

KENTUCKY CRAFT HISTORY AND EDUCATION ASSOCIATION, INC.

Interview with Mary and Neil Colmer
Interviewer is Mary Reed
May 30th, 2018

() This symbol refers to an inaudible word or phrase.

. . . This symbol refers to an interruption to the speaker

Mary Colmer:

Wow. You didn't ask me any questions? (laughs)

Mary Reed:

No, I haven't started yet. Okay I will do an introduction so that we have that to start the film at. Okay. So are we ready? Okay. Good morning. My name is Mary Reed and I'm interviewing Neil and Mary Colmer at Weavers Bottom craft studio in Berea, Kentucky. Today is Wednesday, May 30th, 2018. This interview is part of the Kentucky Craft History and Education Association's mission to interview Kentucky's craft luminaries and organizations in order to save their stories. Neil, let's start with you. Tell us a little bit about yourself and how you came here to Berea.

Neil Colmer:

Well, it got to be time to look for a college and I really didn't have a whole lot of options. And some friends of the family had been through the area here and discovered Berea and told us about the college. So I applied and at the time my hometown was outside the Berea college field, their Appalachian field, that they choose students from.

Mary Reed:

And which hometown is that?

Neil Colmer:

Pomeroy, Ohio. It's right on the Ohio river, halfway between Cincinnati and Pittsburgh, right in the Southeast corner of Ohio. And so I applied and I was accepted, which surprised me because my chances were so slim, but starting in my sophomore year, I got a job in the weaving shop. What year was this? Let's see. I started college in '67. So the following year I got started in weaving because it sounded like fun. I just, that was really it. I had never been around it. I had kind of an aptitude for knot tying and that kind of thing. So I had a little interest in fiber and fabric and I got a chance to work in the weaving shop. And it just took over. That was in September that will have been 50 years ago. So in a nutshell, that's how my weaving career went. I worked three years as a student. They hired me as a full-time weaver when I graduated and I worked another three years as a full-time employee. And then I went off and helped him set up Fort Boonesborough State Park when they built the Fort and they had 15 different traditional Appalachian crafts being demonstrated and displayed there. And I was one of the artists that was hired to help set the whole thing up. I worked work there for about five years. Took a couple of years off to watch my son grow up a little bit. I worked as a bicycle mechanic for a couple of years, and then I got a job at Churchill Weavers. And during the time I was working at Churchill Weavers, we had the opportunity to buy this giant loom behind me over here and start our own weaving business. So while I was working at Churchill's, we found studio space, started renting and started producing our own goods for the public.

Mary Reed:

Okay. Mary, tell us a little bit about your background and how you came to Berea and then weave it in to how you all came together.

Mary Colmer:

You don't ask much do you? (laughs) I was born in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. My dad was in the air force. My mom was a nurse and dad had a jazz combo in the evenings and I played music. And at one point I fell in love with a folk musician and went to New York city to live with him, traveled around the world, sang for the troops in Vietnam, did music for advertisements and Columbia records. And when I had my baby things changed and when my first husband left me and the child, I came to Berea to go to Christmas Country Dance School and think about where I was going to go. What was I going to do as a high school dropout with a learning disability and a three-year-old and Neil took us in. And I fell in love with him up in Woods Pen in the dance called Hole in the Wall. And he said he would like to have a wife and a daughter. And we were married on 7, 7, 77 at seven o'clock. (laughs)

Neil Colmer:

Couldn't resist that. (laughs)

Mary Colmer:

He was working for Fort Boonesborough. Well, we met twice, actually. We met a week before I met my first husband and a week afterwards, no, a day after I split up. And we got our chance to be a happy again. Yep. I got my second chance of true love here. And he said he wanted to be a weaver full-time and have his own business. And I thought I'll hitch my wagon to that star. And I said, I'd be the support group. And he was working at Boonsborough and I was the doll maker. And I had learned to make the dolls when I was living in New York City. Jean Richie came to my first marriage reception and said that she'd like me to come to her Christmas party and things like that. So I saw May Richie's dolls at the party at Jean Richie's home in Long Island. And she was my first friend in America. It was wonderful to meet her and I have a dulcimer made by her uncle. So...

