

COVER SHEET

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Transcriber: Amanda Fickey, ABD, Independent Contractor
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Interviewee: Art Mize
Interviewer: Amanda Fickey
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Transcription Notes:

AF: Amanda Fickey

AM: Art Mize

In some cases, words such as “um”, “uh”, “and”, “so” and “yeah” have been excluded.

Time notations have been included at approximately 2 minute intervals.

... Indicates pause, delay in conversation, or, weak transition/no transition in themes.

The following names of musical genres have been capitalized: Bluegrass, Celtic, Old Time.

Attempts were made to verify the names of all musicians and geographical locations referenced throughout this interview.

0:00

AF: Alright, well, let me start by saying thank you Art, for sitting down and talking with me today.

AM: I'm delighted. Thank you.

AF: I thought we would begin with basic biographical information.

AM: Ok.

AF: So, where did you grow up at?

AM: Well, until I was 11 I lived in Laurel County, out in the country, part of that adjacent to my grandfather's farm out East 80. And then we moved into a house when I was in 3rd grade. Then we, dad got transferred to Northern Illinois, I lived in Roselle, Illinois, for three years, then we moved back to Woodford County, itching to get back to Kentucky and closer to family when I was a freshman in high school. So, I've been here in the Bluegrass since 1978.

AF: Ok, I'm curious, when you were younger and you were bouncing around a bit...

AM: Yeah.

AF: Were you interested in music and were you taking any music classes?

AM: No, but I grew up in a church that didn't use any instruments and this is a bit ironic because it was all singing, but we'd have singing schools and visiting preachers would have sort of a singing school on a Sunday and we learned, we sang out of shape note hymn books that parted out, you know, soprano, and alto, and tenor and bass, and, so, I learned to read solfege, you know, from a very early age. I don't remember not knowing how to read shape notes.

AF: Yeah.

AM: It was just something we did all the time, it was just our regular religious practice whenever we worshiped and that twice on Sunday and once on Wednesday, so I've had a lot of practice. But my dad bought a guitar... I think the story is that he was buying a high chair for my older brother who was 11 months older than me, I won't give him a year, and um, and there was a guitar hanging on the wall...

AF: Uh huh.

2:00

AM: And he said, if you'll throw the guitar in with it we'll give you your price, so he got this guitar. There have been generations of musical aspiration on my dad's side of the family...

AF: Uh huh.

AM: His mom always wanted to play guitar, and her dad, um, had wanted to play fiddle and there was supposed to have been a fiddle hiding in the barn until his dad figured it out and, uh, he was very

opposed to this kind of... always wore black and white, was a bit puritan oriented, and you know, music was kind of dangerous...

AF: Yeah.

AM: That wild time of life. Dancing and drinking and stuff like that, it went with the music. So, it was frowned upon, but Pa Combs was supposed to have loved the fiddle and Ma Combs loved the banjo, and they hooked the car battery up to the radio and listened to the Grand Ole Opry and lots of stuff, in Leslie County. I was born in Hyden, in the old hospital up on the hill, but I didn't really grow up there, but...

AF: Yeah.

AM: But, my grandparents, my dad's mom lived there and had a lot of cousins, and we were all the time driving up to touch-in and to see my great grandmother and uh...

AF: Yeah, and, was that typically on the weekend?

AM: Yes.

AF: As Appalachian migrants you go back home on the weekend, you spend the weekend there, and then you go back...

AM: We did that all the time.

AF: Yeah.

AM: And I remember traveling the old road...

AF: Um hmm.

AM: Going to 80, all the way up to Hyden. Um, you know, you'd sit in the back of the car, big long bench seats without seat belts.

Interruption in filming

AF: Yeah. So, your father managed to get ahold of a guitar.

AM: Yeah.

AF: And was that brought into the family and shared?

3: 48

AM: Absolutely, was sand and played at home. He got me a baritone ukulele for my 6th birthday, and um, so, I started out playing kind of abbreviated guitar chords and just watching dad or, he had a friend from work that would come over and they would play and sing together, and I remember I thought the other guy looked like Glen Campbell, and they did a lot of Glen Campbell material. But, there was a

barbershop down the street that was run by Martin Young, who had been around playing quite a long time, and he moved to Laurel County from, I think, Perry County, um, and he had a fiddle that dad bought for me, paid \$50.00 for the outfit, the fiddle and bow, and the case you know when I was 10 years old and said Art, would you like to play the fiddle? Sure, whatever...

AF & AM: Laughing

AM: But my older brother played guitar, and dad eventually got a banjo and played some banjo tunes. So, we did a lot of playing and singing around the house.

AF: So, I'm just curious, did you ever start to incorporate that into church, or did that stay two very separate things?

AM: No, no, two very separate things, totally separate; yeah it was Church of Christ.

AF: Yeah, ok. I was just curious if you were playing and doing so much at home, if that ever crossed over.

AM: You know, and it's odd because the idea that religious songs should be acapella was so heavily vested that we really didn't sing any religious songs when we played instruments.

AF: Oh, wow...

AM: So, it was odd because the ethic for like Church of God people would be to almost give up secular music...

AF: Right...

AM: Right, at home, and they would only do religious music. I've known a lot of people who wouldn't do any other kind of music but religious music out of those convictions about music.

AF: Yeah...

AM: But it was very ironic in my family because of the emphasis on not playing instruments in church and then...

AF: Yeah, that is pretty interesting, Art. Well, so you started moving around when you were 11, and you're going to different places, but you're still continuing to play.

AM: Yeah and when I moved to Illinois I got into the school orchestra. There was a lady who lived down the street in Roselle, Illinois, that gave violin lessons and I had lessons at school and private lessons with the lady down the street, and for two years I remember I got really choked up on a lot of violin playing. And then, when we moved back to Woodford County in the middle of my freshman year of high school there was no orchestra there, so I just went back to playing you know, whatever we were playing at home. Got really interested in Bluegrass, actually, at that point. I remember I bought my first record album from a sale bin in Turfland Mall, and it was Bill Monroe's 16 all-time greatest hits.

6:47

AF: Oh, wow...

AM: And, they were all recordings from the late, you know, 1945-1948, that seminal period for Bluegrass music, when Earl Scruggs and Lester Flatt were still in his band, except for a few cuts with Mac Wiseman and, after Flatt and Scruggs left... But what was really stunning to me was to listen to Tubby Wise whose fiddle work on that album was just really remarkable I thought. I set about to kind of imitate, to listen to that and imitate that sound. And then I discovered Kenny Baker, I discovered a lot of what was going on. Vasser Clements, I kind of had dual, like a split consciousness about fiddling, there's that Kenny Baker, very Kentucky oriented, very traditional, kind of defining what traditional Bluegrass should sound like; and then there's this Vasser Clements sort of jazz side, where he is just so distinctive, has so much personality in his playing, and I thought that was fascinating. So John Hartford fiddled kind of like that, but was also very traditional, loved old time music, but could play on that jazzy, swiny kind of inventive side.

So, I think that wetted my appetite for playing, I've always had just a very broad palette, for what I liked.

AF: Yeah, that seems like an interesting shift to go from being in the orchestra and taking private lessons, probably playing more classical...

AM: Well it was all classical orchestra, yeah...

