

**COVER SHEET**

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Transcriber: Amanda Fickey, PhD, Independent Contractor  
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Interviewee: Catherine Currier  
Interviewer: Bob Gates  
Cinematographer: Sean Anderson  
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Transcription Notes:

**BG:** Bob Gates

**CC:** Catherine Currier

**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 names of musical and banjo styles are capitalized throughout the transcript.

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

**0:00**

**BG:** Tell us a little bit about how you got started in this business, as a luthier and a repairperson.

**CC:** My parents started a business, a music store business, when I was twelve, and I was always drawn to woodworking. When I was about, I guess I was seventeen or eighteen, I was a senior in high school, seventeen, I got pretty mad because, I did repair work in the store, but they wouldn't let me take shop.

**BG:** Your parents wouldn't let you take shop?

**CC:** No, the school wouldn't let girls take shop. I think the year I graduated they allowed girls to take shop.

**BG:** Ok.

**CC:** And I just, I just liked doing instrument repair and stringing guitars so that's what I did. I went away to a technical college when I graduated from high school to learn how to repair band instruments. I came back and studied with another luthier out of Frankfort and my education started then basically. I did a lot of little stuff when I was younger, fifteen, sixteen, or seventeen, but I didn't have any formal education other than what my dad showed me, or what some of our guitar instructors showed me. But I didn't really want to be just a clerk in the music store. I really liked fixing stuff, and repairing things, so I did. I just continued to get an education. Majored in Business and Wood Technology at Eastern Kentucky University. Then I went away to California and worked as an apprentice at Taylor Guitars for one summer. Then I came back for a couple of years and took off again for another summer and went and studied mandolin building on Long Island in New York. I think that apprenticeship taught me that I didn't want to be a full-time builder because I really liked being around people. I liked the retail business too. I like doing repair work, and being a builder, you can ask my boyfriend, it's a very solitary life and he's very much a hermit. He's perfect for building instruments.

I like doing repair work. I like being a problem solver.

**2:02**

**BG:** Who is your boyfriend?

**CC:** John Hamlett.

**BG:** Who is that? **(Difficult to hear/transcribe question)**

**CC:** From Virginia. He's from Lovingson, Virginia. He's moving here.

**BG:** And he is an instrument maker?

**CC:** That's all he does. Well he does repair work too, but yeah, he's really, really...

**BG:** So you have to be pretty solitary to...

**CC:** Well, let me put it this way. It's impossible for me to go downstairs and get focused and do much building and then have to come up here and wait on a customer, or do a repair for a customer. So most of the building, I started this a year ago, of course I'm moving also, I'm moving my home, so this ukulele that I'm building started about a year ago and we still aren't done with it because of time, you know, and when you have a business it's more than a forty hour a week job. That's all there is to it.

**BG:** But you started out not thinking so much about the business part, wanting to be a luthier or maker.

**CC:** Mhm. Yeah, I mean, I've always been in the business. The business was here first, and then, you know, I can remember for years and years my mommy said, "Well you can't make any money doing repair work. You can't do that." And I just kept plugging along and learning a little bit more and a little bit more and pretty soon it seems like fifty percent of our business is repair, a lot of it. You can't sell instruments, I don't think, and have a lot of repeat customers, without really doing repair work on them, and be efficient. You have to set-up every guitar that comes through the front door; even if it's brand new you have to do some set-up work on it. So, if you have a repair shop in a music store, you are going to be a lot more successful I believe, and most small businesses find that out, most small music stores are finding that out. Two things that help sustain a music store and business: a repair shop and teachers, musical instruction. So we've always had that in our store. Now it's a bigger part of it than ever because there are very few luthiers. It's a dying breed I guess. Although, when I go to my conferences... We have a conference every other year, the Association of Stringed Instruments Artisans, there are a lot of young kids all the time, so it's heartening to think... and I have young people that come in here too that ask about apprenticing and wanting to learn and I say, "Well I don't want to hand spoon-feed you, so you go out and if you can come in and ask the right questions then yeah you can come in and hangout with me, I don't mind." But you know, you have to be a self-motivator and want to learn, I'm not going to say, "Here, you have to read this and you have to do that." That's not the kind of person I want to hangout with.

