

The Early Years

My parents were Louise and James ... mom was a singer, songwriter, musician and artist ... dad was an entrepreneur; he owned a gas station, owned and captained a charter fishing business, was a member of the coast guard, managed Elvis Presley's road show for Colonel Tom Parker, and managed Eddy Arnold's road show just to name a handful of the things he dabbled in. I had a normal childhood, ummm, up until I was 6. About that time mom discovered Shirley and I could sing ... at that point, though I did not realize it, my life's path was chosen for me. Mom played the guitar [and organ and fiddle] so when old enough she insisted I learn the guitar as well. I started with a small 4-string and discovered playing guitar came easy to me. At this point mom and dad began entering Shirley and I in talent contests. The earliest songs we learned were the hits of the day; and these are the ones we used on talent shows. Speaking of talent shows, I want to share with you pieces of one Shirley and I won. It sounds a tad odd at the beginning because we were late entries so the two hosts didn't know we were there ... you can kind of tell in this 1946 interview [**Family song 1**]. Since I was always quiet and shy the interview was almost painful so I was tickled when we finally got to sing [**Family song 2**]. Having done well that week we were brought back the next week and then a third week when we sang a requested song that won us the top prize, *Lullaby Yodel* [**Family song 3**].