

COVER SHEET

TRANSCRIPTION NUMBER: 9 OF 17

Transcriber: Amanda Fickey, PhD, Independent Contractor
Date of Interview: 3/09/2012
Duration: 64:08
Interviewee: Gary Cotton
Interviewer: Jesse Wells
Cinematographer: Sean Anderson
Location: Workshop, Grayson, KY
Sponsoring Organization: Kentucky Craft History and Education Association, Inc.
Funding: LexArts, Kentucky Oral History Commission

Transcription Notes:

JW: Jesse Wells

GC: Gary Cotton

VC: Valerie Cotton

SA: Sean Anderson

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.

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

0:00

JW: Can we start off with telling where you were born and talk about maybe how you grew up, your interest in music and your family?

GC: Born in Grayson. Raised here in my hometown. I've come by it; I guess it's passed down through the family. My Dad was always a woodworker. And like we were talking earlier, Mom, she was the one that loved the music and I got my woodworking from Dad. I've always been one that wanted to try different things and enjoy, I enjoy music as well so... That's kind of how we got started into it, Jesse.

JW: What kind of woodworking did your father do?

GC: Dad started out building cabinets and so forth. Grandfather clocks. Just about the biggest and last thing he did was he actually built a wooden car. He and Mom enjoyed that while she was here. They both had fun with that. That was really entertaining and a great big achievement for him.

JW: Who taught him to do that type of work?

GC: ... Well, I don't know, Dad, where did you get yours from now? [Turns off camera to ask question]

[GC's father responds off camera: "See, my father was a carpenter too. He was a house builder.]

GC: It's been in the family for a long time.

JW: Yeah.

GC: But now, I got mine from him. Dad was always the woodworker in the family. I'd always slip out and get in his shop and be messing with his tools when I was younger, you know.

JW: What kind of music did your mom sing?

GC: Mom loved to sing Gospel in churches. They had a small Gospel group, and her and her sister sang in church a lot. But her true love was Bluegrass music. She loved it. On her last year or so she would actually lie in the bed and sing for me and I'd play some, and she'd sing.

[Video interrupted by dog barking outside]

2:34

GC: She um, she would have Dad take her out when she had been down in the bed sick and go sing Bluegrass music. She loved it.

VC: She had thousands of CD's, didn't she?

GC: Yeah. She has enough CD's and music down there that she could start her own store in music. It was unreal.

JW: Did anybody else in the family build instruments that you know of?

GC: Nobody in the family. The reason I started, I had a guitar built for me and there were a few little things that were less than I thought they should be. I've always been one to think that if somebody else that I could, so I started studying up on it and that's what it all stemmed from, was that I wasn't really happy with what I got so I wanted to build one myself and built it the way I wanted.

JW: How long have you been building guitars?

GC: Jesse, when been building about six years now. We have built, with what's laying here on the table; I think it makes us 68 guitars.

JW: Wow.

GC: So we've been pleased and we're selling a few guitars. Hopefully, before you get gone I'll sell you one.

JW: We'll have to work on that... How did you learn this craft? Did you study any particular builders?

GC: Frank Finocchio. I've studied a lot of his stuff. So that. I've read a lot. Jesse, there's nothing like experience and trial and error. I've always had a sound in my head that I wanted to get and we're getting there. The first twenty-five or thirty guitars were good, but I think we're starting to get there now. There's a lot of passion that goes into it with me. I love what I'm doing.

JW: What do you think about when you build a guitar, as far as the construction and the materials?

4:49

GC: If you can ever learn to manipulate the wood, and what I mean by that is if you can take any top, Sitka, Red Spruce, or whatever, and if you can manipulate it and losing it up and get it to vibrate and talk, once you've learned how to do that, I think we're getting there and it's a great big accomplishment to learn how to do that.

JW: Do you tap tune them?

GC: I've got a method of tuning my tops. I'll run them through my thickness sander and I shake them, and if you've ever shaken a metal roadside sign and heard the warping sound it makes, I will sand my tops until I shake them and they start making that metal sound and that's where I stop. I know at that point it's loosened up enough to do that.

JW: It's got some flex.