AF: And then to come back here, and then to go back to those sort of Bluegrass roots...

AM: And it was odd because my older brother was playing guitar with the family and got more interested in classical guitar when we moved back to Kentucky....

AF: Oh...

AM: He took classical guitar lessons through high school and got really serious, he is a wonderful classical guitar player, but is very, very heavily vested in the classical instrument, you know, where as I went the other direction into the folk roots, I'll admit to ear playing.

AF: Oh, well, that's interesting how it works out within families like that...

8:50

AM: It is! But we can still get together and he'll bring a duet book with flute parts, or violin parts, and we'll play guitar and violin I can read really well.

AF: Yeah.

AM: So, um, even though I didn't pursue it beyond that, because of all the shape note reading as a kid, I can just, I can almost sit down with a tune book, like if I go to a dance, and they're gonna play a tune that I've never learned, they'll have the tune book open and I can kind of sight read the notes, but extemporize my own version of it.

AF: Ok.

AM: So, I'm just a very adept reader, which is just a great gift to have that from such an early age. Yeah, so I'm kind of unusual as a fiddler, to be able to play by ear but by notes if I wanted to.

AF: Well that's what I was gonna say, yeah it is kind of unusual, and especially, I guess that movement to Northern Illinois becomes really important for your education.

AM: Very much so.

AF: And your ability to read, I would think, to read music, you know...

AM: I didn't notice any difference between the, this is a little off topic, but I didn't notice any difference in the schools going in 6th grade in London, Kentucky, to 6th grade in Illinois, but by the time we left and I came back the slow math book and the math classes was the fast math book in Woodford County and it was just like that across the board. They were doing, I was doing lab work in a chemistry class where you are testing the elasticity of metals and things like that and the only thing they could put me in, in Woodford County, was sort of an earth sciences class where we were just talking about rocks. And it was just such a kill down of educational quality in high school that I was very, I'm not sure what exactly the word is, there are so, discouraged isn't exactly it because I was enjoyed everything that I was doing, but I just thought school really had,, was very degraded in terms of what was offered here compared to what was offered up there. I was on a speech one time and traveling to Chicago and competing, and they didn't have any speech program then, they didn't have any theatre in Woodford County, and the people that wanted to do theatre had to fight for it. And we had to, we had a fight with the principal just to get access to the cafeteria to put on a play or something. It was just a different mindset of how the arts fit in...

11:11

AF: I think there's still some of that... that lingers. Well, that's an interesting observation. Well, I'm curious, so you came back from Illinois, and you're put into a situation where the high school is very different, was it during this time that maybe you became more interested in going beyond simply playing and actually working on the instrument itself and doing repair and building, or was that a little bit later on, or...

AM: The first time that I really had the inkling that I was interested in this was when I was in college, I came to college, and my older brother had dated Homer Ledford's daughter...

AF: Laughter

AM: And even though they continue to date, Julie and I would meet often on campus at UK and he ended up needing a fiddler, Porter Corum was the fiddler with him before I joined his band. And, this was in 1982. And I played with Homer for a year and half or so, couple of years, before I moved on to another Bluegrass band that was working a whole lot more at the time. But, I loved being around Homer, he was very inspiring, and of course he was that sort of consummate musician and luthier, he was sort of the, I didn't know it at the time, that impression of him would be so informative for me, but I look back on him and see it, you know, that it was a great mix for a life to be able to do the music and work on the instruments and appreciate them across the board.

I got interested in acoustic set-up when I was playing with him and I'd start doing things that I had no idea about, messing with my sound post which a lot of fiddlers do, pulling the sound post around and noticing how it changes the instrument, and keeping the acoustics confused by always shifting it around. And, you know, I didn't do a whole lot like that, but I did get a guitar from Homer that I finished out. It was mostly put together. I had to mount the neck and do the varnish work and do the setup and that sort of thing. He'd get these kits from Sigma Guitar Company, from Martin Guitars, and I picked up one from him when I was in his band just for fun. But, I was really a musician playing a lot of music, and in the early 80s I was getting interested in Celtic fiddle, and Old Time fiddle, I was going both directions, and in traditional work I was moving into, from Bluegrass into Old Time, and more into like, Celtic, Irish and Scottish, exploring those directions. And I would have a Bluegrass band; I would have a Celtic group that would play, and then I discovered Django Reinhardt and Stephane Grapelli, through an interesting connection.

Do you want to hear that? It's kind of odd....

AF: Well yeah!

AM: It's an interesting line of how things fallout. There was a band in the 60s called the Kentucky Colonels, and they traveled all around, and they were a touring band from California to Maine, all over the United States. And, there was a musician in that band name Bob Slone, who played bass. And they had another bass player, sometimes it was Bob, sometimes it was someone else, but Bob had a friend from Pike County, he was from Pike County. He had a friend named Harry Hopkins, and Harry traveled out to California with them and the significant thing about the Kentucky Colonels was their guitar player, Clarence White, was a real innovator in how to play guitar. He really transformed how the guitar was approached in Bluegrass music. He set the stage for the colossal impact that Tony Rice ended up having in his approach to taking the leads on the guitar; Clarence White was exploring that territory. And, back in the 60s, Harry Hopkins, Clarence White got killed, he got hit by a car out in California, and Harry, who was a friend of this whole circle of people, ended up with these reel-to-reel tapes and Harry's son Danny was the guitar player in the band that I went and joined after playing with Homer, so Danny Hopkins was in this band called Stoney Creek that I played in, joined in 1983. We still get together and play occasionally for one thing or the other as amazing as that may seem...

16:14

So, Danny had these reel-to-reel tapes and at the time I could go into the music lab at UK and dub them off onto cassettes, and I realized that Clarence White was listening to Stephane Grapelli and Django Reinhardt recordings, and that was the big inspiration, or some of the...

Interview interrupted – light blows, chatter about lights going out, videographer forced to stop filming and replace bulb

16:36

AF: Ok, so you have some of these recordings and you take them to the music lab at UK and figure out who was playing what...

AM: Well the recordings were all recordings of the Hot Club of Paris, France, which were recordings done in the 30s, 1934-35 up through '38-39. But these, I've found over the years since then, these,

recordings were tremendously influential. I've met, there was a guy that used to come to Mr. Miller's shop named Paul Sap who played professionally, he used to play on the Lawrence Welk show before, when, where was he at in Kansas? I think there was some mid-western state, before he went to television he had a radio show, and he played electric guitar with him, and like I think he would have been in high school, or a teenager in the 30s when these albums would come out, they would drive all the way to Cincinnati just to pick up the latest Django Reinhardt and Stephane Grapelli recording, and a lot of, if you listen to Old Time players like Clayton McMichen, who after being in the Skillet Lickers in the 20s moved to Louisville, and had a band called the Georgia Wildcats, you start, if you find, if you listen to what the guitar players are doing, and you listen to Hank Williams Senior, you listen to the rhythms of the guitar players, you listen to Bob Wills, there's a whole Western swing, you can hear it in Bluegrass music too, there's an offbeat chop of the mandolin, there's a tremendously strong influence of this swing jazz music and Reinhardt and Grapelli were acoustic instruments, guitar, fiddle and bass, so it spoke right across, in a way most jazz of the day and swing jazz was a good bit of people doing band instruments, but it spoke directly to a lot of the acoustically centered musicians of the day and fit right in to the string and the tradition very strongly.

