On the eve of Travis Edward Pike's latest CD release Feelin' Better, author Harvey Kubernik interviewed Travis about his 1964 German-Italian band, The Five Beats, and its impact on the new CD.



HK: The songs on your new Feelin' Better CD were inspired by The Five Beats, the German-Italian rock band formed in 1964 to showcase your live, off-duty performances while you were in the U.S. Navy, stationed in Germany.

TP: Yes. They were the first band put together especially for me. Previously, I just sang with whatever band was on stage. If I was invited to sing, I'd find out what songs we knew in common and sing them. In Five Beats rehearsals, I was able to introduce songs they had never heard, but which I knew were show-stoppers. They were genuinely talented and picked up new material quickly — and I also got to sing all my favorite songs — songs I had sung for years and had polished all the vocal nuances long ago. And I wasn't singing for tips anymore. I was the headliner and well paid, by the standards of the time.

HK: How long were your sets each evening? Were you fed on the job and if so, how was the food?

TP: Good questions. There was a curfew for youngsters, under sixteen I think, and it started around 10:00 p.m. As a result, our shows started around 8:00 p.m., which meant the kids could be there for two 50-minute sets before they had to leave. The shows then continued until just before 3:00 a.m., which made for very long gigs. Where I was, in northern Germany, there were days in summer when I went to work in broad daylight and by the time I left, dawn was breaking on the new day, making it seem almost like night never came.

As for the dining arrangements, I'd always have supper before the show. Sometimes, if I arrived early, I'd be offered a free supper by the management, but it was a courtesy I seldom enjoyed, because I tried to arrive as close to show time as practical, to avoid being mobbed by fans while I was trying to eat. However, after the gig, shortly before three in the morning, I would be fed. My favorite was Farmer's Breakfast, (a huge cheese, bacon and potatoes omelet, sprinkled with dill pickle chips). The pickle chips topping may sound strange to my fellow Americans, but it was delicious, and after the workout I'd put myself through on stage, much needed and much appreciated.

An equally tasty alternative to Farmer's Breakfast was Kurrywurst, a large sausage covered in tomato sauce, sprinkled with curry powder, usually with potato salad on the side and a slice of fresh rye bread to sop up the tomatocurry sauce. If the cook went off duty and didn't hang around for the end of the show, the club owner or manager would prepare that meal, and we'd sit and recap the events of the evening.

The only drawback to those late night dinners was that after an exhausting seven hour show, a big meal like that could make me sleepy, especially if I had a long drive home afterwards. I did actually fall asleep behind the wheel a few times, but was lucky enough to get awakened by running onto the gravel on the side of the road before I came to grief.

HK: While you were over there, you were in a car accident that ended your career with the Five Beats and sent you stateside for surgery. Had you fallen asleep behind the wheel and how did that accident affect your career?



"Teddy, die Twistsensation aus USA," survived the wreck. His Sunbeam Alpine sportscar did not.

TP: The accident to which you refer happened in broad daylight, around noon. I was wide awake, driving into town for lunch. A crew was putting fresh tar on a stretch of road in front of me and an oncoming armored truck skidded on the fresh tar and slammed into me.

As for how the accident affected my career, the first and most obvious effect was that I was no longer the lead

singer for The Five Beats, and I heard nothing more about recording contracts with either Polydor or Phillips. With the injuries I'd sustained, it was also clear I would not be making a comeback as "die Twistsensation."

The dancing and wild leaps that characterized my show were in the past, so I began writing songs, in the hope that when I was discharged, I might rejoin the band. My voice was still good, but a recording contract would have to be based on something other than my stage presence, so I began writing original songs for the Five Beats, one of which, "Till the End," composed for their Vampire show, I finally recorded for *Odd Tales and Wonders Stories in Song*. It had become a real showstopper for Travis Pike's Tea Party in 1967-68.

HK: You covered mostly American rock 'n' roll. Tell me about the venues you played and what songs went over best with the crowds.

TP: Prior to teaming up with The Five Beats, I sang wherever there was a live band -- mostly in small to mediumsized dance halls - not unlike the beer and wine clubs in Southern California. As for my repertoire, I sang a lot of Elvis -- "Heartbreak Hotel" was one of my most popular show openers. A particularly powerful set closer was the Ray Charles hit, "What'd I Say." I sang songs by the Everly Brothers, Chuck Berry, Little Richard, The Coasters, Fats Domino, Jerry Lee Lewis, Bill Haley and the Comets and with the Five Beats, even introduced the Clovers' "Love Potion Number 9" to go with the original Vampire show, carried over from the Vampiros, one of the bands broken up to form the Five Beats. I always loved that song, and it had a spooky, fascinating sound to it that, when you consider most of my German audiences would have had trouble understanding the lyrics, seemed to go really well with the bat-wing capes that hung from the necks of the guitars and electric bass.



