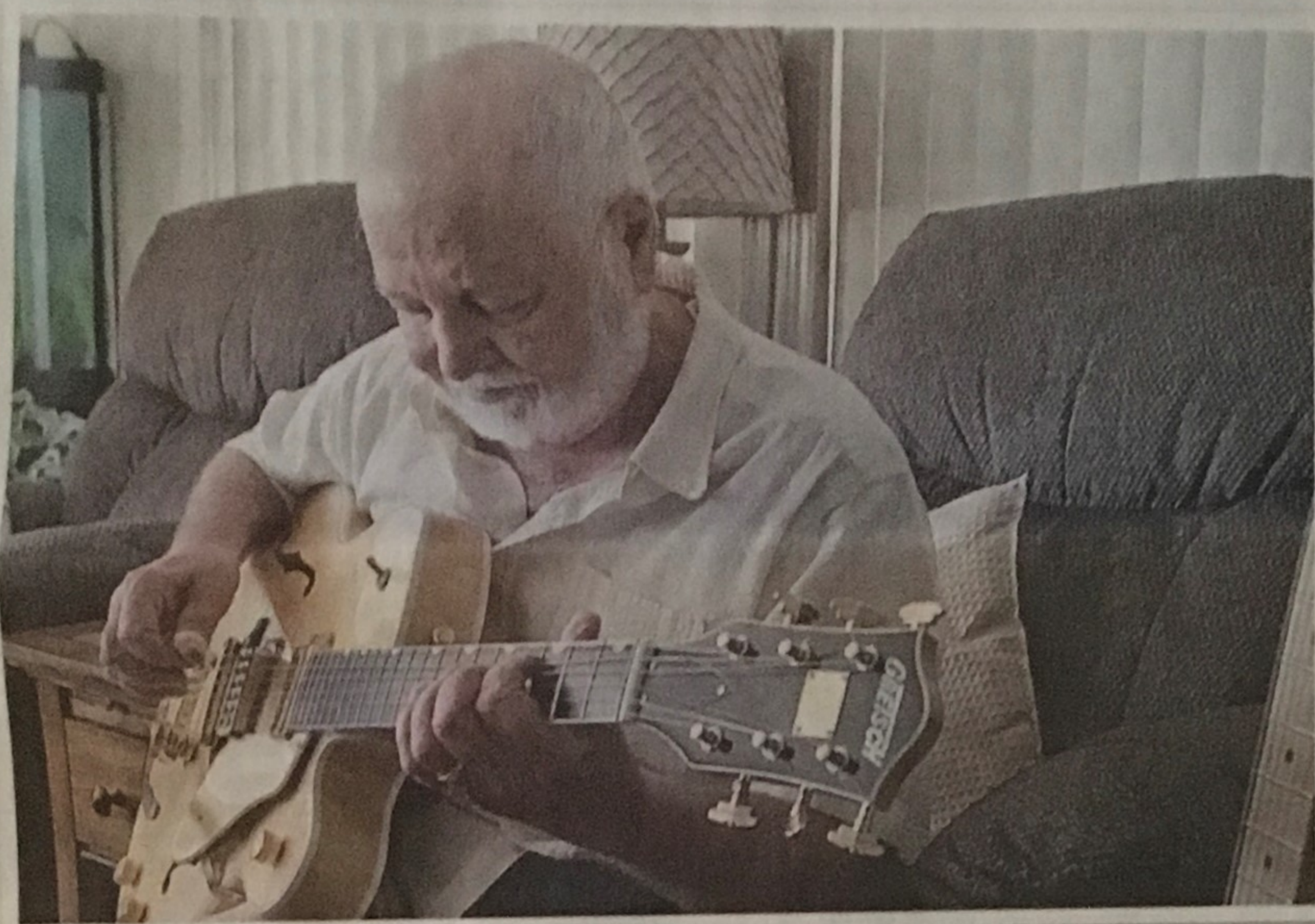


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SUBMIT FRONT PORCH TIDBITS VIA COMMUNITY@IDAHO PRESS.COMBOISE'S 84-YEAR-OLD
GUITAR GOD

BRIAN MYRICK / IDAHO PRESS

Renowned guitarist Bobby Gibson plays one of his prized Gretsch guitars in the living room of his Boise home, Thursday, May 13, 2019. Known for his fingerpicking skills, Gibson was inducted into the Fingerpickers Hall of Fame in 2018.