GC: I make my own bracings. I will count the growth rings in my bracings. If I'm using a really tight Sitka top, I will get a brace with less growth rings to loosen it up, or the other way, if it's a really wide grain top I will try to tighten it back up a little to where it's muddy. So, you can tell there's been a lot of thought and stuff that's gone into it. I'm passionate about building. I love what we're doing.

JW: Well that passion, how does that translate when you get your guitars into the hands of a really good player?

6:30

[Video interrupted by dog barking outside]

GC: It's like raising a kid and you know that he's turned out really well and you're proud of the kid. That's the way that I am of instruments. To see somebody on stage representing you and playing one of your guitars and hearing it, it's great. It's a little footprint that I've always said I want to leave on this earth. When I'm gone, there will be something left behind of us. I feel like we're going to be able to do that. But it's the greatest feeling ever was. You want to rush and get it done so you can see what that next one is going to sound like. But we're proud of it and it's a family thing. Valerie helps me a lot. She's involved in it. We get a whole lot of enjoyment out of it. I don't call it working at all. It's an enjoyment. It really is.

JW: Are there any other people who maybe showed an interest in building and have approached you? Have you had any mentors or apprentices or...?

GC: Not really. I've always said, with my turn and attitude and stuff I have a hard time really saying that I could build with anybody else. I've got certain ways that I want to stick to so bad that I don't know if anybody else could get along with me in my shop or not. But I have the hope, and I hope it will come true, that the grandbaby will take it up and I want to teach him. I'd love to be able to pass on what we are doing to him. There's not a lot of this going on in our area. So, I'm hoping that we can do that.

JW: Who are some of the inspirations for your instrument building?

8:55

GC: Well, I've met and had the opportunity to talk with Richard Hoover, Dana Bourgeois... I had the chance to sit and talk with them about a lot of their ideas and stuff at the NAM show in Nashville. I would probably have to say that, as far as builders go Richard, I love what he does. The Collings' guitars. Man, I think they're fantastic. I love to give credit where it's due, and all these people are building fantastic instruments. It's a really, really tough market to get into with people like that building. But we're doing it as a really serious hobby. But hopefully we can pass it on later on to the grandkids.

JW: Who are some of the folks playing your instruments right now?

GC: Dave Carroll, Don Rigsby, a really good friend of mine, Adam McIntosh plays for Joe Mullins. Bob Minner owns one of our guitars. He plays for Tim McGraw. We've got several floating around out there now. I don't know whether to say anything about this or not, but I talked to Russell Moore here the other day and he wants to talk to us.

JW: All right.

GC: Whether that will happen or not, I don't know, but in April we are supposed to meet. So hopefully I can maybe put one in his hands.

JW: There's a lot of good interest out there.

10:47

GC: Yeah, and that's what it takes. That's what it takes. You've got to have people seeing what you've got out there being played.

JW: Well, can you describe the sound in a guitar that you look for?

GC: Yeah, I call it compression. When you hit the strings, I want it to sound like a compression coming out of the box. An acoustic box is really described as an air pump anyway, but I think that we've got just a great deal of compression in our box. The sound is coming from inside. So many guitars, it sounds like the strings are making all of the sounds on the outside of the box, but I've got to say that I think it's described as compression in the box from that. I'm really enthused about it, because, like I said a while ago we are really getting there and that's what I want to hear out of them.

JW: Is that sound from you personally? You're a player. Or, has that been influenced by other players who have told you what sound they are looking for?

GC: No, it's strictly what I've wanted to hear. You know, Martin makes a thundering guitar, but I've found them not to be really balanced sometimes. I'd like to think that our guitars are really balanced. But, I've got to say honestly, the sound that I'm getting is what I've been hearing in my head, and we're getting there.

JW: In that process you've developed some tools. Can you tell us maybe about some of the innovative designs of tools?

GC: You know, as country boys go, we've always been able to design and make things out of necessity, but I built a radius jig right there that we radius our own fingerboards with. I've built several bending molds for bending different sized guitars. Gosh, I could probably go back and dig up a lot of things when you begin thinking about it, little things you come up with, you know, but I call it a recipe and I've got a certain type of wood that we use for bridge plates and you know, talking about your own ideas and designs, I've got to attribute a lot of that to our woods and our matching of woods. We've come up with a lot of neat stuff of our own in the past.