The Vampiros "Vampire Show"

HK: You performed under a stage name in Germany.

TP: I did. I discovered right away that "Travis" was a mouthful for my German fans. Our "V" is their "F." Think of Volkswagen,

pronounced "Folks-vaggen" in German. Well, I found it painful to hear them struggling with "Trafee." (I suspect they got the silent "S" from the French, and since my name was foreign to them, that seemed appropriate.) "Trafiss" was no better, to say nothing of the faces they made trying to get the name out. My childhood nickname was Teddy, derived, I suppose, like Ted Kennedy's nickname, from my middle name, Edward. Not only could they say that with ease, but it lent itself to a rather wonderful chant when they wanted an encore. So, rock promoter Werner Hingst dubbed me "Teddy, die Twistsensation aus USA."

There was another angle, too, totally unknown to me back then. In Germany, juvenile delinquents were called "Halbstarkers" - a word translated in my Langenscheidt's New College German Dictionary as a street-rowdy, a hooligan, Brit a. Teddy Boy. Look up Teddy Boy online, and you'll find it referred to British teenagers, strongly associated with rock and roll, who affected Edwardian dress (hence "Teddy," short for Edwardian), who became notorious for street violence in the late fifties. Subtle as that may seem, I think all those connotations contributed to my mystique - a foreigner, an American rocker, the quintessential outsider - an outlaw, no doubt, irresistibly fascinating to the youthful German audiences that made up my fan base. And Tedesco is Italian for German. I know some of my German fans believed I was really a German, pretending to be an American. Maybe they thought my name was a secret hint that they were right.



Charly Ross on Sax with the Vampiros

HK: Okay. Moving right along, I know your songs have all evolved over the years, but for this album, with the help of special guest artists Christopher Woodcock (saxophone), and Jon DuFresne (electric guitar), you and your multitalented younger brother, Adam, ignored the tracks you performed for the 1966 movie, Feelin' Good, and deliberately set out to recapture The Five Beats sound palette of a half century ago. I find it interesting that even though these songs were written for The Five Beats, set in the style of your performances in 1964, The Five Beats never actually heard or played any of them. Instead, you performed seven of them in your father's 1966 theatrical feature film, Feelin'

Good. How different were the songs you recorded for the movie from what you intended them to be and how do you feel about them now?

TP: The movie versions were arranged for the on-screen band, and they had little time for practice, less to polish their performances. They were college students attending Harvard and Boston University and I only got up to Boston on weekends, during which, filming was the priority. Under the circumstances (with a very small budget, little or no rehearsal, and recording eight songs in a single three hour session), they satisfied the needs of the movie, but the arrangements were not what I would have preferred.

My mental arrangements were planned for the Five Beats. Most telling was that the band in the movie had no sax player and my concept relied heavily on a significant contribution from "Charly Ross," the sax player who came over from the Vampiros to The Five Beats.

HK: What was it like – revisiting and reclaiming songs you wrote so long ago and recording them for today's music collectors?

TP: At first, it was a little touch and go. Frankly, we questioned whether or not we should even try to resurrect them. Songs like these are seldom heard today, unless they are legitimate "oldies," actually recorded and released back in the late fifties and early sixties. But as they came together, all the excitement of songs of that era came with them. I'm thrilled that we went for it and delighted with the way the album came out. I think oldtimers and new fans alike will respond to these fresh, classic rock and roll era songs and sounds. I know I'm Feelin' Better since we finally recorded them.

HK: For the most part, you sang American-style rock and roll. What about the Beatles? They were fairly well- known in Germany by then. Their Polydor, two-sided hit single of "Komm' Gib' Mir Deine Hand" and "Sie Liebt Dich" came out in Germany in March, 1964. You must have heard it.