It was neat for me to discover that because I didn't know anything about it growing up, and I didn't know anything about it until I heard these recordings. Although, I had played in another little side band and someone had told me that I had played, well, some of the things that we learned and played were old pieces from the 30s, I just wasn't so familiar as to get to listen to what Grapelli really sounded like. So, he's been a strong influence on my jazz interested side.

19:08

AF: So, you're experiencing all this and finding, sort of new music while you're at UK, is that shaping your experience at UK? What was that like?

AM: I lived kind of a, I was almost gonna say Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, there's a polarity in me that is uh, partly rooted in my religious background. I think the strange thing about being really fundamentally interested in the text and studying it very, very closely, is an academic thing. And then there's this musical thing, that caught me from an age that can't remember, that's always been part of my life, but both have always been part of my life, and what I did at UK was I took an undergraduate in philosophy.

AF: Oh, ok...

AM: So, I was really interested in the history of ideas, I took anthropology classes and history classes, and I was in the honors program, I really loved just, "what is this thing we call humanity?" sorts of questions, and culture. So, I got really interested in Greek, and in my last two years as an undergraduate I took classical Greek and took some Latin, and took a Master's degree there in Classical Languages, and then, um, I was married at the time and it wasn't a good time to move to go in to another kind of program so I took a Master's degree in Philosophy, and continued on with doctoral work in philosophy before I met Mr. Miller. I actually took an ethnomusicology class, um Ron Pen, I remember when he came to UK, and I took a graduate level ethnomusicology class one year and I made my project about Mr. Miller. And because I had met him when he was about, I met him when he was 88 years old, so that would have been in 1986, but I hadn't been around him very much. And, but I remembered him, and wanted to spend some time with him, so I started hanging out with him quite a bit and he was a sort of fellow that seemed like he remembered everything that ever happen to him, and everything that ever

happened to him was significant. And, you know, for so many decades of figuring out how to tell the story and tell it well, he was just a jewel to be around.

So, typically I would run and get lunch, and go sit and have lunch with him, and chat with him. And I asked him 3 times if he would apprentice me, and was turned down. And he'd say, he was in his 90s already, and he'd say, Mize, I can make 6 violins in a year, but if I took on an apprentice I might make 1 or 2. It would just slow me down too much. But as he got older, he got to the point where I think he just really reflected on the fact that he was just going to take all of this information with him, and I think it just dawned on him that he wasn't going to live forever. Here he is in his 90s, and he finally figures it out, and I just kept hanging around him because he was just so enjoyable. And he was sort of grandfatherly to me; and his only grandson had died of a drug overdose, and I think it was just a really good match. I needed someone kind of, of his bearing, in my life at the time, and I filled something for him too, and it was really a sweet thing. So, he eventually said I'll apprentice you.

23:05

AF: Will you tell me a little bit about his background? So, how was he trained? What was his experience, and what was his first name?

AM: Joseph Bernard. Although I think they probably said Bernard... But that's what he puts on all his labels and instruments, Joseph Bernard Miller. Everybody called him J.B.

AF: Ok.

AM: He was born in 1902, born in Owen County. Grew up in Gratz, in Owen County, on the river. His family had a big farm, and he was one of 11 kids I think, he was down near the bottom of the stretch, if I'm not mistaken, but I don't remember exactly... He was very recognized by his family and people around him as mechanically adept. So, when they needed a single tree repaired, or some kind of equipment around the farm to be fixed, he was a good woodworker and just had a good mechanical sensibility about fixing things. So, there was a lot of fiddling around. His dad was an Old Time fiddler and he had an uncle that was an Old Time fiddler. So, the musical interest was there, and he and his brother, Bob played banjo and fiddle, I think they may even have swapped back and forth a little bit, and played at little parties around in Owen County when he was a kid, so, he was already kind of tying into a community of people around him that played. So, known as someone who could fix things, the postmaster as I understand it, in Gratz, or in the vicinity, turned him on to a book that had come out called Violin Making: As It Was and Is (correct title, verified), by Heron-Allen. I have this copy right over there I could get it for you and show it to you, it's just torn to shreds, and it's the copy he started with, and maybe I could get over there and pull it out and show it to you, it's just amazing to see it.

But, I'm a little ahead of the story, because what happened first was, he had a brother that got married, and his fiddle was under the, of course, this is how he told the story and I hope it's true because it's too good of a story, but evidently the slats fell out from under the bed on his wedding night and crushed the fiddle.

AF: Oh... yeah...

AM: And there was someone else whose wife was the stenographer for the court and she had the stenography machine, big, heavy piece of equipment from what I understand, sitting on a little

spindleylegged table, and those were his words, spindley legged table over in the corner, and the guy had his fiddle all the way across the room propped up in the other corner, and the legs broke on the table and threw that stenography machine all the way across the floor and into the fiddle and busted the belly out of it.

26:27

So, his brother and his friend, they bring these two fiddles with the bellies busted out of them and say, can you make us one fiddle that we can share? So he takes the back off of one, cuts the f holes out and what not, puts it together, so they've got a fiddle to play, that's where the postmaster got involved, ok, because he saw that and he says, you know you oughta check out the supply company in Michigan, VC Squire Company in Michigan, that had a catalog, and you can get that violin making book from it and that's what got J.B. going on making violins.

But his first repair was actually on his dad's violin because his dad had put his violin in the chest of drawers, not everybody carried them around in cases and sometimes nap sacks, whatever, it was in the chest of drawers and with the farming economy and farming life you might go several months without playing and not taking your fiddle out. So he pulled his fiddle out and a mouse had gotten inside it and what mice do to a fiddle is they see that little opening, and they say well if I just widen that out a little bit, and so they'll widen out a hole here around the f hole and get in there and make their nest, and that's where it happened. So he actually, his first repair was to trim out that gnawed out part of the wood and graft another piece of the wood in, right, and then trim it down to shape and then varnish it to match. And, I've seen that, he did beautiful work, and so that was his first repair before he did the, making one fiddle out of two exercise that he did, and I know that when he really got interested in it and he read the Heron-Allen book about violin making he also went to a violin shop in Cincinnati, he went to Wurlitzers from what I understand, and the guy behind the desk let him go down stairs, from what I picture, he went down the stairs to where the repair shop was, he says he you can go down and talk to the repairman. He went down there and talked to him and he says he wasn't down there but about 2 minutes when the guy hollered down, that's as much time as I can spare ya. So the repairman said look, you're a barber, make your living barbering because you'll do better making violins on the side and barbering, and it was a big life decision for him to go ahead professionally as a barber and do repair and violin making on the side.

So he did until he retired from barbering in 1965, at which point he was communing with people from Nashville like Ray Cuffin, I've heard people talk about coming to his shop over on Strafford Drive and finding Vasser Clements in there, or Kenny Baker, or someone told me just a couple of weeks ago that they went in there, in his shop one time... A guy brought me a violin to repair that he got from Mr. Miller, and he said that he went in there one time and Roy Clark was in there, so he was good buddies with **(unable to transcribe 5-10 words due to background noise)** and a lot of Nashville scene going on in the 60s and the early 70s.

