

The Highwayman

Willie Nelson, the original Texas Outlaw, stops in College Station for performance

BY SUSAN OVERCASH
The Battalion

Texas, 1933. A country in the throes of the Great Depression, America is caught in an iron grip of famine, drowning in the heat and hopelessness of bread lines and unemployment. That April, in the Texas heat, a young boy is born to Ira and Myrie Nelson in Fort Worth. The couple, residents of nearby Abbot, a town which a geography buff would be hard-pressed to find on a modern day Texas map, name their son Willie Hugh Nelson — and a legend, an outlaw, is born.

Nelson, raised by his paternal grandparents after his father died and mother abandoned the family, said his extended family turned him on to music.

"My grandparents were both music teachers," Nelson said. "So it was just natural that I started learning things early."

Nelson said his older sister Bobbie also helped him learn music.

"My sister started learning to play piano and organ," Nelson said. "She's three years older than me, so by the time I got up old enough to start learning something, she already knew something."

While sister Bobbie learned to play the piano, the younger Nelson learned to play the guitar. Always interested in music, Nelson cited some of his greatest influences, Hank Williams and George Jones.

"It's sort of a broad list," he said. "Anywhere from Bob Wills and Hank Williams to Ray Charles or Frank Sinatra, Bing Crosby — all kinds of different people that I really like."

"Frank Sinatra was probably my favorite overall singer, and George Jones is probably my favorite overall country singer, him or Hank Williams."

Throughout his teen years, Nelson worked odd jobs and played in honky-tonk bands around Abbot to make money. After high school and a short military service, Nelson took a job as a Disc Jockey at a local station in Fort Worth and recorded his first single, "Lumberjack." By the close of the '50s, Nelson had been married, divorced and fathered two children.

In 1961, Nelson moved to Nashville and worked as a songwriter, selling several songs to artists including Patsy Cline and Billy Walker, and, in 1965, signed a deal with RCA records. However, in the late '60s, Nelson moved to Austin and began writing and performing his own work.

According to Nelson, reading allowed him to focus on a more positive attitude toward life and his career.

"I started reading a lot," Nelson said. "There's one book, *The Power of Positive Thinking* — that's sort of the overall accepted book on positive thinking, but there's a whole lot of others ones. That pretty much persuaded me that that's the only way to go."

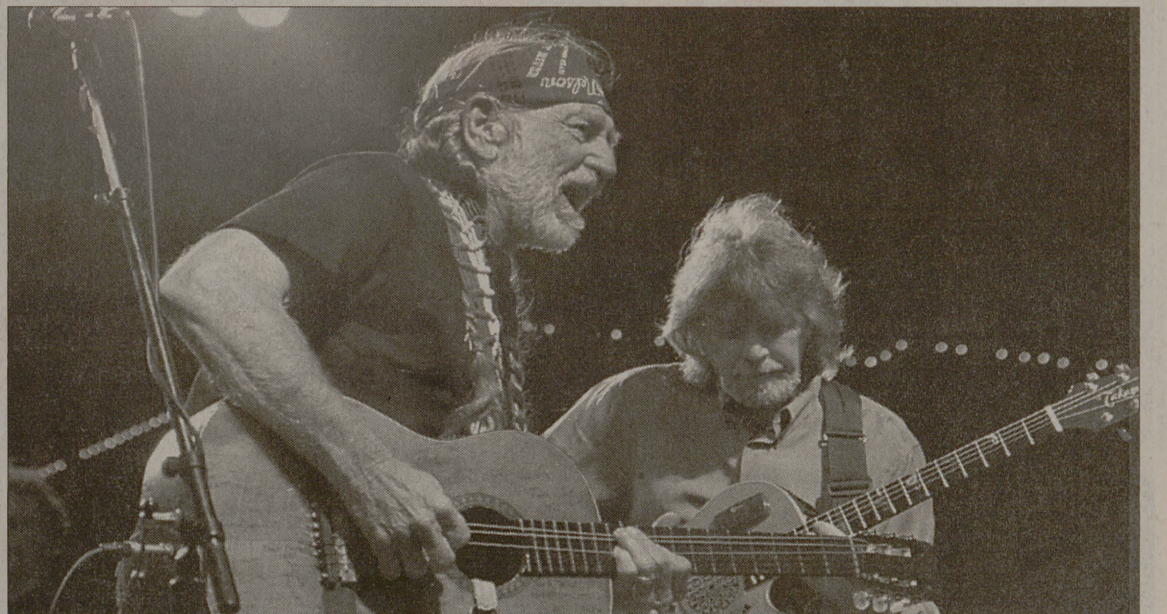
Over the past three decades, Nelson has continued to write and perform his own music, in-

cluding the hit "Red-Headed Stranger" and one of the top-selling country albums of all time, *Wanted: The Outlaws*. More recently, albums such as *Spirit* and *Teatro* have, according to Nelson, afforded the artist a look back over five decades of country music.

"Well, I feel like *Spirit* came from a place — it was sort of like a 17-year overall look at everything," he said. "*Teatro* was sort of a follow-up to *Spirit*, a natural progression. The instrumental album was also a natural progression — kind of what I wanted to hear me do, just to get away from the lyrics and the heavy rhythms, just for a second, and do something that sort of soothes the mind."

Nelson has also pursued an acting career, with roles in films including *Red-Headed Stranger*,

SEE WILLIE ON PAGE 6.



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