TP: I did, and I liked both songs. I especially liked the harmonies, but I never realized they were an English group. What first brought that to my attention was another Polydor hit that year by a girl group, "Die Sweetles," that overnight seemed to show up on every jukebox in Germany. Their song was "Ich Wuensch Mir Zum Geburtstag Einen Beatle." (I want a Beatle for my birthday.). I have to admit that I began wishing a girl group would do a song like that about me. Surely, I thought, someone, somewhere, might want me for Christmas . . .

HK: The Beatles were not the only ones to sing some of their songs in German. Your "End of Summer" has verses in both German and English. What can you tell me about that?

TP: That was the first song I wrote when I was in Chelsea Naval Hospital. I was pretty low at the time. I'd just had a bone graft to reconstruct my left ankle and thought my rock and roll career was over. The song is about a summer

romance coming to an end, and although the lover promises to return in the spring, it sounds more like wishful thinking than likelihood. And I still haven't been back to Germany, so I'm glad there was no real "Lorelei" waiting for me.

HK: What was it like back then, readjusting to civilian life?

TP: Shocking and disturbing. It seemed to me that young people my own age were protesting nearly everything nearly everywhere, not to mention taking over public buildings and spitting on returning servicemen. This was not the America I knew when I enlisted. One high school friend, almost as alienated as I was, talked me into attending a "Hoot Night" at a Charles Street coffeehouse. There I sang a few of the parodies I had made up to entertain the wounded undergoing treatment in Chelsea Naval Hospital, won the evening's prize (which I think came to all of \$15.00), and discovered a new performance venue, suited to my condition. So I went from entertaining the troops, to entertaining the coffeehouse college crowd, to forming a new band that ended up as Travis Pike's Tea Party and finally re-launched my music career.

HK: Please put this album into context in regards to items in your Otherworld Cottage Odd Tales and Wonders catalog.

TP: I started with the book, *Odd Tales and Wonders 1964* – 1974 A Decade of Performance, in which I characterized myself as a time capsule sealed in 1974. I recorded and released *Odd Tales and Wonders Stories in Rhyme* and *Odd Tales and Wonders Stories in Song* at the same time. Stories in Song was mainly comprised of novelty songs, like the previously mentioned vampire song, "Till the End." written initialy for The Five Beats.

HK: Your overseas German-Italian showband.

TP: Yes. But I was short on material when I played on the wards. I knew lots of songs, but I didn't know how to play them, so to fill out a half-hour performance, I told a few of my 'Stories in Rhyme" in the character voices I'd created for them when I first composed them, hoping to launch my career in animation by making them into theatrical shorts. In those days, the Newsreels were gone, but a cartoon or two on the order of a *Pink Panther* animated short, were still commonly shown in theaters before the feature presentation. I'd guess I started out doing my *Peerless Goth* and *Twail's Tail*, and when the troops applauded, they became a regular part of my peformances. That might have been when I wrote *The Lori*. What mattered most to me was that it seemed the GIs liked them at least as much as the parodies I sang.

The book and both album covers display a soft-focused 1968 photo of me and my baby brother, Adam. By then, most of my songs and rhymes featured in my albums had been written, and he and my daughter Lisa enjoyed hearing me play them. That photo also speaks to how I feel about Adam today. In 1968, that little guy was seeing the world through fresh eyes. Now, he brings that fresh vision and skill to my works, with the result that they have all been improved by his efforts.

Travis Edward Pike's Odd Tales and Wonders

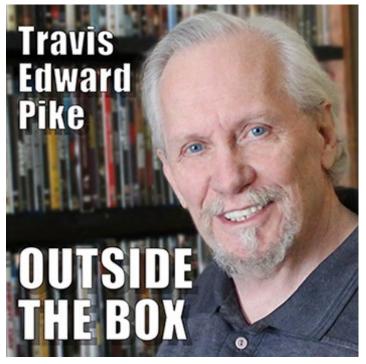


1964-1974: A Decade of Performance

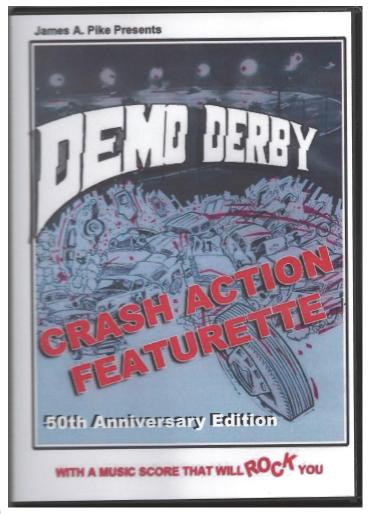
Forword by music journalist Harvey Kubernik, author of A Perfect Haze:
The Illustrated History of the Monterey International Pop Festival
and Canyon of Dreams: The Magic and Music of Laurel Canyon.