29:50

AF: So that's interesting, so he was repairing violins on the side, making a living primarily as a barber, but when he retired he was able to shift that?

AM: Yeah, he was totally into the instrument work. He lived in Frankfort, barbering at a big 5 chair barber shop, and I think it would have been part of hotel near the capital that he was in, and he worked

10 years in Frankfort from 1923 to 1933. But he was, for the last few years of that, he made his first violin in 1929, and, so from 1929-1933 he would travel to Lexington, he knew some people here because of his capital connections and the people he was shaving and doing the haircut for, and of course, that was back in the days of razors and strops and all that sort of stuff too, but he would come to Lexington on the weekend and pick up instruments from the symphony people here, take them back to Frankfort for the week, do the repairs in the evenings, take them back the next weekend, and would be kind of in rotation doing repairs here, so he fell out of sorts with the guy who managed the barber shop there in Frankfort and he just decided, well, I'll just move to Lexington, so that's what he did.

31:07

AF: That's interesting, so he never actually formally studied with someone.

AM: No...

AF: No, it was just all on his own.

AM: No, he went to, he did meet a very famous violin maker of the day, one of the finest makers in America, was in Northern Kentucky, his name was Robert Glier. And, he told me about going to visit Robert Glier, and that he invited him up and had dinner with him and his wife, and he was someone who perused avenues to knowledge where he could find them... that way. There was a doctor in Lexington named Trapp, who would travel the world to see famous instruments, and he had a photograph collection that I have over here so that I can show you of instruments, and so he got an instrument education about telling the difference between German, French, Italian instruments and that sort of thing, learning instruments of quality, and about the history of instruments from this kind of amateur here in Lexington who was just really enthused about the topic.

AF: Well that's a really interesting backstory for him.

AM: It is.

AF: So that just, that drew you to him, that sort of personal story...

AM: Oh yeah, oh yeah...

AF: About his abilities...

AM: Oh yeah, and he was vivacious, and loved young people. You know, a lot of older people kind of dry up and get off to themselves and he was never like that. He coached his church baseball team until he was in his 60s, and it was funny, because the distance from him, from the back step of his house to his garage was 20 yards, and he would race ya. I mean, from the first time I met him, he'd say well lets go out to the shop and he'd just cut out running. He was, he had a vital energy that was rare.

33:02

So you started to study with him, like you finally convinced him, or he finally gave in and realized the significance of passing on this knowledge, so how long did you work with him?

AM: Two years.

AF: Two years.

AM: For two years, and what I did is, I would find instruments like this (**picks up broken instrument to demonstrate**) and I would say, what do I do? And so he would lead me through the process of how to do good repairs essentially. He would say, Mize, you can't make a living making violins. Do it if you want to, but I'm gonna show you how to do good repairs, because you can make a living for your family working on instruments...

AF: So, how were you making a living at that point?

AM: Well, I was giving private music lessons, and I was playing gigs, I've had pretty vigorous involvement in the music performance industry around here where it can be found, and I was on a graduate student stipend in philosophy as well, TAing and teaching classes. So, just piecing it together like that, like I do. It's just now the graduate student teaching has been replaced by shop work, you know, repair, and I'm still doing music lessons, private music lessons, and still doing a lot of gigging, as much as I can.

AF: Well, was that, you know what 's funny with TA funding, it's enough to get you by, but was it a big shift for you to decide to let that funding go and, and decide that I'm going to make it on lessons, and gigs, and repair work.

AM: I transitioned out of it. I didn't plan it this way when I did it, but I was also teaching, I was already supplementing my TA stipend with part-time instructing, so, if I could teach in the philosophy department as a doctoral student, but because of my MA in classical languages I could teach medical terminology from Greek and Latin.

AF: Oh, yeah...

AM: Which was offered at BCTC, which then was known as Lexington Community College, or there was an evening and weekend course program at UK that offered the same course. So, I might teach a course or two semester to semester extra, you know, just to stay in that. And I did that until... I don't know that last time I taught one of those medical terminology classes, maybe 8-9 years ago. So I continued that for quite a while and then got pretty burned out on it, but I do miss teaching, I do miss the classroom. I'm going to do some very limited work with some homeschoolers next fall.

AF: Oh, ok. Well, I think that's interesting that you transitioned out of that, and took it sort of slowly, so where did you first open your shop at, and when did it first become a shop?

AM: Oh, that's a good question, I was blessed because there I was learning and apprenticing with Mr. Miller, with his shop behind his house, so once I'd done this for two years, and this was in 1997, when I, from '95-'97, when I was apprenticing with him, and I opened, he let me use his shop space to get started in. And I was there in his shop from '97 until 2003, 2002 when he died. And when he passed away there was some unclarity about what was going to happen to the estate and whatnot, so I moved. I had already moved here to this house, so I moved in here. And then, kind of thought it might be nice to have a space off by itself and be out of the family's hair, and I think my wife enjoyed me getting it out of the house, and I moved down on Short Street, there was a little space. And it was just expensive paying rent every month on top of everything. I found as a repair person people will come to me, and I don't

need a shop space out somewhere like a storefront, people will tend to find you if you do this kind of personal close repair work.

37:28

AF: So, you've kind of spread by word of mouth, you've built a reputation on your ability to repair and you don't necessarily need to market yourself to a certain extent.

AM: Right.

AF: Yeah, ok. Well, let's talk a little bit about the work that you do. I think it's very interesting, the number of musicians I meet, that do restoration work, they build from scratch, they're playing gigs at the same time. Talk a bit about all of the things that you are doing here in your shop.

AM: Ok, of course, the main thing that I'm doing is, as far as restoration, is putting an instrument in good order. Usually that's in the interest of just making it playable and so it performs well, but the interesting thing about violins is that I also see it as being a conservator, because a lot of the instruments I work on do have historic and interest and historic value. And for people that are interested in the history of instrument making, if I do something that really alters an instrument then I need to take that into careful consideration. For example, I did, I restored an instrument that was made in Amsterdam in 1815, about 3 years ago, it was a really interesting instrument to work on. There are some kinds of things that you do in restoring a violin, and violin culture is very unique, it's inbred, there are very peculiar ways and principals that are inherent to the violin culture about what should do and what you shouldn't do to an instrument. And some of that is obvious with any instrument, like revarnishing, you destroy a certain amount of antique value by replacing the varnish with a new varnish, so you tend to avoid doing that.

But there are some repairs that are part of adapting an older instrument to a modern set of criteria. So, violin necks were shorter up until the mid-1800s, although the lengthening of the violin neck happened in different places in Europe at different times. First started in France in the late 1700s around Paris, but it spread throughout the course of the 1800s through continental regions and England. So, if you come across a violin that has a short neck you have to adapt it, modernize it, I actually have a graft that I'm doing here, it's an old, there's an old scroll... This violin was made about 1810, the box I've got back here, and this is the box to that violin(**picks up violin in shop**). German made instrument, about 1810. Very characteristic type of flame, very narrow banded flame, that's typical of these instruments and the look. And this instrument had a short neck, so I've had to make a whole new neck angle, neck handle is the word I'm looking for, and graft it along three surfaces, this side and this side, tapering in to increase the glue surface and underneath, and that's tricky. But as far as a repair, that's one of the most sophisticated repairs that you can do, is to graft a new neck handle and to get the modern criteria for the length, but we generally consider that a suitable kind of adaptation although you are throwing away an original part of the instrument, its gone forever, it's such a common operation to do and you won't find, there may be one or two original Stradivarius that haven't been modernized. It's very rare to run across one that hasn't been modified, but it can't really be played, I mean it could be played, but you run into difficulties of playing in the modern environment if they're not up to modern, what's the word, particulars, details...