JW: Do you have a personal preference in wood choices?

13:50

GC: I've got to say that I love them all, and to me they are all good. I love our molds. Mahogany's... I think we've done a lot with Mahogany that I haven't been hearing of with other people, but then again, we build some really strong Rosewood guitars. I'd like to think that we could build them both very well. But I play Rosewood. In the living room I've got a Rosewood, so maybe that tells you something about what I lean towards a little bit.

JW: I know you build a lot of dread knot-sized guitars. Are there a lot of other styles of guitars that you enjoy building?

[Interruption by videographer]

14:48

GC: We've recently built an L-00 guitar for a friend of ours up in West Virginia that was beautiful. I've got a 000/0M laying here that we're working on right now and I've built a slope shoulder 45's, slope Ds we can build you pretty much whatever you want. If we don't have what it takes to build what you want we'll make it. I like to think that we can jig-up and make whatever anybody wants. My favorite, without saying, is a dread knot. It always has been for Martin and everybody else. But we can build you whatever you want.

JW: Maybe talk a little bit about building mandolins and... have you built any other instruments? I know you've built quite a few mandolins.

GC: Well Jess, we've built, I think it's eight mandolins and this one setting here makes the ninth one we're working on. I don't really think that we've mastered what it takes, or I haven't figured out what it takes to make a really great mandolin, and right now I've got to say that we are putting most of our efforts into guitars and learning those. But we've built mandolins; we've built a couple of banjos, dobros... I got a fiddle that we're still working on. Yeah, we've messed around in a little bit of everything, but I keep going back to guitars. I feel like I'm closer to getting my foot through the door on guitars. It's such a hard market to get into. But we have messed around with a little bit of all of it and I hope to build some more mandolins. We've got a lot of people asking about them right now, too. So we'll just have to see. Our repair work here lately has kept us just about away from building.

JW: Really?

GC: Yeah.

JW: So you do a lot of repairs. Do you work on any instrument that might come through the door?

GC: Pretty much. Pretty much. I had my first dulcimer in here yesterday. But we work on fiddles, banjos, guitars, and basses... We do a lot of set-up work, and a little bit of electric work, not a lot, I've got a really good friend who is just fantastic on electrics and I lean on him a whole lot for that.

JW: So he does the repair on electric guitar repairs?

GC: A lot of it. You probably know him, Bobby Burnett.

JW: Oh, ok. Yeah.

GC: If I've got some really serious stuff in here on that I kind of fall back on Bob and get him to, well, I actually help him on that part of repair, and I send stuff to him on that.

[Interruption by dogs barking outside]

18:24

GC: Yeah, I'd like to say that Bobby, he does a lot of electric work for me, and that's who we rely on to do our electronic work and stuff.

JW: Do you find a lot of people needing electronics in their acoustic guitars?

GC: No, they actually kind of shun you when you go to talk to them... But Bobby is an awfully good boy and he's really talented at it. We kind of... I'd like to think I'm smart enough to know what I should be working on, and what I don't need to be working on. Fretting them and so forth, yeah, we do all that. I love to do that.

JW: Do you find that a lot of people seek you out because there's not an availability of repair people in the area?

GC: Yeah, we've received guitars and done repairs for people as far as Napa Valley, California.

JW: Oh wow.

GC: I've got them coming in from Virginia, West Virginia, we're really starting to get our name out there. There is a slack amount of people who do this work anymore.

JW: Sounds like a quality thing, too.

GC: I hope so; I'd like to think that they are coming back for that.

JW: If they are coming from that far away and they are coming back, it's...

GC: We had an old gentleman bring a banjo here the other day and he wanted to stay while I worked on it and sometimes that's hard to do. I told him, I said, "I'm a little busy right now and it may take a little while," and he said, "Well, if I've got to wait a year we're going to do this together." So, that kind of made me happy to know that he thought that much of us, which we got him taken care of and sent him back. The quality of your work will either make you or break you. We try to do our very best here and I hope that I never quit learning. I always want to think that I'm learning something every day with everything we do.

JW: What are some of the things that you'd like to improve, that you find...?