Living quietly in a west Boise mobile home park is a man whose surroundings give few hints of his former life in the inner circle of stardom.

The mobile home is much like those around it — neatly kept, flowers out front. Step inside and you'll see a spacious living room with comfortable furniture and a big-screen television. The only clue to its owner's career are two guitars on stands.



TIM WOODWARD

For the Idaho Press

His name is Bobby Gibson. He's 84 years old, and though the term is typically used for the likes of Eric Clapton, Jimi Hendrix and other pop stars, he is, in his own way, a guitar god.

"There's really nothing to playing the guitar," he jokes. "After the first 50 or 60 years, it's easy."

He started playing at 10. Like many great players, he grew up in a musical family. His mother taught him his first chords. An uncle who played the banjo taught him to accompany him. He made his first money playing music when he was 11, earning three dollars to play at a barn dance in Ridgefield, Washington.

When he was a teenager living in Vancouver, Washington, he met a young man who was working as a disc jockey at the local radio station. He played guitar, too, and so began a lifelong friendship. They played together at Grange halls and barn dances. The young man, then in his early 20s, was Willie Nelson.

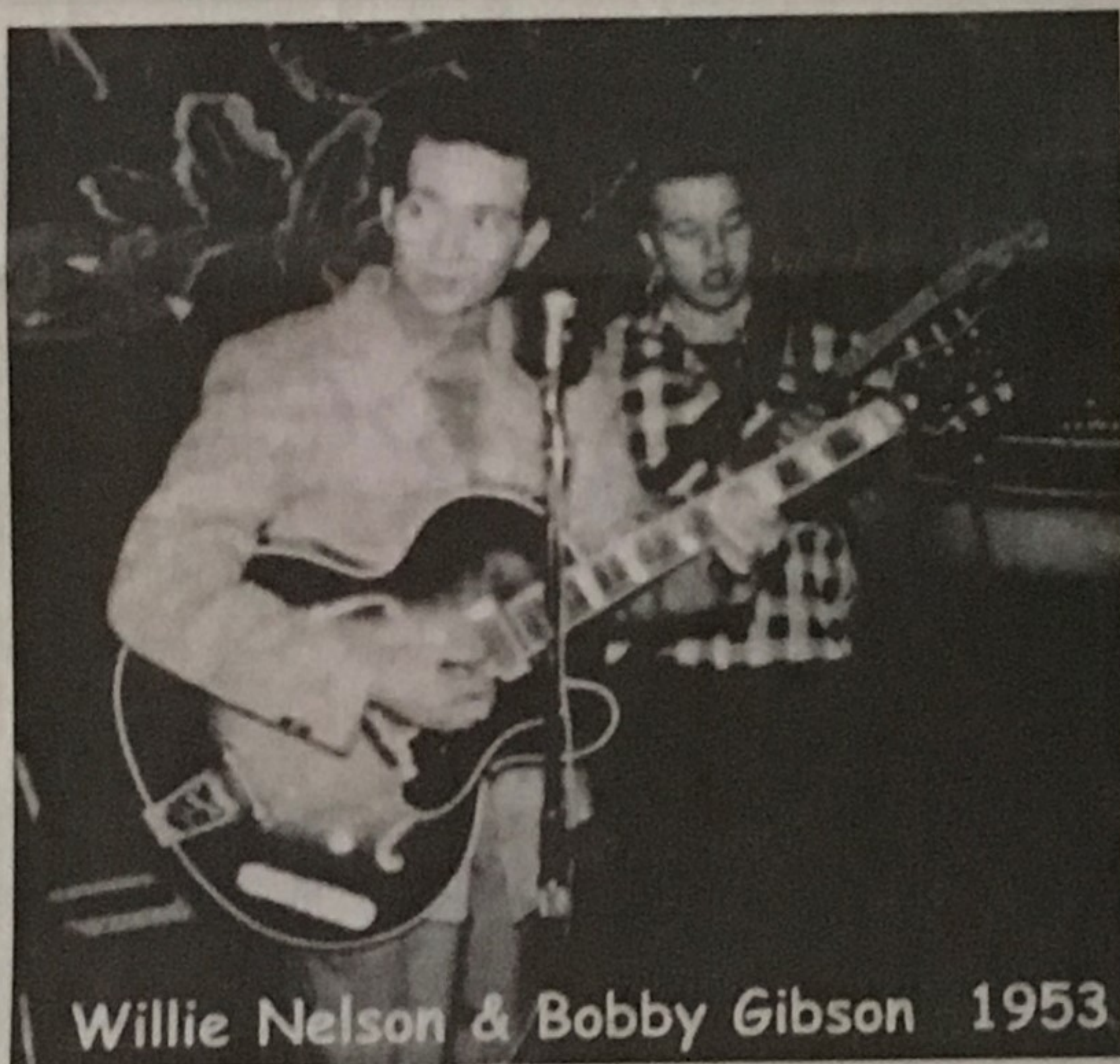
"He went by the name Texas Willie for his radio show," Gibson said.