42:03

AF: How long does it take you to do something like that, Art?

AM: This is hours and hours of work. Many, many hours. Typically the cost run on a graft like that is **(interruption in filming)**. These days... **(another interruption in filming)**... \$1400.00, \$1600.00 dollars. So it has to be an instrument that would be of enough value to warrant doing the work to, right, before you would even touch it. So there are a lot of older instruments that just aren't worth giving that attention to, and frankly a lot of instruments that you run across today that haven't been grafted or modernized just aren't worth it and that's why they haven't been. But occasionally you'll run across an older instrument that just hasn't had the opportunity.

Some folks brought me an instrument from Clay County last year, and it came from the creek that my great-grandfather lived on who also played fiddle and I just couldn't help but imagine him playing this fiddle. It was a great old violin, but it had never been modernized. It was probably a late 1700s violin, probably one of the finest instruments I've ever seen come out of the mountains. It's still in the mountains. Some folks in Clay County still own it. I do, it is interesting to me with my background, to run across instruments that are from the mountains, or from the Appalachian culture like this, this instrument that's here in front of me is from Leslie County as well.

43:49

AF: So the instruments that you come across, they, you know from Leslie County or Clay County, were they made there or were they brought by immigrants?

AM: They were brought by immigrants, or ordered by catalog. The one from Clay County that was so old was certainly brought by immigrants or purchased, you know, there was a lot of traveling in the economy. I had an ancestor that would travel from Clay County to Abingdon, Virginia, you know, if you're in the merchant class of people. So it wouldn't be impossible to come across an instrument, to buy, and sell, and barter for a nice instrument if you knew what to appreciate.

This instrument is very poor. The one from Clay County was superb, this one is very poor, it was made in a factory where the emphasis was to make it quickly, so the back was very thick, the belly is very, very thick, the base bar, wish I had one that was open... Oh, I can show you one that is open, if I can get up and come back... Here's an exquisitely made violin, this, the exquisitely made violin, and you'll see the difference between a carefully finished and finely graduated belly, all smooth, and a true base bar that has been grafted on and fitted very closely, you can't even see the joint, but they are two separate pieces of wood. Great deal of focus and care goes in to doing that.

And this is one piece of wood that's just been roughhewn, they've probably taken a knife blade and cut down each side and left the ridge wood standing. This is both structurally inferior, in terms of the support on the instrument; it may be why we have this crack here, because it just doesn't hold up the weight of the strings on the belly. And acoustically very inferior, because one thing that the base bar does is make the top function as one larger piece of wood moving together and that promotes better base response. So this puny thing is not going to cut it. So, what I'm doing to this violin, it's not, there's a little irony here, I would never do a regraduation on this violin **(reaches over to other violin on desk)** because it's so well made, I'd never touch it, I'd leave it in tack because it represents very good artistry and I wouldn't go through measuring and changing things, but this is kind of junky. So I've regraduated the back, and you can see how the wood is all white, I've already regraduated the back, so

this is going to be a really nice, viable instrument with great old wood. This is probably 1870s or 80s, and I'm going to make it structurally sound and I'm going to graduate the belly once I get this horrible top crack repaired, by some miracle I'm going to get that fixed. And then I'm going to take the base bar off and graduate the belly and I'm going to turn it into this, and then, this will be a screamer.

47:15

AF: Well, I'm curious about a couple of things. The first thing, when you finish this repair, since we're using this particular violin as an example, how much does something like that run, for you to restore so many different parts? What all comes with it when you are averaging that cost, or calculating that cost? What all comes in to play for you?

AM: For me?

AF: Yeah...

AM: Mostly it's just time, because there aren't a lot of expensive parts until you get in to setup, and then you've got the costs of pegs or the cost of a bridge, but, you know, I'll be taking a piece of spruce and trimming it down for the shape of the bar. There's not much in the way of material costs, it's all in the way of labor.

But it is interesting what happens on the value side for the owner of the instrument, because for a lot of people, there is just, what is this instrument worth? And in the market, once you do whatever repairs or restoration is required, does it warrant in its market value investing more money in it? So, if you have to do \$600.00 dollars of repair and the violin will be worth \$1000.00, you gotta say, is it for me to do it, or am I going to pass it on to someone else to put that money and that it would be important to do. Or, if it's going to be \$1000.00 to put in, and it's only going to be worth 5, it might not be worth doing it. This is a classic situation where a violin is not going to be worth as much as the money that's being put in it, and that happens when the violin has sentimental value. So, there's a family here that this violin has come down through the family, and they just happen to have the resources to invest in it and want to put it in tiptop condition and keep it, and they want it to be a viable instrument on into the next decades as they pass it on down. So, we'll improve the instrument, it will be a great player, and it will improve its value because it will be a singer like it has never before been, right, but it will never have the value of an instrument like this that was properly made from the beginning, but still, its value is in the heirloom territory.

AF: So, as a luthier then, how do you feel about the finished product? You put all this time, all this labor into it, what is that like, to finish and hear someone play it?

49:46

AM: Oh it's wonderful, you know, it's always exciting to hear what one's going to sound like, but getting the structural repairs done and the restoration done and then being involved in setting it up too, I have a lot of, a lot of input in the kind of sound that it ends up having, because how you tailor a bridge, making it sound its best, there's a lot that I do to instruments just on the setup side, in addition to the kind of structural repairs. So, you know, if this instrument could come to me, and I'd need to make a bridge, right, or if it's like this one that's missing its saddle, the piece underneath that protects the top from the force of the string pressure pulling against it, there are parts that I have to make to set this up.

But there is a lot of tonal adjustment, and I have people that bring me their instruments and say it's just so hard edged on the treble, which is usually the fault of the violin.... You like the base ok, but you get up on the high end and it just screeches or it's really hard edged and unpleasant. So, what do you do to change the tone? Well, there's a variety of issues and alignment in how the bridge is cut and the post position that really, dramatically affect the quality of the voice. So, knowing ways to change the sound to get, um, to make someone happier, with what their instrument sings, is something that I do a lot.

AF: So then, what's the difference, or do you feel a difference, between an instrument that you repair or restore, versus one that you make from scratch?

AM: You know, I do a whole lot more of the repairing and restoring, so I encounter that a whole lot more, but making one from scratch is, it's a totally different gratification.

AF: How so?

AM: Well, because the whole thing is yours, and it's not just the voice, it's that... for this instrument I drew the scroll, and scrolls differ, so if you look at these two they're very different from each other, and people studying violin scrolls, there's an aesthetic that you acquire, and it isn't an absolute judgment – that's a good scroll and that's a bad one – but you get a sensibility about what you like. And so, I mean, I drew that scroll because when I drew it, that's what I liked. And the f hole is just the same, and even though I was very meticulous about laying out the geometry of the box, and regions by Stradivarian principles from the early 1700s, still I chose my arching and the shapes of my corners to say, it's me. So there's a lot that's stylistically me, so it's a gratification...