**BG:** I saw some pictures when I was here a little earlier with some kids, younger people, looking like they were working on instruments for a brochure or an advertisement. Do you have other people working here?

**CC:** No, I have one other guy that helps me out occasionally and my boyfriend, but you, I also give repair clinics. I teach people how to do it, like a basic set-up on a guitar, and how to make nut in a saddle, the pieces at the top and the bottom of a guitar. I do give repair clinics. And actually, when John moves here from Virginia, we hope to maybe do some mandolin building clinics from kits basically, but that's how you start usually. You don't start out by building all of your own equipment for an instrument, you usually start out with pieces that are semi-manufactured and then go from there.

**5:15**

**BG:** I saw you have a whole shop downstairs with woodworking...

**CC:** Mhm, complete...

**BG:** You have wood storage in one area. I saw in Homer Ledford's place even more.

**CC:** Right.

**[Videographer interrupts]**

**5:41**

**CC:** You have to have a woodworking shop to do workworking, and I don't want it up here on the main floor of the store because it is too dirty.

**BG:** I guess I was wondering, when your dad first bought this place, and you said it was rented from the Moose Lodge, right?

**CC:** Elks.

**BG:** The Elks, Elks, ok, that's an elk and not a moose out there.

**CC:** Yes, yes it is.

**BG:** On the building you have a big elk.

**CC:** Right.

**BG:** So, was that there in the beginning? Did you have a woodshop down there?

**CC:** Mhm.

**BG:** Ok. Who worked that?

**CC:** OK, well, let me see. We've been in this location thirty-seven years. We had two previous locations before this. So I was in my, I was twenty-five when we moved into this location. Twenty-five, forty-five, yeah, that's, I'm not going to tell you how old I am, but yeah, we've always had one form or another. Maybe it wasn't quite as big as that one is right now, where my shop is in front of the windows, but it's been there the last twenty, twenty-five years.

**BG:** Ok.

**CC:** We've always had a woodshop.

**BG:** I guess I was wondering. You said that for a business like this to work you had to be able to do repair and do lessons, right?

**CC:** Mhm.

**BG:** So, that was always a part of your business even...

**CC:** Maybe not as big of an extent right now, but it is. Now I do a lot of repair work.

**BG:** Was your dad doing repair work before?

**CC:** Hmm, minor, you know, neck adjustments and restrings, but not a whole lot.

**BG:** So you're the one who did it here.

**CC:** I'm the one who did it.

**BG:** Nobody else that you worked with or learned from?

**CC:** I've learned from other people, but not here. Not in this location.

**BG:** It sounds like a lot of your learning came when you went away, am I right?

**CC:** Absolutely. I had one guy in Frankfort that, Melvin Penn, he approached me one summer and said, "I want to learn how to repair band instruments because I'm frustrated when people come in and want me to replace a pad in a clarinet or fix a spring," and I said, "Well that's neat." I said, "I'd like to learn more," he was a really good stringed instrument repairperson, so he and I would trade our trades. I would go up there once a month, or thereabouts whenever we would organized it and spend a day with him and help him with all of his repairs that he had, and then he'd come down here once a month or so and help me with some repairs I had here. So that's another way I learned some of my trade.

**BG:** So when he was visiting you he was learning stringed instruments, and when you were up there he was learning how to do band instruments. And you said you went away for a year to learn band instruments.

**CC:** I went to Western Iowa Technical College.

**BG:** So what did they teach you? What did you have to know about band instruments?

**CC:** Overhauling. You take every instrument completely apart and refurbish every piece on it. I learned how to do re-lacquering of brass instruments. So complete overhauls and re-lacquering and dent work, basically.

**BG:** And does that get into how to get the best sounds out of those instruments too?

**CC:** Absolutely. You can't get a good sound unless they work perfectly. It's just like a guitar. If it's not set-up perfectly it's impossible to get the best sound out of it.

**BG:** So you had a little woodwork before that in school, but then you went there to learn brass instruments?

**CC:** And actually, I took my first structured woodworking class when I was in Iowa, and built a Cedar chest. And I took metal shop and learned... I made a lot of my tools for my band instrument repair, like big metal mandrills to rub out the dents in horns, in brass horns. So we were taught to make a lot of our tools and we still do. Jigs and fixtures are, you know, it's just something you have to be able to build and do and design when you are doing instrument repair and instrument building.