Mary Reed:

That's an amazing story. I know you say that you make your dolls fashioned in the Richie family tradition. And so I want to ask you a little bit about that and what is that tradition? And one of the questions I had was how did you learn it? But I think you've just answered that, but for those people who don't have any idea about the Richie family, can you explain that a little bit?

Mary Colmer:

Yeah. Well, when I lived in New York, I would go to their parties and one Christmas party May Richie was there and her dolls were on the shelves and I got looking at them and she told me that this is a style that the Richie family does. And you don't notice that in other traditions and having a little shawl and a hat and a basket, things that reflect mountain life. This one, the basket's made with corn shuck, like the skirt, but it's only one little rib of it. You weave the basket in and out like that. I'm using that. And that was made by Jennifer Kaplan, wonderful friend of mine. But anyway May Richie became May Richie Duchamp. And she married a guy from Austria and she taught at Pine Mountain isn't that... or John C. Campbell. Anyway, one of those May was teaching there. May taught Jerry Armstrong in Chicago, and then Jerry Armstrong taught me.

Mary Reed:

Is the shape of the head part of their style?

Mary Colmer:

Yeah. The head is a corn shuck that's rolled down and rolled around and theirs are rolled more. I changed it a little bit and made mine more long. So it's very hard to roll corn shuck it's flat, you know, (laughs) and how they do it is magic. You just wave a wand and then... It's all tied together. There's no glue anywhere except putting the hat on and the hair on. And there's a wire through the arms. And this is a doll that was on the postcard that we made 35 years ago or so, and she's only faded a little bit.

Mary Reed:

Where's the Richie family from?

Mary Colmer:

They're from Viper. V-I-P-E-R. Viper. Yeah. I had to learn how to talk. I still don't do it right. You get the Canadian in me. This doll is the very first doll I fell in love with when I was a child, I had a touch of polio and spent my days looking at this doll and it became my constant companion. When I left home my dad gave me that doll when I left home and he gave it to my mother on their honeymoon in Niagara falls. This I think is the best doll I have ever made, you know, in my humble opinion. The lilt of her skirt and the little wand here. I think that's the best. The other traditions are the neck. You don't usually see the neck wrapped and that's a one. And then the wire here is in a loop, which is another part of maize tradition.

Mary Reed:

Do you dye the corn husk?

Mary Colmer:

Yes. I use dyes that are sold in the grocery store. I won't mention brand names, but the things that you get for the general public are not as caustic to the environment as others. It's basically a salt.

Mary Reed:

Have you ever used natural dyes?

Mary Colmer:

Yeah. They don't tend to stick very well to the to the corn shuck. By the time they set for me maybe my mordant isn't very good. I don't know, but these have worked really well and I get older and I don't know, I've made 11,779 at the moment. (laughs)

Mary Reed:

11,779 to date.

Mary Colmer:

Almost 12,000.

Neil Colmer:

It's a lot of dolls.

Mary Reed:
That's a lot of dolls.

Mary Colmer:
I think that's enough.

Mary Reed:
Do you date and number each one, or?

Mary Colmer:

Yeah.

Mary Reed:
You catalog them then.

Mary Colmer:
I have been cataloging dolls. And I must say I haven't made predominantly corn shuck dolls. I've used seven bales of corn shucks so far making those dolls. But I do a raggedy Ann or a Teddy bear. I made some out of scrap yarn the other day that are hilarious. You know, you've put me in a field with some grass and I'll just make a doll. Yeah.

Mary Reed:
Did I recall that you wrote a book on making a corn shuck dolls?

Mary Colmer:
Yeah. It's out of print. I saw it for sale on Amazon the other day. I'm going to have to do a remake and do some screenshots? No. I'm going to have to do it again.

