You know this is years ago and it has changed. There was a big, old piano and we played a bunch of songs.

Was that also a paid gig?

No, that was volunteer.

Did you feel that you were different than the other, "normal" kids in Hibbing?

Well, you have the sports people, basketball players and the like. We were kind of loners to some degree; we used

to have big "DA" haircuts (Duck's Ass, because of the way the hair looked when it was combed together in the back) and our collars turned up and drive Harleys. In school they didn't care for us, because we used to wear, what at that time were called, "engineer" boots—that had big (metal) clicks on them. The floors were beautiful in school and we dragged the clicks. The principal and the teachers would go wacky and come and grab you by the collar. It never got violent.

We used to hang out at L&B Cafe and have Coca-colas. That's where the so-called "wild kids" in town hung out. But, it wasn't wild at all. We were not allowed to drink alcohol and we didn't do drugs. We'd also hang out at Sammy's pizza.

Where did you buy your drum set?

At Chuck Crippa's. We used to go there all the time because... Sorry, I just remembered a different story: When Bob was getting his motorcycle he just called me one day and says: "My Dad wants you to go with us to buy a Harley," because I had a Harley already. You don't just get a Harley and drive it, if you know what I mean, it's a big machine. So, he wanted to make sure that it was intact and in good shape, because his Dad was a smart businessman. They were great people. His mother was more loose, and more "bubbly," while his Dad was a real business-type, more strict. Anyhow, we got his Harley, I checked it out and ran it, and I drove him home on his bike.



Bob's boyhood home: 2425 East 7th Avenue, Hibbing, Minnesota. Photographs by Lars Lindh.



expensive cars. We didn't have new cars. We used (our cars) to promote our dances or rock concerts. We would get these big speakers, horns and two big amplifiers on top of my convertible and we would sit there playing, to advertise our dances. You don't see that anymore!

We had to earn all the money ourselves, as my (family) didn't have a real lot of money. Bob's mom and dad, because they had a business, had a lot more than we did, but he did earn it.

What did your father do for a living?

He worked at the mine. He was a locomotive engineer which was a good paying job, but there were a lot of strikes and lay-offs. There was always good food on the table, but we didn't have a lot of extras.

Where did you live at this time?

We lived in the 2600 block, about four blocks from Bob.

Were you with Bob when he had his near-accident on his motorcycle here in Hibbing?

I was there, right. I think my cousin was with us and maybe some other driver. There is a little place called Brooklyn. There used to be two train tracks there. Bob was kind of a nervous person, he just couldn't sit still. He was kind of restless. My motorcycle was getting warm so I shut it off while the train went by. As we were waiting and waiting for the train to go by, Bob got really restless, and as soon as the caboose at the back of the train went by Bob took off. Another train was coming from the other direction and you couldn't see it from where we sat. However he did, so he took his bike and threw it down—he must have caught sight of the train with the corner of his eye. He never, ever, mentioned it again. Didn't say a word, picked up his bike, didn't talk about it and started his motorcycle and took off.

Did you meet his mother and father?

Yes, I knew his mom and dad for years, in fact. His dad owned Micka's Electric with his brother. He had super parents, really nice. He was maybe a little overly rebellious or hyper because of his parents being a little overprotective. His parents were quality people, really nice people. His mother was making jokes all the time. His dad was more of a businessman, more quiet and

When was this?

Ah...when we were 16.

(Anyway) we used to park the Harleys right in front of Crippa's, and go in and check the records out. They used to have booths, so if you bought a record you could go and try it out.

We spent a lot of time there. We bought picks, sheet music and whatever.

Drums, guitars, Harley Davidsons. Where did you get all that money?

I did work after school. We used to go to Chuck Crippa, and if you had a

job—for \$300 dollars you could get great drums, at that time, now it would be \$2,000 dollars probably—Chuck would say, "Ah, give me \$20 dollars a month." And that's how he took care of it. That's how Chuck Crippa was, he took care of all the kids in town that way. And Harleys, well-used Harleys were pretty reasonable at the time. You got a nice little Harley for \$300 dollars. The convertibles...Bob had a '54 Ford convertible, I had one also. They were used, but nice little cars. They were not

The Moose Lodge. Photograph by Lars Lindh.



serious. Bob's brother, Dave, was also a nice guy.

Did Bob work in the store?

He worked there; he'd help. In fact he helped repossess things, when people couldn't pay. He worked there once in awhile, but not really a lot.

Have you been in contact with him since then?

No, but I used to go and talk to his dad just after he started in the music business. I would go talk to his mom and she would relate things. I never saw him after that.

Did you go to the same high school classes as Bob?

I think the only one we had together was Study Hall.

Did you know Echo Helstrom?

Oh, yes. We used to go out to where she lived, right out of town on Highway 73, and listen to records. We used to double date, and go to the movies. She was blond, a pretty girl.

When did the Golden Chords band split?

It was when Bob went to Duluth to play.

One recollection that came to me just now is that there was a colored DJ in the Virginia, Minnesota area, and he had a record collection you wouldn't believe. Bob found out about him, so we went up there one day. I remember we went up these big steps. He lived upstairs in an apartment in Virginia, and had a massive collection of all kinds of music, so Bob borrowed some of it. That was the kind of music you couldn't get around here.

Do you have contact with the other members of the band?

Bucklen came here a few years back. Monte, I have seen him quite a few times, last time just a couple of years ago.



The piano Dylan played at the Moose Lodge. Photograph by Lars Lindh.

Monte is still playing in Colorado in a band at casinos and bars. He was probably the best guitar player on the whole Range.

We played a lot as the Rockets, not the Golden Chords but right after that. We played one, two nights a week, at least. We played for a teenage club at the time rock 'n' roll started. We played there

for many, many months, almost every Saturday night. Chuck Crippa was the president of the union at that time, and he said, "You guys play a lot, you had better join the union," and we did. We were actually union-member musicians for many years.

What did you do after high school?

Monte said, "Let's go to California. My uncle has a business there with decent jobs," so we took off. I had two jobs. One was in a Research and Development department and I also did TV service work on the side. I came back to Hibbing after about a year. Then I got drafted. I was in the service for two years.

What work did you do here in Hibbing?

I just retired; my last job was as a manager at US Steel Corporation.

Bob's brother, David, was he ever involved with your type of music?

Dave was younger and more involved with classical music. He was a choir director, and piano player. They are really two different people. ♦

Lybba's Theatre, now "Lybba's Sunrise Deck." Photograph by Lars Lindh.



Lars Lindh, Bob Dylan addict since the early '60s, is a 49 year old, self-employed financial consultant and father of two currently living in Sweden, although he's also worked in Canada, USA, Mexico, Colombia and India.