GC: What my wife is doing right now... No, she does a good job, but what I'm saying about that is for me to improve my finishing, that is a tough part of building for me to have a really good area to spray and finish in, that's tough. I think we are coming around on it, but that's one of the toughest parts of building a guitar to me is spraying it out.

JW: Do you find the environment here in Kentucky prohibitive in that matter? Just the amount of humidity and the right...

GC: Yeah, it's all a factor, but I think that just the amount of experience in what you are doing is everything. You say sixty-six guitars, which is a lot, but I think every time we do one we learn something different. I do think we are getting better. We use Nitrocellulose, which is the old style spray... If there was anything I wish I could improve on it's probably the finishing work of it.

JW: Have you ever tried the French polish or shellac on a guitar?

GC: Yeah, Dave Carroll has a guitar of mine right now and I French polished the top of it for him. Actually, I had started to French polish the whole guitar, and French polish will break you for the amount of time it takes to do it. I love the old time ways, the old style, the old oil varnishes and stuff, I love that, but let's face it, the way things are now, you don't have time to sit and rub on a guitar for a week or two. I hate that because everything is so hurried up, but yeah, I've done that and I love it.

23:07

JW: Is that the guitar that everybody loves so much, that has the French polish top?

GC: Actually, no. His Mahogany is the one that everybody loves so much.

JW: The other one is Rosewood?

GC: The other one is Brazilian Rosewood.

JW: Huh.

GC: It's a good guitar. It's a good guitar. I have actually studied the old Hershey-makers style of finishing violins and fiddles, so the old ways are always fascinating to me. I love it. But like I said, you get so much time involved that you just can't afford to spend that much time and do it and stay caught up. And nobody really sees the amount of time that you put into it dollar wise to be willing to pay it. It's always fascinated me and I've studied it and I have done it. It's neat. It is neat.

JW: On the opposite spectrum, what new techniques are you using that you might share in your construction? You said you use a different type of bridge-plate wood, are there any other differences from the classic?

GC: Nothing other than the fact of how I manipulate the top with studying the amount of growth rings in a brace. That's an aspect of putting a top together that I don't know if a lot of people look at it that way. My bridge-plate is definitely one of my pluses because I've built with two or three different designs and I've always gone back to this and I'll stay with it. The different ways of manipulating tops, loosening them up, bracing and stuff. The rest of it Mr. Martin had it all down, you know. I've taken what he did and kind of improved on it and worked on it a little I think. The hands-on in instruments anymore is kind of rare. So much stuff is all computers.

JW: Do you do all of your inlay work by hand? Do you cut all of your pearl?

25:37

GC: I do not cut my pearl. We get it cut through Brian England.

JW: So right here in Kentucky?

GC: Yes. Brian does all of our cutting, but we do our own inlay here. Once again, you know, there's so many different parts of building that take so many different skills to do.

JW: And that's a semi-dangerous part of building too, I know...

GC: The dust and stuff from pearl... I do the inlay and I pretty much leave it at that. But now, we've done a lot of inlay and a lot of hearts and flowers banjo necks and stuff.

JW: Wow.

GC: We try to do a little bit of all of it. But once again, I'll go back and say that guitars are our passion and that's what we hope to eventually make it on doing. But it's enjoyable isn't it, Hun?

VC: Yep.

JW: What do you hope in the future, what do you hope to look back and would you be proudest of?

GC: Maybe number one hundred! I would love to be able to sit down and say let's jig-up and make twelve or eighteen guitars a year, no more, let's make eight or twelve great guitars. I don't ever expect to want to make a bunch of guitars. Because of the passion I have for it I want to keep it close. And, I've had my dream come true on one or two things for us. Seeing my guitars played on TV. That was one of the first things I always want to see. Don Rigsby, Dave, they use our guitars on their taping over there. So, you know, it's real simple. I've always said that when I leave this world I'd like to leave something behind to remember us by. To say that I've build two or three hundred guitars isn't a really big thing to me, but to listen to someone play one and I can be as proud of it as they can then I think we've done something. And we do, we strive to... If I build a guitar and it leaves here that I'm proud of then I'm almost certain that the guy that buys it is going to be pretty happy too because I'm pretty strict on what I like, or I hope it would be that way. But it's just a passion. We love it, and if the good lord let's us I hope we live long enough build another hundred more.