**BG:** So how do you do that? I mean, you look at instruments and say, "I need this tool for this."

**CC:** Can I get up?

**BG and SA:** Yeah.

**CC:** I have a whole draws full of cauls and things, and that's where the woodworking comes in handy, that I make to work on things, there is a wooden caul or clamp for every instrument you work on.

**BG:** What's a caul?

**CC:** These are little things like this.

**BG:** C-a-u-l?

**CC:** C-a-u-l, caul that you work with. I had to make special tools for gluing that fingerboard on that upright bass over there, you know, its just part of it. You can't buy every little tool that you need, or fixture that you need when you are working on an instrument because a lot of them they aren't standardized, they are different sizes, so you just go ahead and make them.

**BG:** Ok.

**CC:** It's like a pattern maker, like people who do designs for like airplanes. When you start building a new product, you have somebody who does a prototype, and they build patterns, and that's what a lot of what we do here.

**BG:** Patterns, ok.

**CC:** You do a lot of that.

**BG:** You call that a caul, and what was the other thing?

**CC:** This is a clamping caul.

**BG:** A clamping caul?

**CC:** This is a clamping caul, and this is just a glue backing caul for when I am making different types of pick guards, and all the pick guards that came off of Martin guitars I have to replicate them, so I have to make one of these for different sized pick guards.

**10:25**

**BG:** Ok.

**CC:** So you can't buy these, you have to make them, so that's why I have the woodworking shop, and you always have all these little pieces of wood laying around. It never ends.

**BG:** I don't see any markings on there. How do you know what it's for?

**CC:** Well, a lot of times I do. There is on that one **[holds up block]**.

**BG:** Ok.

**CC:** This is a brand new one I just made.

**BG:** Oh I see.

**CC:** I forgot to mark it. This is the current D-28.

**BG:** Current...?

**CC:** D-28 guitar.

**BG:** That means the ones they are making right now?

**CC:** Yeah.

**BG:** Martin D-28s.

**CC:** Yes.

**BG:** Ok.

**CC:** And that's the size I use.

**BG:** And that's the pick guard for that?

**CC:** Yes, that's the pick guard.

**BG:** So you don't send it to the factory for a pick guard, you make your own?

**CC:** Well I do, for some, but the new ones, they aren't always a perfect shape... They've changed them over the years. And what the deal is, the new ones aren't as pretty as the ones I make. They'll send me a pick guard and the edges are real rough and they are pointy, they aren't rounded. I like them rounded. So I put the pick guard on here and I round the edges and I sand it and then I go downstairs and use this big buffer where I buff them, so I make them even better than the ones that come from the factory.

**BG:** Ok.

**CC:** There's good, better, and best, and I try to be one of the best.

**BG:** Well, I was looking at the interview that was done with you before and you made a remark about, a strong statement that you were a perfectionist

**CC:** I am. It's a blessing and a curse. I work on a lot of instruments that don't warrant being a perfectionist, you know, because they aren't real high-end instruments, but you still try to do the best work you can on somebody's one hundred dollar guitar, if I have to do a set-up or a repair on it. If they want to pay for the repair, I should do the best work I possibly can. It's like I told the guy on the upright bass I'm working on, this is a seven or eight hundred dollar repair, and I said, "That bass isn't worth it,"

and he said, "It's my wife's; it's worth it. Fix it. I don't care what it costs." So I said ok. It will be a beautiful little job when I'm done with it.

**BG:** From your perspective, you say worth it because it's not that expensive of...

**CC:** Right. But a lot of instruments have sentimental value.

**BG:** Right.

**CC:** Sentimental value means a lot to people. I think next to people's children, their musical instruments are some of their most prized possessions, and it's a point of honor to try to take care of them when they are in my shop and do the best work I can, and to try to understand exactly what the customer wants. Builders, whether I'm building something or whether I'm repairing something, what the customer wants, what their budget is, and you know, what their expectations are for that instrument. If they just want it to be functional that's one thing, if they want it to be beautiful, as in this one, this thing has scratches and dents all over it, but to replace the edges he wants it to look nice, but it can't be too nice because we don't want it to look brand new, we want it to still look old. So, that's what he wants, he told me exactly what he wanted and that's what I'll try to do.