Neil Colmer:
Yeah, with newer technology.

Mary Colmer:
Yeah. Computer technology. I did line drawings in the book and I didn't have a camera that would do that. You know, how do you click a camera and hold a doll? I couldn't do it. Yeah. Yeah. Maybe Siri would go click for me. (laughs)

Mary Reed:
Awesome. (tape cuts out) Yeah. Grant and going through that process a couple of years process too, but that has been our history so far is that we eventually write a grant and do a written transcript of all the interviews that we've done. And you get a copy of that too. And a lot of times it's easier to read something (inaudible).

Mary Colmer:

We interrupted that story with the dolls, because how we bought the studio, you know, how did we get here?

Mary Reed:

Oh, I'll get you there. We ready? Okay. It looks like the corn shuck dolls are a very traditional form of craft and also the weavings are too. And it's interesting that you brought them both together. And can you tell us something about your traditional patterns and the fibers that you use and materials?

Neil Colmer:

Well, I pretty much stick to simple, natural fibers. Cotton and wool for the most part. They're dependable, you know how they're going to react and, heck, they feel good. (laughs) You know, it's really nice to work with them. The patterns themselves have been around for a long, long time. Some people try to turn the overshot patterns into an Appalachian original, and that's just not. So people have been weaving patterns using the same technique for 3000 years. So overshot is traditional because it's been around for a long, long time.

Mary Reed:

What do you mean overshot?

Neil Colmer:

The pattern in a piece like this is formed when the pattern yarn, which in this case is the blue, skips over some of the white threads to make a little block. And those skips are floats where the pattern yarn jumps over the white threads. So it goes over a certain number of threads before it goes back into the weaving. So it's overshot.

Mary Colmer:

Or shot over. (laughs) No, that's when you get your gun.

Mary Reed:

There's some words down there. Oh, you signed it.

Neil Colmer:

That's my name and the month that I completed the piece in.

Mary Reed:

Wow.

Neil Colmer:

And that's all woven in, of course, you can see it on the back as well.

Mary Reed:

Now is that a coverlet?

Neil Colmer:

Like this is a king size coverlet. This is big.

Mary Reed:

And a coverlet is like a bed cover?

Neil Colmer:

It's a bedspread really. Yeah. At one time, a coverlet was only used as decoration on the bed when it was time to go to bed, you'd gather up the coverlet and fold it neatly and put it to the side and have other blankets for sleeping. But we sleep under hours now. (laughs) We have a lot of these at home and we use them.

Mary Colmer:

Yeah. We're spoiled, really spoiled. We have lot of weaving.

Mary Reed:

So do you do custom orders for people? Do you supply these coverlets to museums, historic sites?

Neil Colmer:

I have done a few historic pieces. One went to the Woodrow Wilson House Museum in Washington, DC. I wove some yardage for them to use as upholstery on a chair.

Mary Colmer:

From the Lincoln bedroom. It was a fabric and they put it on the Lincoln chair?

Neil Colmer:

No. That was, that was another item.

Mary Colmer:

He's woven so many things. He was the fastest weaver in the history of Churchill Weavers.

Mary Reed:

My goodness. That's a long history.

Mary Colmer:

They used to fight over his work in the mending room, because he made so few mistakes. They got a lot better.

Neil Colmer:

Got bonuses too. (laughs)

Mary Reed:

Yeah. Well, we have so many historical sites and I would think that they would want to carry your towels or your throws or something. And I just wondered if that had been part of your...

Mary Colmer:

For half price.

Neil Colmer:

That's a very small part for us. I have talked to other weavers, who've done a lot of work for museums and stuff like that. And we've done custom orders for individuals over the years as well. That was a big part of our business was accepting custom orders.

Mary Colmer:

If somebody walked in the door and said, could you do this? We think about it a minute and say, yeah. (laughs)

Mary Reed:

Okay. So did you take your crafts on the road or have you always just sold retail out of your shop?