AF: Because there is a lot of you in it, yeah...

AM: You won't find if you're very keen on the differences between instruments, you won't find this instrument anywhere else; it's the only one of its kind in the world. You know, for that, because it has that assemblage of preferences and design elements in it that just are my personality. So it's a whole world of different gratifications, it's complex... it's fun. You know about it, really...

AF: Yeah...

AM: And this is great, the gratification here is that I'm really doing something for somebody else and that's what really got me into this sort of an ivory tower, academic feeling like I'm , you can teach in a class, but I always liked teaching private music lessons because you are dealing with one person and you're really finding what they understand and what they don't and really connecting into that, and this is sort of a direct personal service sort of thing too, and I really liked that. I could hear the echo of Saint Paul saying, you know, be quiet and work with your hands. There was sort of an ideal when I switched into this that I was living out and thinking in terms of those kinds of, what kind of life do I want to live, ultimately, am I going to grow up and have a career, yes, I'll do this to where I'm really working with my hands, close, personal work where I'm doing a direct service for people who need this done. And I like that.

So, there's a really nice gratification in that, independent of what the instrument sounds like, or what it turns out like, there's sort of a nice, being part of this weave of, web of people that are interested or in need of something to be done.

AF: Well, I see what you're saying about the very different two forms of gratification for you. If I can ask you a few more questions about the one that you've made from scratch... The tools that you're using, and the sketches that you're doing, you're doing all those by hand.

AM: Yes.

55:02

AF: Are you using computers in any way?

AM: You know, I'm not really, except sometimes for research.

AF: Ok.

AM: You can find lots of photographs of great historic instruments online, but no, I'm not generating anything that way and my design work I'm doing on a big piece of paper with a compass and with a ruler, and I'm drawing it all out.

AF: As someone who takes a very, literally hands-on approach and does it by hand, do you judge, or would you judge violins differently if they had been produced through the use of a CNC machine where someone had put in the dimensions and it had been cut out...

AM: This is a wonderful question...

AF: What do you think about that?

AM: And it is very timely, because we've seen a real transition over the last, in the time since '97 or '95, when I've been kind of in the middle of this, I've seen tremendous change in what's happening that way because the sophistication of the instruments and the quality of the instruments that are coming out of shops and factory settings where they are cranking them out through computer imaging, that quality has improved, and improved, and improved, and improved over the years and it's really phenomenal. I have some instruments back in there, Chinese made, that are just phenomenal when they are made that way.

At least to the degree to which they are roughed out, and how much the detail finishing work is, how close the machine can get, I don't know, but in principle, instruments of higher and higher quality sound are getting cheaper and cheaper because more of the process can be mastered well using the kind of technology that you are speaking about, or that you've mentioned, so it makes sense, what doesn't happen with that are the individual characteristics of an instrument like this.

I'll say this, just out of pure frankness and candidness, that it's actually an issue, I think, for people that do make instruments by hand, whether they can keep, they can hold their superiority of voice over and against the various and astute technology that's crafting these instruments from the style that you're talking about. There's a lore, and in the lore about instruments we're sure that something handmade like this allows the maker to achieve heights of discrimination about a particular piece of wood that a machine can't do, you know, where you line up 50 pieces of wood in a row and you carve them all the same, and if that's what a factory method is, then the person who's judging how that particular piece of wood moves and responds should be able to maintain superiority, but if you couple the

factory technology, with what I'm reading about which are methods of testing the elasticity of the wood and strength of the wood, and then you adjust your carving to the peculiarities of the wood, I'm not sure that down the road the individual maker is just going to be surpassed because the technological knowledge about the materials and the way to manage the materials, and the particular details that really determine good tone, that once those are controlled and mapped out scientifically then a factory can do better than any individual because the knowledge base is more available to the person. Or, at least, you'd have to have the degree from MIT in that particular field of study to go in to that arena of work in order to get what would be coming out from the factory. So at least someone like me, who didn't go to a violin making school, right, would probably be surpassed... you might find that this doesn't happen as much, just in terms of the economy, but the world economy has to keep going in the same direction, cheap labor in China and cheap labor in Romania, producing instruments that perform pretty well...

AF: Do you think that there will always be a market though, for handmade instruments?

1:00:08

AM: Yes, yes.

AF: I do too.

AM: I think the charm of something that, you can tell an immediate difference between an instrument that is factory made and one that is handmade by those kinds of subtleties and nuances. Like, Mr. Miller's mandolin, if I can just go and grab another instrument... This, you'll never see another instrument like it in the world. It has a beautiful maple, very curly maple, in the back, and he didn't bind it in the way that mandolins are usually made with the binding around the edge, he put the perfering in that a violin has and a double row. So it looks very distinctive, very unique, and he's put this carved ridge in the back, sculpted this shape, it's very unique. So we have a beautiful instrument that's all Mr. Miller, it's so, it has so much personality; the selection of the appointments, and the way he did the headstock and design... You know, a lot of people make their own instruments and put Gibson appointments on them, I don't know why, it's like the whole speech of making the instrument is to make it what you would say, but here you are quoting someone else. Right, it's plagiarism. It's kind of an odd thing. There's a quoting a great sounding instrument, and doing what you have to do to make it a really great instrument, but then there's what you're saying with the style of it and the exterior of it that really should not mimic factory product, ultimately in my opinion, and my way of looking at things, and for that reason, that an economy that's based on individual's works, and artistic work, and craft, you should have a place.

1:02:17

AF: Right...

AM: And maintain its place.

(Interruption, videographer changes tape – recording time starts over, begins from 0:00)

00:00

AF: So, let's pick up there, I agree, I think there will always be a market, there will always be individuals that want handcrafted items that include a portion of the crafter in them, and have a very personal identity. So thinking in terms of moving forward, and how the shop is moving forward and the business is moving forward, I know you're working on a diverse range instruments, so will show us some of those instruments and talk about that diversity?

AM: Ok, well on the one hand there are different types of instruments. Although most of my work is on violins, I also service violas and cellos and bases. So, I don't know if I can, if you'll follow me over there, if I was going to like show you the base (**conversation about moving the instrument in front of the camera**)...

1:01

AM: So this guy moved to Kentucky from California, and he had his base stored for a while, right...

AF: Oh wow(**shows base with large crack down the side**)...

AM: And that's what happened, the tension on the strings, which I've got slacked now, it pulled apart at the block and then, because of this pull forward, it's cracking the belly here, and there's a crack here... and I think that's a former crack that has not succumbed to the pressure. So this is the sort of thing that sometimes comes to me.

Usually bases, different instruments have different ranges of problems, it's very common for bases to get bumped when they are being carried around because they are so big, and fracture across the heel or have neck issues and I've done a lot of those repairs and restoration. Usually it's just a matter of the edge work coming loose, people take their bases out to the Bluegrass festival or whatever in the heat, and the glue gets weak, and that sort of thing.

Tonal adjustments on any instrument, I get asked to do but the structural sorts of things for a base, it's, there's some major work there.

AF: What sort of wood...