**BG:** Sounds like it would be hard to repair something and still make it look old.

**CC:** Nah.

**BG:** No?

**CC:** No, you just don't do as good of a repair. I mean, you don't get quite as involved in making it real shinny and getting every little scratch out of it because that's full of scratches and dents.

**BG:** When you are adding the edges we were talking about, you are trying to make those look like new aren't you?

**CC:** Well, look like it was not busted off of there basically, but not necessarily brand new looking. I'll still try to keep it rough looking, a little.

**BG:** So you are making choices all the time...

**CC:** All the time...

**BG:** ...about the degree, and how much of that was customer input?

**CC:** A lot of it is. The customer has the final say because it depends on how much they want to spend. That can be a seven or eight hundred dollars repair, or that can be a thousand or fifteen hundred dollars repair. He might say, "I want you to go over this and try to minimize all the scratches and make it look really good," and I might have to get the hand buffer out and do buffing on it and I would probably try to talk him out of that type of repair on that instrument, but then you have to reach a compromise too, what you're willing to do. I don't say no very often to my customers, but I have said no occasionally.

**14:18**



**BG:** No to what?

**CC:** No to the kind of repair they want on the piece that they brought in.

**BG:** Too much work?

**CC:** Yeah.

**BG:** I just bought a heating system from a salesman that I thought was pushing towards the high-end and I let him know and he didn't quite care, he thought I could get a loan and pay for it. So, you've got that choice though, you try to fit what you think, how do you figure that out with a customer?

**CC:** Well, I think you have to be honest. Most of the time I think, when you are honest with your customers, yeah, I say I'm sorry, this is a, it may be a 1958 arch top guitar, and you may want to put a two thousand dollar repair into it, but it's never going to play good, it's never going to look good, it just doesn't have the craftsmanship to begin with to do that. So you have to be honest. Most of the time they are going to go, oh, ok maybe I'll just hang it on the wall. It's amazing, if you are really just blunt, just as blunt and honest as you can be, say you know, this is a neat old guitar but it didn't have the craftsmanship to warrant what you want to do with it. And you try to get them to come around to your side. If they don't want to, then you say I'm sorry, that isn't the type of repair that I want to do, and I won't do that. Take it to somebody else down the road. I don't very often do that. I really try to talk sense into my customers. I mean, I've got a couple hanging over there on the wall right now that are three or four hundred dollar repairs and I might get my cost out of that repair, but I have to sell those instruments if they don't come back for them. See, that's what you try not to do, you try not to get more of a repair into an instrument than it's worth because, let's say they decide they don't want that instrument now. Ok, that four hundred dollar repair is done. Is that instrument worth four hundred dollars? Now, if I say I don't want to do it and they say, "Here's the money. I want you to do it." Well, ok.

**BG:** I see the risk there.

**CC:** You see the risk? I can get stuck with instruments that I can't even get my labor...

**BG:** Yeah, I saw that instrument over there; it didn't look very high quality.

**CC:** Sentimental.

**BG:** Yeah, sentimental.

**CC:** Yeah, sentimental, and you know, it's their instrument. It might have been their first instrument, and if it was the first instrument that their grandfather gave them, I mean, it's got a lot of memories. That's what musical instruments are all about.

**BG:** Yeah, you know, I've been watching these crazy shows on TV about these collectors and how prices are whatever the collectors will pay for them, and collecting seems to be a whole different thing, doesn't it, from a musician?

**CC:** Yeah it is. I have one customer who taught guitar here for about twenty years, just a great guy, and he is a collector. I just have to laugh. I just sold him this little banjo back here that I'm working on, and I bought it for my boyfriend and my boyfriend said, "Nah, it's not good enough, I don't want it, so Owen came in and he looked at it and he said, "I'd really like to have that," and I said, "It's yours." So I sold it to him, and he's just got it. He's just like one of those guys at the pickers. He goes to pawn shops every week and he goes yard selling...