Mary Colmer:

Well, first we started selling out of the house and then we started going to crafts places the Kentucky Guild let me have a table at one of their craft fairs and I could pay for the booth fee afterwards.

Neil Colmer:

Oh, that was July.

Mary Colmer:

It was? That was the July one? Sorry Guild. (laughs) But the Guild too, I couldn't believe my joy when they said that I had achieved membership. Ah, I was so excited. Yeah. And after we retire now, I'm hoping to be able to teach corn shuck doll making at the academy, the Guild academy. Yeah. And I'll be making more dolls... after I get to 12,000. I'm not number of them anymore. I'm going to give them away for charitable donations and things like that and teach. Yeah. So we bought this place and moved in in 1989. I bought it over the phone for \$1 down payment and the owner had to co-sign the loan and we paid it off eight years ago. Yeah. I sold a doll to a lady that had been in the New York Times and she really didn't believe me...

Neil Colmer:

The doll had been in the New York Times.

Mary Colmer:

Yeah, not the lady. (laughs) The doll had been featured in the New York times. A travel writer, passing through town, took a picture and had me sign my name. And when I got the copy, I was disappointed because it was in shoppers world. It wasn't in travel. It was supposed to be in travel. The doll had failed, failed me and I was sitting there doing dolls saying, you failed me. Here's supposed to be in... And this lady walked in and she laughed and laughed. And she heard me berating a doll for not fulfilling its obligation. And she said, "Can I buy it?" I said, "Yes." And she went away hugging the package. 25 years later, I got a letter from her saying that she doubted my word about the doll being in New York Times because they had tried to look it up on the computer and it wasn't there. Well, she wasn't looking in shopper's world and it had failed

me again. And so I wrote her back a letter with a copy of the article with shopper's world on it and we autographed it and I sent it back and she sent me a thank you. And a couple of minutes later... that was in July in November, she came back and she said, "How's the business?" And I said, "We're \$2,000 away from being debt free." And she said, "Do you still have the postcard?" And I said, "Yes, I still have the postcard." And then she left and I said, doll failed me again. She didn't even buy a postcard. And on her way back, she stopped again. And she said, "I doubted your word about the doll and I doubted your word about the postcard. So I have to buy a postcard. Can I write a check?" "Well, keep the card." "No, no. Can I write a check?" "Yes." And I went to put it in the drawer and she went and I looked at the check and she'd written it for \$2,002. And she said, "There you're debt free". And Neil was out of the place.

Neil Colmer:

Yeah, I wasn't even here.

Mary Colmer:

No, he wasn't here getting us lunch. And I asked her permission and I wrapped the copy of the bank deposit and the copy of her check up in a Christmas present and put it on the tree. And it was the last thing we opened that year. And he said, have you paid off the debt? And I said, no. And he said, get out the checkbook. And we wrote the check, put it in the mail and took a selfie and sent her a copy. Then end. (laughs)

Mary Reed:

What a wonderful story. (laughs)

Neil Colmer:

There are some wonderful people out there. There sure are.

Mary Reed:

An angel. Yeah.

Mary Colmer:

Would you like to hear another wonderful...?

Mary Reed:

Absolutely. How'd you come by (inaudible)?

Neil Colmer:

Shall we tell them about how we met? Okay. I'll start. (laughs) I began weaving in my sophomore year in college in 1968 into 1969. And that summer of '69 Woodstock happened. There was all kinds of wonderful things that summer. And I got a job at Camp Pine Woods in Massachusetts. It's a summer long of week-long and weekend sessions of singing, dancing, crafts, and fun. And it's held in the summertime.

Mary Colmer:

And good home cooked food.

Neil Colmer:

Oh yeah. It's a wonderful place.

Mary Colmer:

And I was a camper.

Neil Colmer:

She was a camper for one of the weeks. And we met during the week, danced together a few times.