Gibson spent his teens playing in the Vancouver area with whoever he could wherever he could for whatever he could make. His first job at a dance hall paid \$17 a night. Then, as now, local musicians were exploited.

"We played at a packed Grange hall one night. It was so crowded you could barely move. We said, 'Boy, are we ever gonna' make a lot of money tonight!' They paid us \$3 each."

Young but talented, Gibson was destined for bigger things than playing for a few bucks a night at Grange halls. He went on to own a recording studio, front his own band and play with well-known musicians in Nashville, Los Angeles, New York and other cities.

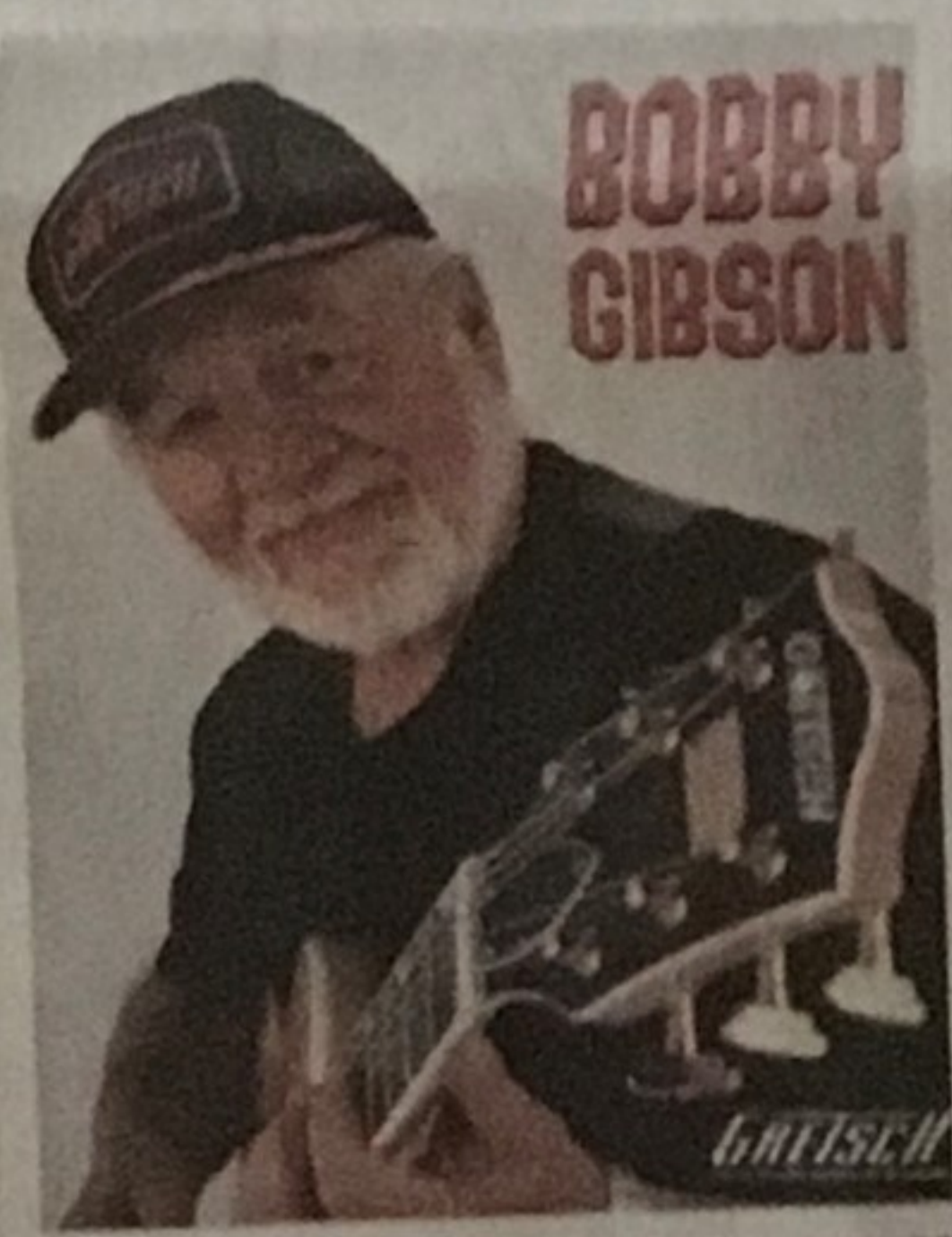
One was the late Merle Haggard, recipient of a Grammy Lifetime Achievement award and a member of the Country Music Hall of Fame. They were drinking wine together