This is the 1968 photo I mentioned on the previous page, used fpor the cover of the first book, and both the Stories in Song and Stories in Rhyme CD albums,, all mostly family friendly novelties, or so I thought.





The next three albums contained songs I wrote and performed solo in my coffeehouse days, then with Travis Pike's Tea Party, and finally, my new *Outside the Box*, with some songs I wrote back then, and some newer ones, but most never before performed or recorded until now.



Meanwhile, I released a 50th Anniversary Edition of Demo Derby on DVD, (previous page), mentioned in the Odd Tales and Wonders book because I composed its title song, and that crash action featurette became phenomenally successful when it was booked on thousands of screens, all across the country, with The Beatles Hard Day's Night.

HK: The first song you wrote for a movie was the title song to Demo Derby, but you didn't sing it, did you?

TP: No. I was stationed in Germany when it was recorded by the Rondels. Actually, the first title song I wrote for a movie was "The Red-backed, Scaly, Black-bellied, Tusked, Bat-winged Dragon," but *Demo Derby* was my first song to actually make it onto the big screen.

HK: We need to talk about the musicians who performed on Feelin' Better, especially your younger brother Adam.

TP: I could write a book about Adam, and probably will someday, so let's start with our guest artists. Adam has known saxophonist Chris Woodcock for some years and recorded with him before. When it became clear that to recapture the sound of the Five Beats I needed a fabulous sax player, Adam immediately recommended Chris Woodcock. Adam knew his talent and said he was perfect for the job. Chris studied studied music at the University of Redlands and has been playing sax for years, mostly with local bands all across Southern California. And he's done studio work, including producing and recording some of his own original music. Having worked for several years at Tower Records in Covina, his knowledge of what was (and what could be), was exactly the mix I required. He ended up playing on seven songs on the Feelin' Better album. I love what he did for my songs and would hire him again in a heartbeat..



Jon DuFresne is better known as a computer consultant than as a premiere electric guitarist – but Adam knew, and brought him on board when we decided we needed someone with the chops, experience and knowledge of the patterns perfected by the greats of the past, to play the kind



of parts my old time "Rock 'n' Roll required." We talked a few minutes and Jon got right into the style and structure I needed. "Cold, Cold Morning" was trickier, not the least because Jon was trying to create complimentary parts to Chris' previously recorded sax. He not only did, but that, but got right into the jazzy "jam session" feel I wanted to support my vocal. Jon is now on my list of go to guys, too.







Barbara Jordan

I called upon Lauran Doverspike and Barbara Jordan to augment the chorus, both young ladies I had worked with before. Their vocals were excellent, lending just the touch I desired.

Which brings me to Adam. What can I say about my multiinstrumentalist, co-producer, backup vocalist, co-arranger, recording and mixing engineer that I haven't said before? When it comes to our recordings, he's as important as the air I breathe – and for these tunes, he brought something even The Five Beats lacked, and that was the keyboard work he provided, including the Jerry Lee Lewis-style piano riffs that really sell the era we were trying to recreate. I couldn't have done these albums, and wouldn't want to do any new ones, without him by my side. Who could have imagined that I would find all the ingenuity, skill and craft I lacked in one guy, especially one as close as my own 22-year-younger brother. He and I have both worked with extraordinary musicians, so we know how good it can get, but for the approach we share in our mutual desire to serve the song, it doesn't get any better than this.



Travis, in the background, is haunting Adam as he works out a part for one of the songs.

HK: Let's go over each track. How about an anecdote on each of the tunes.

TP: "Cold, Cold Morning," is a relatively new song, not written for The Five Beats, but very much in their sound palette. I needed four songs for the album that were not in the Feelin' Good soundtrack, so I chose it for the first cut. Another hint, less important than you may think, is that the Taylor Guitars company only started up in 1974 – just in time to make the decade I describe in my book. I bought one. It's never been stolen, and you'll hear it on many of the cuts in my recent CD albums. Furthermore, I only rewrote the lyrics you'll hear in this recording, in August 2014, making it one of my newest, old songs. Of course, I composed the music back in the 60s and a rehearsal version, called "Bad Week," recorded by Travis Pike and the Boston Massacre, meant to aid in working up a final arrangement, recorded at Lightfoot Recording Studios in Jamaica Plain, found its way onto the internet, but has mercifully been taken down. This finished authorized version is, in every respect, a much better song, but that early rehearsal proves conclusively how long I've had that one in my bag of tricks.