Mary Colmer:

He was sitting on the back step of the cookhouse shucking corn. And I thought, "Wow, that's the kind of guy I'd like to marry."

Neil Colmer:

Yeah. It was shucking corn for 250 people (laughs) every day. So we met that summer at Pine Woods. At the end of the summer, we both went our separate ways. I came back to Berea. Mary went to...

Mary Colmer:

I went and got married to the guy in New York City. (laughs)

Neil Colmer:

And so, you know, that was it pretty much we weren't staying in touch or anything like that.

Mary Colmer:

We had one really nice dance and you invited me to go swimming, but everybody in camp was swimming and they weren't wearing bathing suits. It was the sixties. (laughs)

Neil Colmer:

And it was a tradition that was an event that happened there every year.

Mary Colmer:

He asked me to dance and somebody had put out their cigarette in my drink and I went to drink it and was running to the edge of the woods and spitting and the dance caller was May Gadd. 72 years old from England. And she said, "Well, young lady, are we going to dance or not?" (laughs) And that was the only thing he remembered about me. He didn't remember the swimming party. (laughs)

Neil Colmer:

Well, things went along swimmingly until seven years later. We met again here at Berea College at the Christmas Country Dance School. They have a big mixer to start off the evening. And at the end of the mixer, we ended up together and did a couple more dances after that ended up spending the week together and becoming very interested in each other.

Mary Colmer:

And we danced a dance called Hole In The Wall.

Neil Colmer:

Yeah. That was the one, huh?

Mary Colmer:

Well he led me to the head of the set and it said traditional dance and it's done the same way all the time. And I didn't realize when he started at the head of the set that we would be just going down. And when we got to the very, very end of the whole set, the music stopped. So I didn't have to learn the part to come back up. I was really glad about that. And when I curtsied and he lifted me up, I looked into his eyes and that was it. That was it.

Neil Colmer:

(laughs) Well, we ended up getting married, obviously.

Mary Colmer:

I'm still waiting around for Hole In The Wall to dance again.

Neil Colmer:

After we'd been married for about 11 years, somebody asked us one day, "What were you doing when they walked on the moon?" And I said, "Well, I was watching it on a little TV with rabbit ears in the camp house at Pinewood's." Mary said, "Well, I had just left Pine Woods. And I was in Newport".

Mary Colmer:

And Arlo Guthrie was pointing up at the moon from stage saying, they're walking on the moon right now. And somebody had a little TV camera with an antenna. I don't know where they plugged it in. (laughs)

Neil Colmer:

So, that stopped the conversation. When I said Pine Woods. And she said, Newport and Pine Woods, we looked at each other and went, like, we started, started coming up with these memories that we were sharing. It took us 11 years to remember that we had met all the way back in 1969. (laughs)

Mary Colmer:

Harlequin romance. Right there.

Mary Reed:

Meant to be.

Mary Colmer:

And at one point in both of our lives, we thought we'd never walk normally.

Mary Reed:

Both of you?

Mary Colmer:

Yeah. Because I had polio when I was six and he had a septic. How do you say that?

Neil Colmer:

At the time they called it Legg Perthes, named after two men. It's a condition where the hip joint disintegrates basically due to a lack of nutrients and they made me a state case and tried a new technique of treating it with a built-up shoe. I was four inches taller for about a year and a half. And a brace on my leg that kept my legs straight and kept the upward pressure of walking off of the joint. And I had a perfect regrowth. I have an absolutely normal hip joint and no problems.

Mary Colmer:

All that weaving, you know, years of muscles and Taekwondo, you know, it makes a person strong, fit. Maybe we'll live long.

Mary Reed:

So how did you come to be here on this corner in Berea?

Mary Colmer:

I called Robbie Robinson and told him to come and mow his lawn in the back. And he said, if you're so concerned about my building, why don't you buy it? And I said, because I don't have a down payment. And he said, how about \$1 down payment? And I'll, co-sign the loan.

Mary Reed:

Wow.

Mary Colmer:

And we moved in the next week really fast.