Willie Nelson & Bobby Gibson 1953

BRIAN MYRICK / IDAHO PRESS

Bobby Gibson, at right, appears with Willie Nelson during a performance in 1953. Gibson quips that this photo was taken "before Willie was Willie."



Bobby Gibson is a Gretsch-endorsed artist. "A pretty big deal."

one night when they decided to record a song at Gibson's studio.

"When we got to the studio, the drum kit that was usually there had been taken out for a gig. We improvised by using a microphone case and a toilet brush instead."

How did the song turn out?

"It was beautiful."
When a talented but relatively unknown black country singer lost some work because of the color of his skin, the leader of the Bobby Gibson Band had him sit in for a few nights to help him make ends meet. Charley Pride went on to have 40 number-one hits on the country charts and be-

come a part owner of a major league baseball team (the Texas Rangers).

Gibson opened for Johnny Cash. Among his memorabilia is a letter from Cash, thanking him for loaning him money for a set of tires.

He played with Buck Owens, who sat in with the Bobby Gibson Band one night in Portland.

"His whole band was sitting in the front row."

I asked him if that made him nervous, having all those musicians watching him.

"No," he replied, "I've been doing this so long and had so many people watch me play that it doesn't bother me who's in the audience."

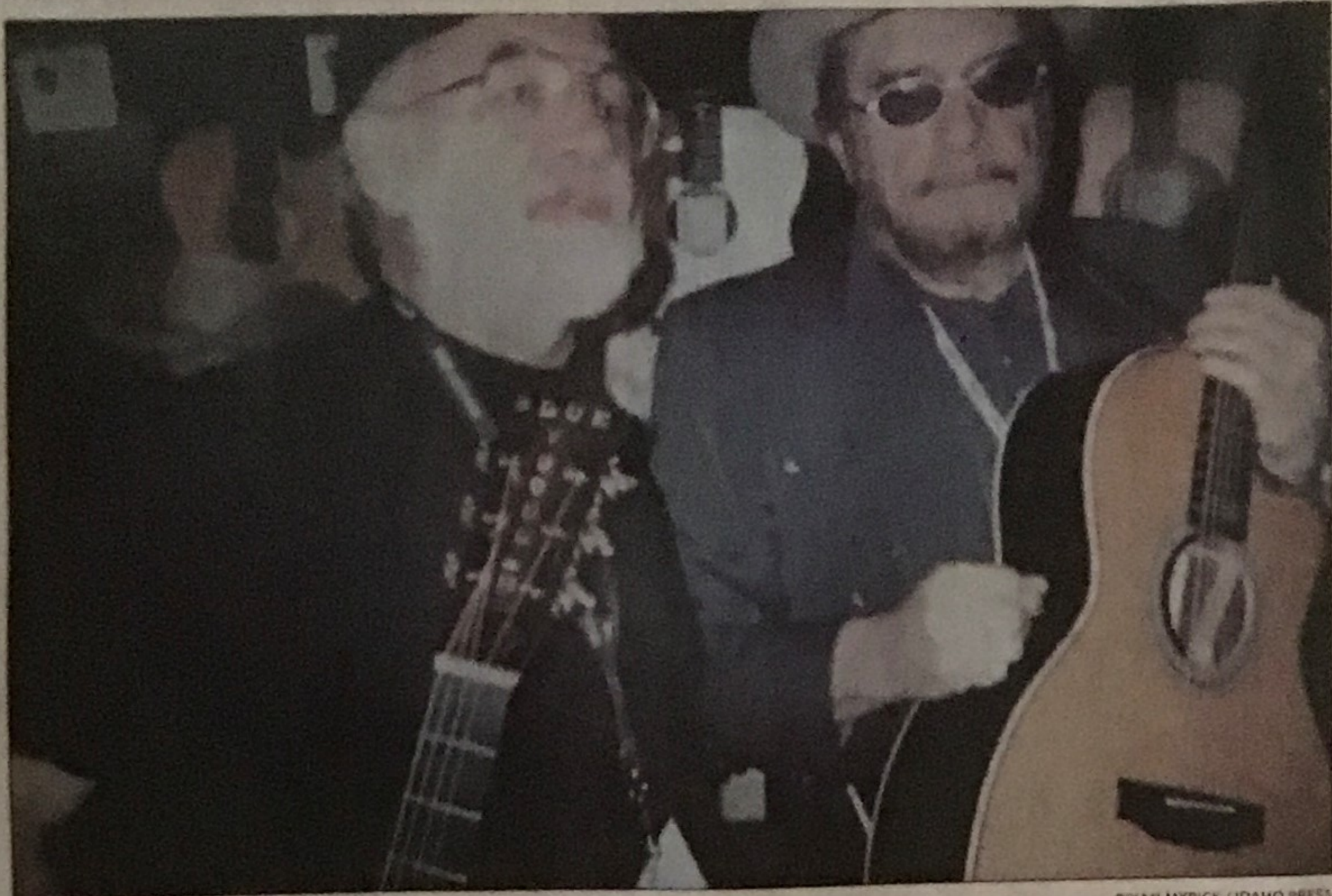
His guitar hero is the late Chet Atkins, whose influence can be heard in his playing. Atkins was known for playing base, rhythm and melody at the same time. Gibson does the same thing, so he's as comfortable playing for audiences by himself as he is with a band.

Atkins's name was all but synonymous with the Gretsch brand of guitars. Gibson is a Gretsch-endorsed artist, which is a pretty big deal. There are only about 20 of them.

Gretsch guitars were favorites of the Beatles' George Harrison.