"Things Aren't Always What they Seem," then called "Watch Out Woman" and with some quite different lyrics, although written for The Five Beats, was featured in *Feelin' Good*, but since that soundtrack was never released, so you probably never heard it. [Ed. But you can <u>watch it now on youtube</u> and or get a copy of the <u>State Records</u> vinyl single 45.].

"Don't Hurt Me Again" is little changed from the song it was in the movie. The lyrics and melody are essentially the same. Only the arrangement is different, improved because our instrumentation was not limited by trying to match the cast of the on-screenband. This is not to say anything disparaging about The Brattle Street East, the band that played in the movie, but rather to clarify that in filmmaking, if the band on screen is seen to be playing the music, it is called "local music" and actors or musicians must be hired for the roles, even if their contributions are really little more than atmosphere – extras, as we used to say.

"Trophy Woman" was "Wicked Woman" in Feelin' Good and is much improved over the original. The lyrics are better and the song, composed for The Five Beats, works better, too. Back then, the concept of a trophy wife (or woman), was generally defined as a golddigger and to my knowledge, the use of the "trophy" term hadn't been coined yet. The gist of the song may be found in any number of songs composed and popularized by country-western star, Hank Williams.

"Foolin' Around," is another variation on the cheating girlfriend songs that were the counterpart to the cheating boyfriend songs in the popular country-western genre, played with a driving rhythm and a strong back-beat.

"The Way That I Need You" is yet another song with a strong country-western theme, but with a positive message. I could easily imagine this being performed by Elvis at the height of his career. The song seems to demand a lot of the lady, but vows to give her the same measure of love and respect in return. This is definitely my Five Beats arrangement, quite a bit different from the movie version, although I don't think I changed the lyrics at all. It has held up well over the 50 years or so since I wrote it. It still moves me.

"It Can't Be Right" used to be "It Isn't Right." It was written as a dance number and is a typical teenage drama about the apparent injustice and despair associated with unrequited love. This dispassionate appraisal is beginning to make me think that back in the day, this is all we ever wrote about, but then, realizing the age of our largest fan base, there was nothing as exciting or distressing as that quest for a loving partner that would make life worth living. Thinking back on it, apart from the odd novelty songs, at which I was a master, what else was there but the exploration of relationships —the deep satisfactions of loving relationships and the desperate depression that accompanies failed ones.

"I Beg Your Pardon" is a pretty song, again conceived with the Five Beats in mind, but altered to suit the movie, beautifully photographed on a *Swanboat* in the *Boston Public Gardens*. An aside to this is that my mother, pregnant with Adam at the time, had to crawl under the *Swanboat* bench to hold the highly directional microphone as close to me as possible, but still out of sight of the camera, while I

crooned the tune to my girlfriend, played by lovely, married, and also pregnant, Patricia Ewing. Adam claims this was the first song of mine he ever heard — while he was still an embryo! I never cared for the arrangement recorded for the movie, but I do like this one.

"Feelin' Better" is the album title song. I adapted it from a composition I began, but never finished, some time between 1974 and 1987. If it sounds newer than the rest, it's because it is.

One of my friends asked me why I didn't re-record "Feelin' Good," the movie title song. The fact is "Feelin' Good" was performed by the Montclairs, a soulful, local band that won a Massachusetts Jaycees Battle of the Bands in 1965, which also earned them roles in the movie. So when the time came, I wrote the title song for them, and the 45 of that recording is still kicking around on the internet. It not only wasn't in the style I wrote for the Five Beats, it didn't feature a honking sax or any of the other elements that defined the Five Beats' sound palette, so for me, this album's theme is simply better served by "Feelin' Better."

"Rock 'N' Roll" is a good enough reason for the entire album to be made. There is no song, anywhere, in which I sound more like "Teddy, die Twistsenstion aus USA," even though The Five Beats never heard or played it. This song captures the Zeitgeist and style of my European musical performances exactly. I love listening to it. For me, it is a gem of amazing brilliance, carrying me back to my youth. I was only 20-years-old when I wrote it, and didn't realize at the time how true it would become when I wrote "I plan to keep on rockin' even when I'm old and gray."