Mary Reed:

And you had been renting next door?

Mary Colmer:

Yeah. We rented almost six years and they had a bucket of tar on the roof ready to fix the leaks any minute for two years. (laughs)

Neil Colmer:

Sat there for years. (laughs)

Mary Colmer:

We started leaving notes on the door, fix the roof. And then the next day, please fix the roof, for heaven sakes, fix the roof. If you don't fix the roof, we're going to leave. (laughs) And then that happened and then we left.

Mary Reed:

So, how did you come up with the name Weaver's Bottom?

Mary Colmer:

One of our friends said, oh, you want to be, self-employed why honey, that takes a lot of bottom. (laughs) And it did take a lot of bottom. So Neil said why don't you look up bottom in the dictionary? No, I said, this is the pits. He said, look up pit. And we looked up pit in my great grandfather's dictionary dated 1895. And it said also known as a bottom. So he looked up bottom and it means courage, perseverance, staying power, true grit, stamina, and depth of character. And I figured we had depth of character. That was it. Yeah. So it actually means shuttle throwers standing ground. Weavers Bottom.

Neil Colmer:

And weaver's bottom is actually a medical term. Yeah. Weavers who sit on hard benches for long periods of time developed bursitis and it's called Weaver's Bottom.

Mary Colmer:

Wow. Wheelchair people get it and have to wear special cushions. We just got the special cushions early. Yeah. And the building was at the bottom of the hill. We were at the bottom of our finances...

Neil Colmer:

You know, a bottom is a fertile place to grow crops.

Mary Colmer:

There's a radio show guy that said, "What do you have to sell?" And the radio person calling in said, "Honey, I want to sell my bottom on radio."

Neil Colmer:

On tradio.

Mary Colmer:

On tradio. Yeah. And the man on the radio station said, "Well, ma'am just, how big is your bottom?" (laughs)

Neil Colmer:

Oh it's about a mile and half down by the creek. (laughs)

Mary Reed:

Yeah. Wonderful. So bottom and also Shakespeare had a character named Bottom in Midsummer Night's Dream who was a weaver and there are jokes in there about the condition of weavers being weaver's bottom. It's a very old term. It took a lot of bottom to, to call ourselves that because we originally had a webpage on the internet and it was taken over by a prostitute ring. And they wanted us to pay them \$250 to get the name back. So we just called it The Weavers Bottom.

Neil Colmer:

We added 'craft studio' to it.

Mary Colmer:

Yeah. No, it isn't The Weavers Bottom. What did we do?

Neil Colmer:

We changed it to Weaver's Bottom Craft Studio.

Mary Colmer:

That's it. That's how the craft studio got back on, because it wasn't just dolls and it wasn't just weaving. And it just wasn't my paintings or my internet () or anything like that. It was just our shuttle throwers standing ground. I had to learn how to weave to be a shuttle thrower. So I could qualify for being equal rights. (laughs) Yeah.

Mary Reed:

Have either of you ever received any awards for your artwork, your crafts?

Mary Colmer:

No. Have we received any awards? We got a lot of money. (laughs) Well, depends on who you compare it to. Yeah. We have lived a simple life that has been very fulfilling and rewarding in our love for each other. And two horses pulling a wagon, you know, it's been really good. We, we realize now that I'm 70, that it's never going to make us enough money to get an electronic door with a clicker that will () automatically and bulletproof glasses or windows, you know, it's not going to be really money-making business. It's more of a memory making business and the joy of people coming back 25 years later and arguing about a doll and the little boy that was 10 years old and came in and bought a Teddy bear and his grandfather bought another one and he came back 25 years and said, my kids are playing with the Teddy bears. You know, those kinds of experiences being on this corner are more valuable than money. Yeah. And when I write the book about it, we're working together on a book about our 30 years here on the corner.

Neil Colmer:

I did receive one award when I was a student. I was awarded the Sarah Fuller prize loom by Berea College. And that goes to the outstanding student weaver of the day.

