



GETTING TO KNOW YOU Larry Roper

I was born on April 1st in Mineral Bluff, Georgia. I was the 5th of 5 children at that time. When I was 2 years old my father moved the family to South Lyon, Michigan, and over the years added 5 more children to the family. We ended up with three boys and seven girls altogether. We often thought the Walton's were patterned after us. My mom passed away at the age of 55. It was her wish that we always remain close and take care of one another. Two of my sisters moved out of state for a short period but moved back, and today we all live within twenty minutes of one another. I am very blessed to

have such a loving family. But that's not all. Many years later my father remarried, and we were again blessed with three stepbrothers. My stepmother, also from Georgia, was very much like my mother. She took us all under her wing, and always treated all of us as if we were her own. She still lives in the farmhouse we grew up in, and we are very blessed to have her in our lives.

In my younger years I was mostly into rock and roll music, of course. I never really played, but I liked to listen to bands like CCR, The Beatles, Stephenwolf, and a host of others. My younger brother Rick, actually (Rickey Nelson Roper) joined a country music band, and my taste turned toward country music. I did actually play a little, since most of it required only three chords. My father, an avid bluegrass fan, told us one day we would come to our senses and realize that bluegrass was by far the best. He went to every bluegrass festival around, and tried to get us to go. One day Rick and I decided to humor him, and we attended our first festival. We were truly amazed with the music, and both agreed the old man was right. When people ask me if I remember such and such rock and roll bands from the eighties, truthfully I don't. It was all bluegrass for me.

I also enjoyed baseball in my early years. As soon as my little hand could hold up a catchers mitt, my older brother Jim used me for target practice. He was six years older than me and he threw very hard. It was my job to stop the ball with whatever part of my body got in the way. It didn't take long for me to learn that it was much better for the ball to hit the mitt than an arm or leg or somewhere else that might make you see stars or talk in a higher octave. My brother was a very good pitcher, I went to his practices, and sometimes they let me practice with them. These guys were six years older than me, and they seemed like giants. At first they took it easy on me, but as I got better they got tougher, and eventually they wouldn't cut me any slack at all. Jim eventually was not allowed to play any more, because he threw the ball so much faster than the other guys. He threw a wild pitch one time, and broke a guy's arm. He worked with me, and taught me all about pitching. When I was old enough to play organized ball, the guys my age seemed small. I played baseball every summer, and during my high school years I helped the South Lyon Lions win four championships in a row. In my senior year we were undefeated. I was voted MVP of my team, and first team -all league pitcher of southeastern Michigan by the coaches association. I credit all of my achievements to Jim. I never thought I'd see the day when I would thank him for all those bruises and bumps and scrapes and sprained fingers, but he's the one that made it all possible for me.

After high school, I attended Washtenaw Community College. Unfortunately, there was no funding for sports those years. I did, however, play for a traveling league in Ann Arbor during the summer. We traveled around to different states. It was fun, but tiring. I was approached one day by a scout for the Detroit Tigers. I didn't know it, but he had been watching me since high school. He gave me his number, and told me to call when I was interested in a try out. Although I never lost my love for the game, I never pursued it as a career.

In my present job of 34 years, I work for the Wyman Gordon Company, in Brighton Michigan. We manufacture a super alloy powdered metal, for use in aerospace applications (mostly jet engine parts). I have, at one time or another, worked in every department in our shop. I managed three departments, over a fifteen year span. I received management training at Oakland Community College, and at Wyman Gordon training center in Houston, Texas. My instructor in Houston was Gib Whitman, of Whitman resources. Gib was a very good friend of Walter Cronkite, and during the Vietnam war, it was his job to brief about five hundred members of the free world press. Needless to say, I was very impressed with him.

I was married for fifteen years, and was blessed with two sons. My oldest son, Jason, is now twenty-six years old and also works for Wyman Gordon. He sometimes does vocal work for The Whitey Morgan Band, and plays a mean harmonica. He's not yet into our music, but maybe someday. My youngest son Darren, was born with a heart defect, and passed away just prior to his first birthday.

I met a neighbor of mine (Janelle) at a graduation party another neighbor was having. She moved to my side of the street and eventually into my home. At the time, she was a single parent raising a young daughter, and I was in the same boat with my thirteen year old son. We've been together now for eleven years, and we are very fortunate to both share the same passion for the music. We are never in a hurry to leave a good jam.

I knew of old time music, and occasionally would find a tape or CD, or sometimes I'd come across a person playing a dulcimer. When I met Sherry Humecky, things really started to happen. Janelle and I became friends with Sherry and Morgan, followed them around to their gigs, and were very inspired by what they were doing. They turned us on to places like Ewart, Midland, Hillsdale, and most important of all--they introduced us to Silver Strings. It opened up a whole new world that we didn't know existed. We've played more music than we ever thought possible, and have made more friends than we could have ever imagined.