**17:20**

**[Interruption – customers]**

**17:29**

**CC continues:** ... and I don't get it because I was around instruments my whole life.

**17:29**

**[Interruption - customers]**

**17:38**

**CC continues:** Collecting is a whole other realm of instrument acquisition in repair, there is a lot of repair work into people's collections that we have to do. I have one guy that collects, he wants one of everything before he dies I think, and he's my age. He's getting close, I don't know how many instruments he has, but he likes a little bit of everything. Doesn't have to be really high quality. He just likes to have one of everything and so that's great. I don't understand it because I don't have enough room in my house. I don't want to collect a lot of stuff. I have a nice little collection of instruments, but there are people out there that want one of everything.

**BG:** Yeah, I've seen that before.

**CC:** And my dad had a, probably had a collection of about a hundred instruments over the years and we just started to disperse that collection because he is in his eighties now and I don't see much sense in keeping a bunch of instruments that no one is going to play, so I'd like, I'd like people to get them out into the hands of people who are players. He's got some really nice instruments.

**BG:** Why did your dad collect instruments?

**18:37**

**CC:** Well because he had salesmen who would come and, back when he was in business, ten, twenty, thirty years ago he always had salesmen who would call on you and one way a lot of them, to make extra money on the side, is to buy something at somebody's store pretty inexpensive and then they'd bring it to another store and go, "Hey, are you interested in looking at some of the stuff I bought?" Vintage instruments for very little money. He would make maybe a hundred bucks on them or something. Once they found out that my dad was interested in collecting they would bring him a lot of stuff and he has really neat stuff over the years that he has collected. He's collected for the last forty-five years, well forty, I don't think he's collected much over the last five or six years.

**BG:** Is your dad still here?

**CC:** He is.

**BG:** Oh ok.

**CC:** Yeah, he still stays at home and does all the book keeping. He doesn't come into the store much anymore.

**BG:** So your mom works over there huh?

**CC:** My mother, they are both eighty. Mom comes in so I can have a day off and so my other co-worker can have a day off. See, basically, if you don't get a day off you get pretty burnt out, you know.

**BG:** Do you take a day off every seven days? Do you work six days?

**CC:** No I work five days a week. Yeah.

**BG:** Well I'm kind of interested. We did this exhibit about luthiers, "Made to Be Played," and one of the themes that was in there was how the luthier or instrument repair person, which I guess is the same thing sometimes, right?

**CC:** Mhm.

**BG:** ... Has a community of people that they service. To me it seems like, just listening to you, it seems like you have a community of professional instrument players and band people. Then you have people who are just not. Is there a difference between those two people when you deal with them?

**CC:** No, not really. A customer is a customer. Anybody who comes in here with an instrument for me to repair, you know, we just, we work on it together, but they are all pretty much the same as far as I'm concerned. Now you know, one exclusion, the players. I have professional people who are players and those guys come in and go, and I don't care if it's somebody who is playing in church next week, or somebody who is going to the winery and playing, doesn't matter, if they come in and say to me, "I need my horn, or, I need my instrument, and I need it in like three days, can you do this?" I go, yeah, I'm going to try if it's possible for me to do it, I really try to get the players instruments back in their hands really quick. Last night a kid came in here at ten minutes till six and said, "I need my band, my clarinet doesn't work," and it just needed a screw. Well you know, ok, fine. Let me sit down and find a screw for it and fix it for him. I have a lot of walk in customers that know that I'll stop what I'm doing and repair something if I can while they wait or I'll try to get it back to them in two or three days. When it comes to players, when you cater to the people who are professionals, they don't necessarily always have the most money, but they're going to tell a lot of people. If you took care of their instrument, they are going to tell a whole lot of people about you, and that's more customers that are going to come in.

**BG:** You said often times they were concerned about getting the thing ready to play again. How about the sound? Are they more interested in that too than the other people?