Mary Colmer:

And then the music award.

Neil Colmer:

Yeah. I also got the... I was the first recipient of the Red Foley Award at Berea college. For my contribution to the social life at Berea College, through music. Red Foley's from Berea. And they named the award after him.

Mary Colmer:

Yeah. He would play his three holed pipe all over campus. Maybe walk into class, playing the pipe. And we have a little band here called Knackered and Numb. Because we're all old and really tired and sometimes our fingers are a little numb, you know, and we play for English country dances. We have 12 people that show up. It's a drop-in situation. Really good. And we're all the owners of the band. We all started it. It's just fun.

Mary Reed:

It sounds like music is also a big part of your lives.

Mary Colmer:

Yeah. Everyday part. Yeah. Music. Yeah, I'm a Beatle maniac and I married two folk singers. A first one and a second, true love one. Yeah. Sixties were wild. I need to write a book about being a hippie in the sixties. You know.

Mary Reed:

That's a good chapter.

Mary Colmer:

Yeah. I don't know. I could write a whole book about it. (laughs) In fact, my last doll that I made it's over there, it's a hippie doll. My first hippie doll. I was brave enough to put a peace sign on it. Didn't put any other symbols yet.

Mary Reed:

So have you had other articles or publications?

Neil Colmer:

Over the years, we've had...

Mary Colmer:

Yeah. Newspapers. Magazines.

Neil Colmer:

Oh, that's I guess the biggest one was the National Geographic. They did... what was the title of that? Great American Journeys and Mary and the studio were subjects of one of the articles in

the book. A photographer named Mike Clemmer came along to do all the photography work. He took, he shot 26 rolls of film or something. (laughs) It was amazing.

Mary Colmer:

We got one picture? Two pictures? He got the moon over the Weavers Bottom.

Neil Colmer:

No, no. That was a different photographer.

Mary Colmer:

See, you get them all mixed up in your head over the years.

Mary Reed:

When was this?

Neil Colmer:

That was '80. It was before we moved in here.

Mary Colmer:

So, it was '87.

Neil Colmer:

So it was before '89.

Mary Colmer:

I was on a TV show in Japan called How Much For The Whole World. And I held up an old boot that I'd made into the old woman in the shoe. And they had to guess how much it was priced at. So that was fun. Oh, golly. So many, so many. I've been on TV in seven countries.

Mary Reed:

Is this with your corn shuck dolls or with music?

Mary Colmer:

With music. Yeah. Music. But I wanted to stay still. We did the music here and people would come in and we'd play the dulcimer. We have two... we have a Jean Richie dulcimer and your single dulcimer. I can't remember the name of the man who built that one.

Neil Colmer:

Charles Simpson.

Mary Colmer:

Charles Simpson. And my dulcimer is Morris (), Jean Richie's uncle. And then we have a double dulcimer by Warren May, a beautiful double instrument. Yeah. Couples that play

together, stay together, right dear? So we play video games together and I have a following of 8,600 people on my live show every evening. (laughs)

Mary Reed:

Are you a gamer?

Mary Colmer:

8,743. He says, I said 86, didn't I? Oh, I haven't looked at the stats in a while.

Neil Colmer:

It went up recently. After the photograph thing.

Mary Colmer.

I don't know where all these people came from. I don't know that many people.

Neil Colmer:

Yeah. But after the photograph thing with the 10,000 views, you got more followers.

Mary Colmer:

I just posted a picture of my son and I having a chuckle and it was posted on Twitter and it's got 10,800, no three hundred. I'm rushing it here.

Neil Colmer:

It's over 10,000 anyway.

Mary Colmer:

It's over 10,000. I've never had 10,000 of anything, you know. (laughs)

Mary Reed:

Have you all been a part of any of the craft organizations here in the state of Kentucky? And if so, how have they helped your development?