JW: Yes sir. I hope so too.

GC: Me too...

JW: That's great.

28:53

[Interruption by videographer, close-up shots of finishing work, general conversation]

30:54

[Return to interview questions]

JW: How do you use technology to promote your building and your work?

VC: Research, you do a lot of research.

GC: Yeah. I'm always studying what the people that are my heroes in building; I'm always studying what they are doing. As far as technology goes, putting clips and videos of what we are doing on there. Seems like a lot of people are interested in that.

JW: So you put that on a website?

GC: Yeah, we have a website. It's www.garycotton.com. We've got a little bit of that on there, and a few pictures to get our word out. But I have found that word of mouth, it's really been great for us. I talked to Dave Carroll this morning and he was telling me that a bunch of people had been asking about us and where we're playing at; so, we're doing well. I'm really pleased with it. And I'll get you and Clay both over here one of these days and we'll put you both to work.

JW: Well...

GC: We'll put you both to work.

32:18

[Discussion between JW and SA, additional close-ups of work]

GC: That is looking pretty, honey.

JW: That is nice wood.

GC: You know, I'm serious, I can sit and do it and I've done a bunch, but here lately she's agreed to help me and she does a fantastic job. She does. Having somebody you can trust. Well, that was the point I was talking about a while ago, I'm so picky and so afraid that it's not going to be done the way I want to do it or whatever, but she does a way better job, and I've got to brag on her, than I would have ordinarily done.

VC: Well, it's one way we get to spend time together. If he's working you know, on something else or whatever...

GC: And then the shop is forming over here you see. We get to loaf together too...

JW: See who the real boss is...

GC: Yeah, he's the real boss right there. But, it's because of him that we learned all of this anyway.

JW: Well, did your dad teach you do finish work?

GC: Partly. Partly, you know, where he finished a lot of his stuff I became accustomed to that, but that's where I still fall short as far as, it's my finishing work. I've wanted to go to somewhere like DuPont or somewhere and actually take a real advanced course with them... How they would use their products. But we're learning. It's coming. I've got to say, that's one of the biggest things that I strive to still want to do better is finishing work. We've started oil rubbing our necks, you noticed that, which is not a new thing, a lot of people do it, but I've found that a lot of people like the oil-rubbed necks.

JW: It's got a nice natural feel.

GC: Yes. When you go in a poolroom you sand a cue stick; it's about the same old idea.

JW: The feel of something...

GC: Right. Like I said a while ago, we've got some, a very limited amount of some hundred-year-old Red Spruce. I say a hundred-year-old, it's at least that probably, but it came from some of my friends down at First Quality. Jeff. We've got some of that. We've got quite a few exotic woods, too. I'm going to call your wife and see if we can sell her some of this exotic wood.

JW: Don't tell her, it's a surprise.

GC: Oh ok, all right. We'll work on that.

JW: You know how hard that is...

GC: We'll work on that.

35:47

[Interruption by videographer, check for room-tone, recording sound of rubbing/finishing]

37:19

[Video of parts, explanation of parts by GC]

GC: Ok, these are the sides with the end blocks. They are put in and glued. We like to put them in our mold and keep them stretched out.

This is a true dread knot mold. By using this we replicate the true size of the molds.

Right here we've started adding the purfling, which is what holds the backs and the tops on. Like you can see, we've only got half of it put in here, but that's the step of that.

These are neck blanks that we can whittle the necks down of.

Now here, this is an old whim, a 000M body, we're just trying to get started on it.

I'd like to show you... This is the 0M top, and this is the rosette that will be put in it. You can see the way it is notched out for it. That will go on this guitar right here that we are building.

And right here beside of you is the neck that's going to go on this guitar here that we've got done. Now we will oil rub this with our stain and we'll oil rub it.

There's the guitar that she's been sanding.

Right here behind you are three tops. These here are all Adirondack tops. We've got three tops and two backs over there, and one of them is in the press back there.

And right there in front of you is the jig that we use to make our fingerboards out of.

SA: There?

GC: Yes. And when you get through with that, we'll take you in here in the room and show you some of our side-bending molds.

SA: What were you doing before you did this?