"Mr. Gretsch told me sales increased so much because of George Harrison that they couldn't keep up. They couldn't make them fast enough."

More GIBSON | C6



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Bobby Gibson, at left, appears with Merle Haggard during a performance in Los Angeles in 2001. They once recorded a song together.

Gibson/ from C1

At an annual gathering of the Chet Atkins Appreciation Society, Australian Grammy-nominated guitarist Tommy Emmanuel filled in as Gibson's drummer. Gibson has a picture in his photo album of Emmanuel learning a guitar lick from him.

He played for years with the late Nokie Edwards, a founding member of the Ventures.

"In all that time, we only played one Ventures song," he said. "I forgot which song it was, but I didn't know it. I don't care who you are or how good you are, you have to have at least a basic idea. I had to ask what the chords were."

In addition to names previously mentioned, Gibson either played or spent time with Patsy Cline, Merle

Travis, Jim Reeves, George Benson, Brenda Lee, Les Paul, Conway Twitty, Glen Campbell and some I've probably forgotten.

Because he seems to have played with just about everybody who's anybody in the country music of his generation, I asked him whether there was anything left that he'd still like to accomplish.

"Yes," he said. "I love playing beautiful melodies. I'd like to play with a symphony orchestra someday. That's one thing I've never done."

Six years ago, he moved to Boise to be closer to a daughter and her husband. Last year, he was inducted into the Fingerpickers Hall of Fame along with Duane Eddy (famous for the twangy guitar sound in "Peter Gunn," "Rebel Rouser" and other hits). Past inductees include his hero, Chet Atkins, which is as good

an indication as any of what an honor it was.

I asked him how hard he had to practice to be that good.