Neil Colmer:

Well, we're both members of the Kentucky Guild for Artists and Craftsmen. And of course, their fairs have been around for a long time. And were instrumental in our being able to market our goods when we started, they really were a big help. And we joined up with the Kentucky Crafted Market when it first started.

Mary Colmer:

And the Chamber of Commerce, the Guild. Some of the...

Neil Colmer:

The Chamber of Commerce didn't really suit our needs very well, but they were supportive, but...

Mary Colmer:

But not supportive. They wanted every single craft and thing we did to have a separate membership.

Neil Colmer:

So if we wanted the bed and breakfast and the weaving and the dolls we'd have to pay three memberships.

Mary Colmer:

And our music. Four memberships and my writing, five memberships, you know, at \$75 each, we couldn't do it.

Neil Colmer:

And it just got to be where it wasn't feasible for us.

Mary Colmer:

And we've been poor all this time, whether people believe it or not, but, you know, we've eaten at the food bank a lot, you know, and when we sell this building and we fade away into the history of Berea, some of that money is going to be given back in the form of me going and filling a whole grocery cart and the whole car full of food to go to the food bank. You know, when you start at the bottom and stay about middle range, you know, there's a certain amount of appreciation there that you did it! Yes. And my learning disability was only vitamins. My music, I did by ear until 1980. And I started taking vitamins. And I did a whole bunch of different companies until I found one that worked. And that's what I recommend is that people, if they're having troubles, try a whole bunch of different ways. If one doesn't work, try the other. And I cared my learning disability. And so I started learning piano. Grover far over in Richmond was my piano teacher. And I went from primary piano the first week where I was given one note to memorize, all the way to playing the Moonlight Sonata's first movement.

Mary Reed:

When you say a learning disability, can you define that a little bit?

Mary Colmer:

Yeah. I would learn something in school. By the time I got home, it would be gone. And I would go over it and over and over it, part of it was child abuse. Getting hit over the head for a football player, makes them kind of stupid for a while. And when the teachers hit you and stuff like that you get stupid and you get to the point where you say things to your child brain, "I will never remember this anymore". And it works. And then you have trouble remembering anything. And then nutrition, when I got the nutrition settled, by gum, I could do anything I wanted. And now I've got an iPhone. (laughs) I can Google it. Yes. And I can go into the dark web and Google it where nobody knows what I'm Googling. You know, it's an amazing world we live in now. And the thing is about crafts and traditions. There are things that you learn doing a craft that are beyond just something you learn in a book. I can tie knots to tie this doll, but because I've done almost 12,000 of them, I can tie a bow behind my head without looking. It's I have these fingers, I have 10 little brains, 10 little brains, and they can play the piano and do one finger at a time and they can tie knots. And you can only learn that being passionate and absolutely adoring what you're doing. When I look at this doll and say, this is my favorite doll out of 12,000 dolls, you know, somebody who doesn't do a craft is missing out on that. They can't say this is the

best thing I ever did in this medium, you know, get good at something. They used to say, it took 10,000 hours, no, a hundred thousand hours to learn something. They've now scientifically proven it only takes 20 hours. Yeah. Yay. Google, you know? (laughs) Yeah.

Mary Reed:

Is there maybe another interesting story that either of you'd like to share with us?

Mary Colmer:

Oh, I want to write a book and tell what the last story of this building is. There have been three deaths in this building and three births, and it has been owned by 17 people or groups, and the building needs to go on, the craft work needs to go on. And we're really hoping that the last chapter in our 30 years being here is going to be something really, really interesting. So keep in touch.

Neil Colmer:

Tune in again next week. (laughs)

Mary Colmer:

See what happens next. Like my my sister-in-law used to say, "What are you going to do next, Mary?"

Mary Reed:

Well, thank you all so much for taking the time to share your story with us.

Mary Colmer:

You're welcome. Thank you for watching.

Neil Colmer:

My pleasure.

Camera man:

Okay. I'm just going to get some room tone. Room tone.

END OF INTERVIEW