



Lowell with family (from left) Tina, Jeanie and Freddy. Bobby Jr. not pictured.

And he continued moving antiques out of Mexico. Unfortunately, the supply was dwindling. Lowell found himself going deeper and deeper into Mexico for his merchandise. It was dangerous territory.

"It's a whole different world down there. It's a nasty, filthy world — you're talkin' dope, drug runners and . . . guys that run women. Man, I've seen it all."

Those experiences changed Lowell. By his own admission, he got meaner.

"Towards the last, I'd eat a burrito and watch a guy die."

The meanness finally erupted when Lowell nearly killed a man. He'd just returned from a particularly bad trip. An old friend invited him out for a steak dinner. Hoping to unwind, Lowell accepted the invitation.

He had a glass of beer in hand and was standing near a shuffle board when a man accidentally tripped, slamming his elbow into Lowell's back.

"Man, I had that sucker peeled over that shuffle board and had that thing (the glass) broke and at his throat, and the only thing that stopped me was . . . the look of horror on those people's faces.

"I got the hell out of there, and I thought all night long, 'Jesus Christ, what has happened to me? What have I become?'"

Lowell spent the next two days with his family. He took his boys to the cock fights.

"Even that bothered me a little more than it ever had."

His wife had left him in 1978 — two days

after Tina, Lowell's youngest daughter, was born. Lowell was a single parent with four children. He decided El Paso was not the best place for a family man. In 1981, he came home to Lincoln.

His sons got jobs at a restaurant, and for a while, Lowell made some money by tattooing, a trade he learned in El Paso.

Then one of his new friends, Rick Petty, heard him sing and tried to convince him to start another band and cut a record. Lowell was hesitant.

By coincidence, a Council Bluffs recording studio was packaging an album of old Midwest rock hits, among them "Um-Baby-Baby." When the studio owner found out Lowell was in Lincoln, he talked him into re-recording the song, rather than just releasing the old version. Lowell formed a band and sang again.

The four-song EP got favorable reviews from The Omaha World-Herald and Lincoln Journal-Star. Another friend of Lowell's resurrected the old Roto label and became his manager.

Under his manager's guidance, Lowell released new songs on the Roto label, and Billboard magazine took notice: "Ice Cold Heart" appeared in the July 20, 1985, new country release column. On Aug. 3, "Ice Cold Heart" and "Independence Day" were mentioned among new pop releases. On Aug. 31, "It's Been So Long" hit the new black

release column, and a biker anthem, "Iron Pony II," hit the pop column.

Lowell began appearing live with his studio band, The Wrecking Co. And before the year was out, The Lincoln Journal-Star Music Poll named him top male vocalist and entertainer of the year for 1985. This time he wasn't compared to Elvis.

Because the band comprised musicians from several local bands, the players went their own ways after a few performances. Lowell would like to form another band and cut more records, but he says he doesn't want to spend too much time playing in bars because he's got a family to care for. Tina is only 8.

So for now, he takes care of his family, living on record royalties and the money his sons make. He plans to do more tattooing as well.

"It's kinda lonely over here," Lowell says.

"I've devoted my life to my kids, really. I don't party that much and stuff any more. I don't think it's good for them to be around it like when they were littler. It didn't make any difference (then) because they could go to bed."

Lowell's friends and fellow musicians agree that he is a family man.

"His family and music come first," says Joe Gray, the Wrecking Co.'s bassist.

Lowell still sings about chicks and love, but most of his new songs celebrate the life of a biker: the highway, black leather, fine-feelin' women and good parties — a lifestyle Lowell hopes to take up again when his kids are on

their own. But even with the responsibility of a family, Lowell says he is doing what he wants to do. Since his second divorce, he says, he has been independent.

♦♦♦♦

It is a late-summer Wednesday night in 1985. Bobby Lowell looks out across the smoky bar. Men and women dance on the open floor. Some lean on the bar, sipping beer in sweaty glasses.

The Drumstick, one of Lincoln's larger bars, holds a crowd of bikers. They came to see 48-year-old Lowell.

His voice is deeper now, more gravelly. He doesn't dance much. He sings and sways to the hammer-beat of his band, which pounds out the rhythm of "Independence Day."

*Life's harder than diamonds, I'm laying out the news  
Got a reputation I just can't afford to lose*

*I'm a true connoisseur of sleazy women and cheap booze  
How I do it is a secret, why I never have the blues  
I'm not taking things lightly, doing things my way  
Just me and Iron Pony since Independence Day.*

This story was done in conjunction with the UNL College of Journalism's depth-reporting class taught by Al Pagel, Gannett professional lecturer.