AM: You typically have maple on the back and sides, and spruce for the belly, but there's a huge presence of laminated bases which are like plywood, backs and tops, and that one is probably laminated for the back and the ribs, but the belly is solid spruce, which is why it is cracked the way that it did, because of the stress that it was under.

So there are different kinds of instruments and I'll show you this one, this is actually mine, this is a mandolin, a Gibson mandolin from 1904 that I bought from Mr. Miller when I first met him, and played it for quite a number of years, and then it came apart where it had been broken here around the neck and had been repaired, and it came apart again and cracked from the pressure of the top, similarly to the base over here. I repaired it, this crack up through here, with these cleats a number of years ago, and then it was just sitting on the stand one day and I heard a big loud pop, and the whole thing had caved in and so I've had to go through, I've taken my old cleats out, in the upperhand, and I've put new cleats here that are a little sturdier and longer and had an additional crack to clean here in the belly, and

from 1904-2012 were gonna have this instrument back up and playing again because I miss it. But mandolin repairs, you know, wood repair and an eye to the pressures that the wood is under, structure repairs, are pretty similar instrument to instrument, but you do get some variations of wood, and this one has walnut ribs and walnut back, actually, the back is sitting right here. I'll put the back on when it's time.

4:17

So, I do some other guitar, mandolin, banjo setup kind of thing, because the violin family instruments don't have frets I don't do much in the way of fretwork. There are other specialists in guitar and mandolin who can cover that territory and I'm happy to let them have it as far as that goes, but so there are different kinds of instruments that I work on that are usually matters of damage, you know and I address that grafting, I had a Martin guitar, a D-28, that had been kicked or something and had a big hole in the back and I found some really good matching rose wood and grafted a piece in, so I get that sort of work.

As far as violins, there are instruments that are fancy, like this was probably made Belgian made...

AF: That has a lovely color...

AM: Isn't that neat? And it's got a wonderful crack allure in the varnish, which some would like and some would not, but I think looks really great. But that sort of roping around the outside, that's a pretty neat instrument. This is not the nicest instrument that I've got, but this is Germanic, this one is French-made, but it's a French factory produced instrument from the turn of the century and, or a little before. The French tend to make better instruments, their factory instruments are better than Germany factory instruments, typically on par, at least the low end of what the French would do wasn't as low as what the German and Czechoslovakian factories would descend to, and they would tend to not, they would tend to cut corners in different ways, that preserved better quality in the instrument overall. But...**(Art moves around to locate certain instruments)**.

I don't know what this is, but it's got the most amazing birds eye maple back, little speckles all over it, and I've never seen a piece a piece of birds eye maple with so many little birds eyes, it's just incredible.

6:53

AF: Now where did you come across that?

AM: Well now this was a repair for somebody, and they, the person who owns it bought the instrument and it had this neck in it, which once you take the neck off, it's marked on the other side of the finger board, French late 18th Century, and that's right, this is a very French scroll from the late 1800s **(1700s?)** and this is a continental European instrument, probably German of some sort, but it's very, very nice. These two don't go together. Stylistically they are a horrible mismatch. So, I am actually carving a scroll, and I will graft it to replicate, because this violin is 1700, so it's 1700s-1750, very, very old, and so, I'll try to replicate the style of a scroll that would be suitable for it and have it grafted so it looks like it's that age and anyone that knows violins will look at it and know that that's a replacement neck, but hopefully they'll say, what a darn good job he did. So, that's at least what we're shooting for.

And then, you know, one thing that does happen here, on these instruments that are tucked in this little cubby over here... This violin was made in Ohio, 1880s, name of Lovejoy, if I remember right, in Columbus, Ohio... 1889. So, I'm restoring it. Occasionally I'll get an instrument like that, that's pretty nicely made. There's a good violin making culture in Ohio, because German settlement in Cincinnati brought luthiers to the area, and this one is actually made pretty nicely, it's pretty good quality too, so this is an American made violin to bring back to life by ability.

9:01

AF: And so, from an economic perspective then, being able to repair such a diversity of instruments is that really important to you?

AM: In economic range, what an instrument requires to be in good playable form and preservation is pretty much the same, but what you find on the lower end like with this violin that there may be some other things that you could do to it to improve the instrument, but once you're in a certain economic range like this one, where everything is really made in the best possible way, the standards of what you want to end up with are the same, but what I would do would be less invasive and more preservative of whoever made this, this is a handmade instrument no doubt... no doubt about it. I'm not sure I answered your question.

AF: That's alright...

AM: I might have strayed in to another question while I was thinking about whatever I was saying... Now I also do a lot of bow work.

AF: Ok.

AM: And the bows are an entire other territory. Now this bow is fiberglass bow, or a carbon fiber bow actually that needed a tip replaced. Here I've cut the piece of ivory, mammoth ivory in this case, and I want to put this on to the tip right, and then I'll cut out the little chamber and put fresh horsehair in it. So there's a different set of technical knows-how involved in bow restoration. Metal work that's wire, that's wrapped, leather that's put on the bow as a grip, let me get a tip of a wooden bow and show ya...

So we have our, have the ivory piece on the tip. It's a very delicate piece of wood, I don't know if I messed up the lighting there by moving the light around but, the grain of this wood runs this direction so it's common for these to get broken on the end. So occasionally if it's a very expensive bow you can splice a repair right down the middle of the crack (**interruption in filming, siren...**).

AF: Ok...

AM: Well let's see, there's repairs when the bows get damaged, and again, what happens frequently with bows is that the often the cost of the repair is greater than the value of the bow will end up being, so it has to be a pretty nice bow to warrant putting very much work in. They are typically pieces of wood that are cut straight and then heat bent to have their shape. So, a lot of times bows have lost that shape and I have to heat them and shape them myself to restore that arc.

There are different issues here, in terms of the pearl that can get damaged. This leather you would put your hand against and your thumb against, so the leather tends to get worn. Being able to skive leather,

a term for leather working where you trim and shave the end of the leather down to a thin edge so that you can wrap it and it look nice. There are some skills there that are kind of unique that you would never run across in wooden repairs and that's kind of a fun thing to know how to do, wrap leather. And this sort of stuff, different kinds of protective materials, which back in the 1800s could be whale-bone, but these are typically plastic or some sort of synthetic material. So. Yeah, there's a different range of repairs that go with violin bows and base bows.

13:05

AF: So, thinking in terms of where the actual materials come from, one of the questions that I wanted to make sure that we touched on today, it's difficult to get access to wood, especially old growth, so will you talk about that and where your materials are coming from.

AM: Yeah, that's a really good question. You can buy tone woods, there are European and Canadian suppliers and it typically tends to be pretty expensive. What is tricky about violin instruments, and really any of the acoustic wooden instruments, is that you can't kiln dry the wood. Heat drying the wood destroys natural properties in the wood that you need to have for the best voice. So you have to carefully air dry acoustic wood, and one of the differences in the value and price in factory instruments is whether the wood was air dried for years, or 6 years, or 10 years, ok. So, if you have to hold on to the wood for 10 years before you're going to make an instrument out of it, it's going to be a lot more valuable because that wood is going to be a lot more expensive.

AF: Right...