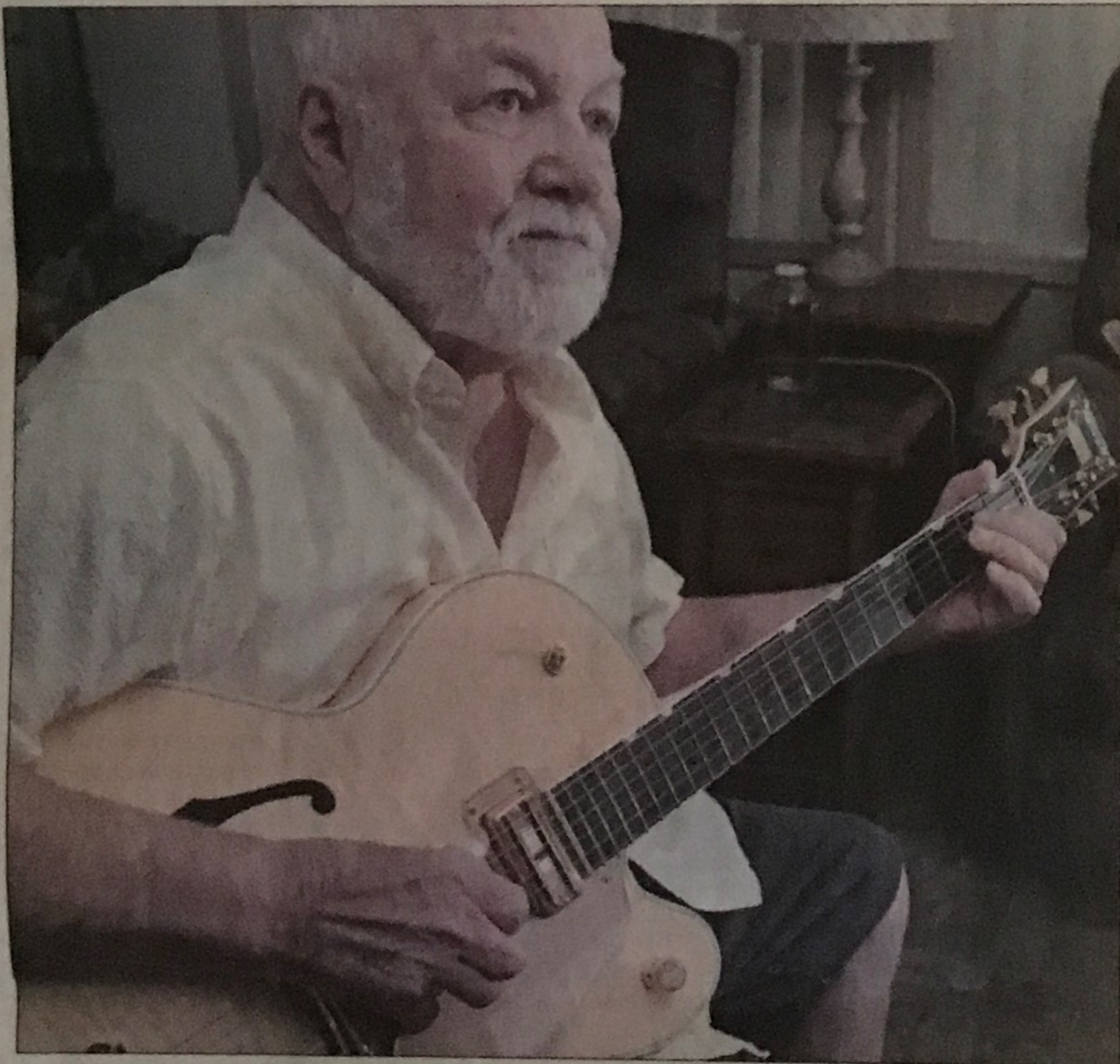
"I've never practiced," he said. "I got paid to learn my whole life. As the jobs progressed, I was able to play five or six nights a week and didn't have to have another job. I'd play some nights in a cowboy outfit and some in a tuxedo. I learned everything on the bandstand. I didn't have time to practice."

Never?

"Never. There just wasn't time for it."