GC: We, I was a blacktop contractor. We worked for the state highway department and built highways. So I don't know how I got into this part of it except for the fact that my mother and my dad worked in wood, which doesn't sound like a logical job for a man that worked on the highway, but here we are anyway.

SA: Well you were talking about it broke your back earlier...

GC: I had some serious injuries out there, so this was what I asked to be able to do, to not sit on the couch and waste away.

SA: Who did you ask?

GC: It was the good Lord that did not let me waste. It just kind of started turning out this way. My mom had sugar really bad and she was bed fast so it was something that we spent time together with, doing that...

But anyway, this here is my jig for bending my sides. I'll take one out that I've got bent in here and show you.

[Video of working jig]

GC (cont.): Ok. Now here's what we've come up with. This is a dread knot side. I've got another one right here. This will be the mate to this one. And that's what we come up with out of the benders.

You can see all the different molds around the walls. The slope Ds, the dread knots, jumbos, the cutaways... But it's a passion. Right there are some of my Spruces. All of this right here are my soundboards that we use on the top of some of our guitars.

Here is a piece of Rosewood. We've got several Rosewoods here. We keep fret wire. All kinds.

SA: Who is the guy you talked about studying, late at night?

GC: Frank Ford.

SA: And who is he?

GC: Frank is probably known for his methods of repair. If you want to get on frets.com and look him up, the man has a fantastic website on there for repair. He can pretty well guide you through anything to repair a guitar. That's one of my heroes as far as that goes. If you don't understand anything or whatever you can get on there and study up on him and pretty well learn it from there.

SA: You talked about being on there for hours.

GC: Oh, it's a passion to me to learn the different methods of fixing things, especially if that's what I do here. I like to be able to, when somebody comes in and needs something I like to be able to give them a pretty good answer, a knowledgeable answer as to how to go about it. I've got to admit, I've learned a lot of that from reading his stuff and studying his website. He is probably the one I study the most when it comes to repair work. Anyway, such is this part in here...

SA: Anything else you want to show or talk about?

GC: I guess that's about it maybe...

VC: The bracing.

GC: I don't know if he got any pictures of how we glue our bracings up on the back of the guitars. As well as the backs go, that's the way we glue our tops up too.

SA: Is that back here?

GC: Yeah, that's kind of a neat way; you can put in every brace in the guitar with that and brace it all up at one time. And like I said, you can do the top as well as the back on it. And you know how the back, Jesse, has got a fifteen feet radius. Then, I've got the wheels are shaped to let me bend that back at a fifteen feet radius right on that.

JW: On the deck at least...

GC: Yeah.

VC: You might want to show him how you glue.

GC: Well, we aren't going to glue anything to that right now.

VC: Ok.

JW: I always wondered how that radius was achieved. People...that's the septum, you think it's a flat top, it's always a flat top and a flat back on a guitar, but...

GC: It's not.

JW: They are both radiuses.

GC: And the top has got a twenty-eight feet radius on the top.

46:22

GC (cont.): It's a passion.

[Interruption by guitar playing]

JW: Yeah, you can hear it.

[Guitar demonstration by JW]

49:19

GC: Good job, Jess. That's pretty.

JW: This guitar plays itself!

GC: Well, thank you. That's beautiful.

JW: It's easy to play.

GC: You know...

JW: It's got a big sound.

GC: It's gotta sound good. They gotta look good, and they gotta play good if you're gonna get into... Now, the old Martins, they can get by with the old rough look.

JW: Well, and the set-up, too.

GC: Right. But you know, if you're gonna get into the market, everything has got to be right and it's tough.

VC: What is it that you said, if the dog is gonna run...

GC: Oh yeah, you can brag about them all you want to, but when the dog hits the ground he has to hunt, doesn't he? So, you know, I can tell you stories all day long about it, but you are going to be the final one to see it. And there's no kidding or fooling anyone for that part. But I think we're building a good box. I think it vintage sound to it. It has an aged sound to it.

JW: Yeah. Imagine twenty or thirty years from now what it's going to sound like.