AM: So you tend to have cheap instruments in the market, in the low end of the economy, that are made with cheaper woods that aren't air dried, so they tend to have more repair issues, right. And I see that a lot here. As far as the woods that I've acquired, I was fortunate because Mr. Miller had a whole lot of spruce that he had acquired over decades, and decades, and decades. And even though he had a big story about his maple, he bought some maple that came out of Stearns, KY, down in Whitley County (**correction by transcriber, Stearns is located in neighboring McCreary County**), back in the 30s and he made gobs and gobs of violins out of big boards of that maple wood. None of that was still surviving when I was around. He had some maple that was plenty old enough, maybe 20 years old, but he had a lot of spruce. I've got probably enough spruce bellies that probably date back to the 40s, or enough wood that I could make bellies out of for violins. I could probably make 20 violins. Of course, he'd been picking over it, so it tends to be a little wider grain, so for all the years he'd start looking for something he'd say oh, this is the best one, and he'd start making a violin, and then he'd go through and find another one. So it's not the best selection for the grains pattern and that sort of thing but it's all really fine wood just the same partly because it's aged so well.

But there was a mandolin maker down in Berea, or around Berea, that was named Carl Cates. I don't know if Carl is still living or not, but he developed a neurological disorder that kept him from continuing to make mandolins, and he made about 30 mandolins before he quit. But he had amassed a nice collection of wood. In fact, I've got some samples of it here... this chunk right here. This is Washington State spruce that, just one billick, I've got a whole bunch of these that I bought from Carl, in fact that's what the belly on my violin is made from. I split off a piece of that, and cut my top out. It went from this raw state, to that shape and form and carved arching and all that sort of thing.

AF: Well it's interesting to think about the commodity chains, where the different pieces come from...

AM: Yeah, that's right...

AF: Ok.

AM: So this had been harvested from Washington State and he'd had it arranged to be shipped to him and then he sold it to me. So I will hopefully make lots of violins out of this spruce. The maple is a little trickier. There was supplier that would come through to the shop occasionally... I think I got this from Carl too, this nice, big piece of maple... Someone... no, I got this somewhere else. Someone had decided they were going to make an electric guitar, you can see the it's penciled out, an electric guitar, and then they decided against it and brought it to me because they thought it could be something I could use for violins. But see, that could be sawed in and I can probably get three violin backs. That will be a one piece back, perhaps, it depends on what the flame pattern looks like, I might want to start and split them because that's a really nice pattern coming that direction, if I laid them open it would be really pretty. So that's something I could use either way.

I bought a bunch of matched maple sets that were Kentucky made from Carl and I would pick up wood every now and then. I was going to say there is a supplier that would come down from, I think, Massachusetts and bring violins to show me that was also bringing tone woods, European tone woods, and I bought quite a few chunks of maple from him. These were guaranteed to have been, these were dated and they were already 6 to 7 years old. So I've got a bunch of that stockpiled.

18:50

AF: That's great, I hadn't actually thought about all the different places that the wood would come from that you work with...

AM: Yeah, you can find a lot of resources online. There are companies where you can just order from Canada that makes it their business to accumulate from whatever sources that they can get it from. Now, of course, there are different types of wood here, there is ebony, which typically comes from India or Madagascar, and there's boxwood... Usually, the various woods come already shaped for this purpose, you know, you don't buy a chunk of ebony and have to cut it up yourself, you buy fingerboard blanks that are already cut down to the final shape, close to the final shape and you just do the trimming. There is also ridge wood like a blank. This particular bridge was manufactured in France. That retails at \$42.00 (USD). It is such a highly selective, aged wood. Aged maple and then cut out. Very well selected for the type of maple that you want for bearing the type of pressure that it has to bear right under the strings there. So there's a very specialized selection involved in just bringing that piece of wood to me, on the market, and then I don't have to start from scratch drilling all those little holes, right?

AF: Well, I tell you, on that note... Is there anything that we didn't touch on today...?

AM: What we mentioned earlier was the apprenticeship program.

AF: That's right. Let's talk a bit about the apprenticeship program because, not only have you studied with Mr. Miller, but you've actually taken on some apprentices haven't you?

AM: Yes.

AF: So, talk about your experience working with apprentices... It was two?

AM: Yeah, I've had two. Well, two years ago I took on Greg Sutherland and we got the grant, the Master Apprenticeship grant from the Kentucky Folklife Program and Greg worked at Don Wilson Music Company, he still does, and he was in charge of their rental instruments and I really had, like Mr. Miller in a sort of way, I didn't want to take on the trouble and the distraction of working with an apprentice. But, I found that their rental instruments were just kind of old stock and I kept having students that were picking up instruments there that were kind of problematic and I thought, it's just going to be a tremendous public service if I get Greg on to some really good repair and set of principles. So we did the apprenticeship and he learned a great deal about how to decide if a fingerboard is correct and what should be straight, and how do you set a post, so that he could do better setup on the instruments that the kids are going to be playing.

21:57

AF: Right.

AM: Really, so that they could be more successful and really, that was all that apprenticeship was about for me, was passing on the kind of information that really helps the kids enjoy the music experience that they have when they have to rent instruments. But Greg was a lot of fun, he's a really great guy to work with too, and I enjoyed it so much that, Tommy Case, is my apprentice... They just finished this last cycle and he was more interested in making instruments. He has made quite a few pretty nice instruments with success, he studied with Bill Huckabee who is a violin maker in Pinksmill, North of Frankfort, and what was deficient about Tommy's instrument was the aesthetics. He could get a pretty good tone, although I think that what we made in our first instrument we made together is something that will out shine his other instruments as far as tone and success, but we started from scratch designing the shape of the instrument and keeping an eye to the aesthetic development of it and he's going to turn out an instrument here that's going to be very beautiful, it's going to have a lot of character. It is just, if you're an amateur and just love instruments, you can make an instrument but not really know the terms that a very discriminating, knowledgeable person will bring to examining that instrument. And there are a lot of people that love to work with instruments, violins, guitars, whatever; they don't really know what the discriminating viewer is going to look for to really judge it. So that's been a lot of, hopefully the benefit that Tommy will get from working with me over the past year, is making a violin that he's a lot more excited about for its success and gets recognition for.

AF: So it is, literally, about sharing knowledge for you?

AM: Oh very much...

AF: It's not just helping someone improve...

AM: Absolutely. Yeah, I very much identify with the teaching role.

AF: Yeah, it sounds like it.

AM: Yeah, I enjoy that very much. There's a certain degree to which people that run a business like myself, tend to be self-protective, because the knowledge that you have is what you have that's special,

it's what brings people to you, but, I've never been very good about drawing those lines very successfully, those self-protective lines or whatever, but it's been very rewarding to work with both Greg and Tommy and see them, you know, enhance what they're doing.

24:52

AF: Right...

AM: Because that's really the joy of teaching.

AF: Well I think that's actually a very positive point for us to close on. We've done a good job I think of, you know, of getting a sense of your history and what you're doing at the shop, and then how you've passed that knowledge on and that's been an enjoyable experience for you. So thank you, Art, for sitting down and doing the interview with us today.

AM: You are most welcome, and thank you for spending the time with me.

Interview stops at 25:19, footage to determine room tone continues until 26:16.

Total DVD run time: 1:28:36