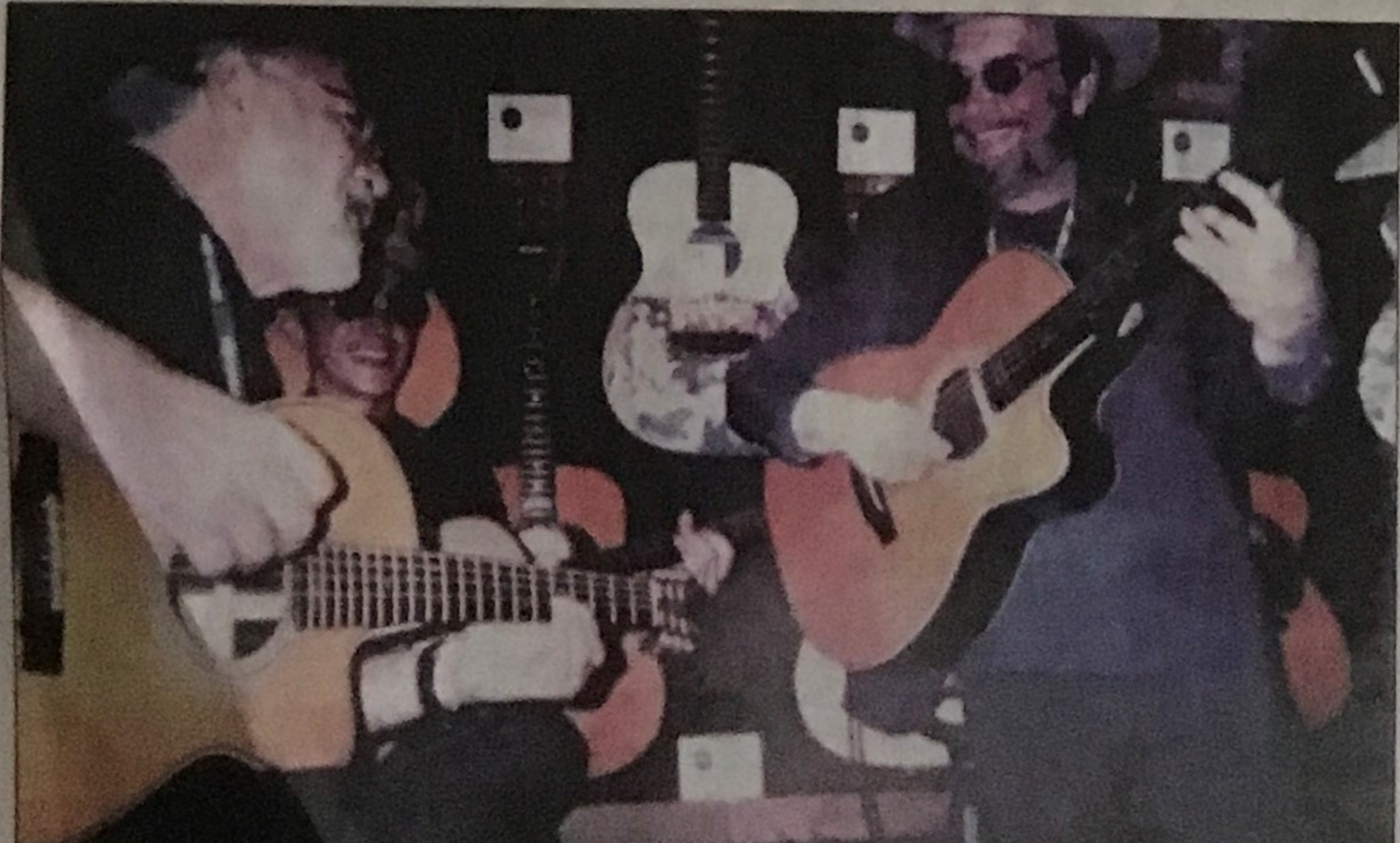
With that I thanked him for the interview. Then I went home and smashed all my guitars.

Tim Woodward's column appears every other Sunday and is posted on woodwardblog.com the following Mondays. Contact him at woodwardcolumn@hotmail.com.



BRIAN MYRICK / IDAHO PRESS

Bobby Gibson, 84, owned his own recording studio, fronted his own band and played with well-known musicians from coast to coast.



Bobby Gibson N.A.M.M. show L.A. Co. 2001 Merle Haggard

BRIAN MYRICK / IDAHO PRESS

Renowned guitarist Bobby Gibson, at left, appears with Merle Haggard during a performance in Los Angeles in 2001.