GC: I've had people throw Martins up to me that were forty to fifty years old and I've told, you know, I don't see what's fair about this, yours is forty years old and mine is brand new. So give me forty years. But uh, I think a guitar has to settle in. I think every brace in there has to accept what it's doing and as they get older I think that happens. It all settles in and every brace accepts it's responsibility that it's doing. I don't think anybody should judge a brand new guitar until its had a chance to settle in.

JW: Absolutely.

GC: But I think our guitars are, you know, sound wise we're right there.

JW: Absolutely.

GC: We're right there. I'm proud of them.

VC: It's neat to have something that you can leave when you're gone. Something is still here... I think that's neat. It's like a little bit of a legacy of yourself, your work.

GC: There's been many people listen to the old Stradivariuses and wondered about the builder, wasn't there?

JW: Yeah, every one of them.

GC: And that's what we hope for out of that. Everybody to just wonder, well what kind of a person was he or whatever... You gotta have a passion for it. You gotta love it to do it. And people like you that plays that music, too. I'm proud of that. I'm proud of that part of it.

JW: It think there's just such a history of people building instruments, it's a part of the world that...

GC: Right now, especially. You know, it's not been that many years ago that you didn't find but a handful of builders. And now, these boutique builders, or backyard builders, they're everywhere. So, it just makes it that much harder to get involved in it, or to get established in it I guess. But, we're getting there, aren't we?

VC: Well, I'm awful proud of him.

GC: We're getting there. We enjoy it.

JW: It shows.

GC: So how many do you want to take home today?

53:24

JW: Emptied out my car before I came here.

GC: Now, have you all been anywhere else today?

JW: Neil Kendrick.

GC: Neil?

JW: Over in Frenchburg. Yeah.

GC: I haven't seen Neil in a long time.

JW: He is still working full-time.

GC: Is he?

JW: Yeah. Over in Mount Sterling.

GC: Ok.

JW: He's finding a little bit of time to work.

GC: You can't get it out of your blood. Once you do it, I think you're branded for life, but that's a good thing. Steve was always really good to me, down in Morehead.

JW: Rigsby?

GC: Yeah.

JW: Yes sir, he's...

GC: I went to Steve when I first started and anything I wanted to know or whatever he told me. And I told him one day, I didn't want to take up his time and he said, "When I don't have time to help you, I'll quit." I always remembered that. I always remembered that out of Steve.

JW: Wow.

GC: He was really good to us when we started.

JW: He's a real teacher at heart. All those years of teaching band I think, he's moved on to his woodworking and his luthiery now.

GC: Right, right.

JW: He wants that to continue.

GC: But that's another one, we haven't seen him in a long time.

JW: Yeah, I saw him on Wednesday night.

GC: Really? Is he doing all right?

JW: Yeah, he's doing great. He sure is. He's enjoying retirement, except I think he's doing more now than he ever has. He is burning up the roads to Lexington a few times a week.

GC: I've wanted to get back over and aggravate you all a little bit over at the College one day.

JW: Well, come on. We'll show you the new building.

GC: Oh really?

JW: Yeah.

GC: Where is it at now?

JW: Well, it's the old public library. The university [Morehead State University] bought it, and they're converting it into our offices right now.

GC: That would be cool.

JW: And a recording studio, a big state of the art recording studio. Classrooms and offices.

GC: So you're moving up?

JW: Yeah, in May. They were putting up dry wall this week. If you're near by...

GC: I enjoy stopping in. I know you are all busy and doing your thing, but I enjoy stopping by and paying respects and saying hi.

JW: Well, if it's on a Friday we will take you down and give you a tour.

56:00

GC: All right. I'll remember that Friday is a good day.

JW: See it in the different stages of the construction.

GC: Now, remember when my little grandson gets old enough I'm going to be around aggravating you to teach him to play fiddle.

JW: How old is he?

VC: He's three.

GC: He's three now.

VC: He'll be four in October.

JW: Well, my little girl will be three in June. We will have to make them pick together.

VC: Yeah. He loves music. He's got a little; Gary got him a little fiddle and a little old small guitar.

GC: Bought him a baby Taylor.

JW: Aww.

VC: Yeah, and he loves it. Gary will be pickin' and he will want to join right in.

GC: You can put it in his hand, Jesse, and he will shake all over. I mean it just thrills him...