Finally, "End of Summer" is the bonus song for this album, previously recorded in the *Odd Tales and Wonders Stories in Song* CD, but with the addition of a string section, most subtly and beautifully arranged for this very special, European-themed release.

HK: Talk to me about the CD front cover. How does it correlate with the music inside?

TP: Surprisingly, I have very few photos of me taken back then. This cover photo, of me walking down memory lane with my Framus electric guitar, is actually a composite created by talented graphics designer, Linda Snyder. The photo of me and the guitar was taken by Judy in Portsmouth Virginia, when I was still in physical therapy at the Portsmouth Naval Hospital. The beautiful grounds in the photo are not in the *Boston Public Gardens*, but a photo taken by my daughter, Lisa, in 1992 at *Croxteth Hall* in Liverpool, England, while we were scouting exteriors for my proposed musical production, *Morningstone*. So, this composite album cover really is a trip down memory lane for me.

HK: The music industry is now dealing with 40 and 50 year cycles in terms of anniversaries and celebrations. Your works fall into that category. Why do you think songs birthed a half century ago, still resonate to you, and do you think the 50 year marker is meaningful to your prospective audience?

TP: Without the nostalgia factor of a long-ago release, I don't think that the fact that the songs are 50-years-old is nearly as important to listeners as it seems to be to marketers. I'm not getting any younger, and that may actually make me and my songs less exciting to some of the younger crowd, but also less threatening, I suspect, so it may all balance out well enough. It also means I probably won't be around a whole lot longer, so if listeners do like what they're hearing, they should get them while they can.

As for the songs, they deal with all the things that were important to me when I was in my late teens and early twenties, the same issues that young people in their late teens and early twenties are dealing with today. Music claims to be a universal language. I don't entirely agree. Not everyone has an ear for the nuances that permeate the craft. If it is all about dancing, words and music are less important than rhythm, but you don't get much in the way of ear candy from an electronic music generator. I am certain there will always be a place for real songs — words and music that convey strong emotions, bringing us all together, whether to share our disappointments and miseries or to celebrate our triumphs and our joys.

HK: What is the difference in writing songs as opposed to writing books and stories? Is it a mindset thing?

TP: Not to me. I do both and respond to whichever Muse is pushing my buttons at the time. Of course, it takes a lot more discipline to write a book than it does to write a song. It takes longer, for one thing, and to return to a work, day after day, as it seems to crawl forward in fits and starts, is much more demanding than knocking out a song that provides the next thing to instant gratification. Both story structure and music structure have their disciplines and they are not as different as one might suppose. The discipline thing is probably the greatest difference, but another might be that many songs are written by partners, one composing the music and the other writing the lyrics. I happen to be one of the guys who enjoys doing both and am fortunate enough, or silly enough, to believe I am able to do so.

HK: Do they feed each other in the creative process?

TP: They do if you're writing a musical. Reading a book is like embarking on an adventure that unfolds in your imagination, a journey as much in time as any dream. Music and movies both take place in time, too. A great musical composition, if all the notes were sounded at once, would be nothing more than a loud noise. And movies not only move from location to location in the telling of the story, but move deliberately through time – or in spite of it in cases of stories where the boundaries of space and time are deliberately manipulated by the author and/or filmmaker. I have often thought that the reason so many composers become good filmmakers, and vice versa, is that, unlike sculpture and architecture, both disciplines manifest themselves through time.

HK: So tell me where people can get your movies, books and CDs.

TP: My CD's are distributed through <u>CD Baby</u>, and Amazon, and both offer digital downloads as well as complete albums and singles.

My original book, Travis Edward Pike's Odd Tales and Wonders: 1964-1974 A Decade of Performance has now been discontinued, and my new 367 page book 1964-1874, A Decade of Odd Tales and Wonders, has more than 125 new pages, displays more than 100 new images and artifacts, and includes the lyrics to all of the songs featured in the albums on its cover. It's manufactured and distributed through Amazon in a trade paperback edition, and a digital download through Kindle.

<u>Demo Derby</u> is manufactured and distributed through Amazon and there are some discounts available to outside retailers desiring to special order or stock it for their customers.

Customers and retailers may view my trailers, book widgets, and previews by clicking the Otherworld Cottage logo or the relative specific websites listed below.

http://www.oddtalesandwonders.com

http://www.travisedwardpike.com

http://www.morningstone.com

http://www.grumpuss.com

http://www.long-grin.com