VC: Right now he is just going from one thing to another real fast. He doesn't stay with one thing very long.

JW: That's the way my little girl is.

GC: Do you teach any classes? I mean, other than the College?

JW: Yeah, yeah.

[Videographer cuts/skip in video]

57:05

[Begins with a discussion of heating bills while videographer repositions camera]

GC: My heating bills here in the winter, and cooling bills in the summer, you know it takes a lot of money. It takes a lot of money.

JW: Yeah, just tooling, and getting enough wood and the cost of materials today and...

VC: The start-up.

GC: Yeah, Jess, I'd say there's, it's hard to believe and understand but there's probably thousands of dollars laying here on the table and just special little tools.

JW: You bet.

GC: You know, to do it.

JW: I've looked at Sumac, and that was about it.

GC: I've been expecting Sumac to be written on the front of my building any day. But we've pretty much got there. We've got what it takes to do about anything we need now. So we got that part behind us and we can move on and we do all right. Like I said, it's just a serious hobby for us.

VC: Well, and you know, with his bad back and stuff, if he gets tired, or whatever, he can just go in, or be off for however long.

GC: It looks kind of silly, but I catch myself holding myself up where my back and stuff hurts me a lot.

VC: It's nothing that you have to just stay right with it, it's more or less enjoyment, hopefully...
Hopefully, that's...

GC: Oh it is. If I didn't enjoy it I wouldn't be doing it.

JW: You wouldn't be here.

GC: No. It's a passion. I love to see people bring things in here that other people would throw away, and I like to put those back together and listen to them when they are fixed. They brought me, I believe it was in the 50s, a D-18 that had been torn all to pieces and it laid in a basement forever. And I brought it in here in a shoebox, there were parts of every kind. I don't know, it took me a while to put it all back together. It was the sweetest sounding D-18 you ever heard when we got it back. I forget the guys name

here in Grayson that picked with Larry. Gallahue. He took it and actually made some CDs with it. It was beautiful sounding. But that's what I like. I like fixing things back up. The old K-arch tops and stuff. They probably weren't much when they were new, and still aren't, but it's just a piece of history you know... I enjoy stuff like that a lot. We get a lot of it.

59:54

JW: You'd have to enjoy it because otherwise you would just say, I only build guitars, I just want to create my own guitars...

GC: A really good friend from Virginia told me, he said you know, you are going to have to come to a point and say I'm going to build or repair, and I don't want to give up either one. I love to build, and it seems like that when one gets slack, the other one always picks up, and it always has, hasn't it?

VC: Yep, and the friends...

GC: Yeah, we've made good friends.

JW: Mhm.

GC: Really good friends from this. I wouldn't trade anything we've done out here for nothing, it's been good. It's just, you know, it's clean. It's clean. There are a lot of just really good people doing it. Hope to keep on doing it, don't we Dad.

[Father responds, "Yeah. If it's quality work you turn out, I'd say they'd come back."]

GC: It's kept us going. And I've got a pretty good wife that doesn't gripe at me too much either, so she doesn't say too much.

VC: It's something, you know, if a person couldn't do anything, if he couldn't do anything, it would be sad.

GC: Oh that's what I said about my surgeries. If I had to sit on the couch everyday, I couldn't deal with that. It was bad enough you know, when actually, working was my life and when I got down so bad to where I couldn't get out there and do it every day, if I didn't have something to fall back on and do this I would go nuts.

VC: And, like I said while ago, the most surprising thing about it, well, not really to me but to everybody else, is he's got talent. It really is a talent that shows through in his work. He really knows and, being as particular as he is, that's why it turns out so well.

GC: See, I paid her to say that.

[Father comment's, "She's trying to get a raise out of him."]

VC: I think Dad's after a raise. But he does, he really does have a talent for woodworking and he loves it.

GC: We are going to keep on doing it anyway.

VC: Yeah. If you love doing something, then you're proud of it, then everybody else can be...

[Father comments, "You should play my favorite song on there."]

GC: What is your favorite now, Dad?

[Father responds, "You play it every day."]

VC: The Wayfaring Stranger.

GC: Pick it for us. You're an awful good picker.

1:03:00

[JW plays The Wayfaring Stranger]

1:04:08

Interview ends