**CC:** Well you have to remember, a horn that you have, or a stringed instrument that you have, has its own inherent sound. I can only do so much to change that. It is amazing that people can go for a year and not change guitar strings, or not ever set-up their guitar and go... There's a guy out of Lexington that I service all his instruments, and he's hard on his instruments, so he came in with this beautiful little baby Clairvoy. He said, "It sounds awful. It doesn't play in tune. I hate the way it feels. And, I'm going to sell it, so just put new strings on it." And I said, "Oh Chris, this is a beautiful guitar. Let's fix it up. I think you'll, I know he wanted a little guitar anyway, let me fix this guitar right." And I did, and he came and picked it up a week later and he was sitting right there. He played it for about an hour and he said, "I'm not going to sell this guitar now." I said, "I told you, it was a good guitar. You just never took the time to let somebody get it right. To set it up, to put new strings on it, to get the action the way it should be. Make it perfect. Make it better than it was when he got it."

**BG:** Why don't you go through the steps of what you did to that particular guitar to make it better?

**CC:** Let me go grab a guitar. I'll be right back.

**BG:** This one here?

**CC:** Not that guitar. Let me grab one a different guitar.

**BG:** Oh, ok.

**22:46**

**[Interruption - Interview goes to get guitar.]**

**CC:** So let's talk about...

**BG:** Setting up?

**CC:** A set-up.

**BG:** A set-up, ok, and that's what a repairperson...

**CC:** That's one of the biggest jobs that I have is to set-up; whether it's a band instrument or a stringed instrument, to set it up so it will play perfectly. We're going to talk about stringed instruments right now.

A set-up is what you do to make a guitar play perfectly in tune and play perfectly easy. Musical instruments are not hard to play, and people always so, "Oh my fingers hurt." Your fingers should never hurt. I mean, maybe if you play for two hours your fingers might hurt for a little bit, but the problem with stringed instruments is, when they are made over seas, or when they are made almost anywhere, they're going to move a lot after when they are built, within six months or a year old. They haven't gotten their "broken in" period yet. Kind of like a new car, you break it in. On an instrument, it has to get this thing called a belly, and it settles down after it's built. When it's brand new, in six months it's going to be a totally different instrument.

When you first build an instrument...

**BG:** Wait a minute. A “belly,” you mean...

**CC:** This little guy is going to rise up a little bit. The top...

**BG:** It’s going to rise up.

**CC:** It’s going to rise up. It’s going to get its belly. It’s going to get settled in with the bracing that it has, it’s got to get broken in and it actually rises up here a little bit.

So usually the action, the action is the height of the string to the fingerboard, fret board. It’s going to rise up a little bit. What happens with stringed instruments is, when they are made they are always set-up, usually a little bit high. Why are they set-up a little bit high? Because you can come down very easy with the nut and with the saddle. I can take a little bit off with the belt sander, and I can use my nut files and file that grove a little bit deeper, but if I have to make a new piece, and make a higher action because it is buzzing, I have to replace the part and that’s a hundred dollars worth of parts and labor. So to come down is easy, to go back up is harder. If a guitar comes in here and it’s buzzing already because the action is too low, most music stores would send that back to the manufacturer. They wouldn’t try to fix it, because it is a lot more work. So every guitar that comes in the front door, I have to do a set-up on.

The set-up is what makes it play easy.

**BG:** Are you saying that the instrument maker sees that ahead of time; that he makes it high so you can do a better set-up?

**CC:** Well you have to remember that most of the guitars I work on are made in factories, so they are not made by individuals.

**BG:** Ok.

**CC:** So even the Martin factory and the Taylor factory, chances are, if it is a brand new guitar, six months later down the road somebody is going to go, “Well my action is a little high.” I go, “Well that’s not a problem, we’ll set it up for you and lower it.” Now what happens when you have high action is, the instrument also tends to want to play sharp. So it doesn’t sound good. It doesn’t play in tune properly. So a good set-up is one of the hardest and one of the most important things you have to do to a stringed instrument guitar and I do it every day, all the time. You know, changing the strings is one thing, but making sure the neck is straight, the nut is adjusted properly, and that the saddle is adjusted properly, those three things work in tandem together. You don’t do one repair, one adjustment, without doing all three of them usually, and that’s what makes a guitar perfect.

Now when I sell a Martin guitar, I’m a Martin authorized repair center, I tell my customers, “I want to see you in six months because you have one free set-up.” And that’s why I want them to come back and understand that I want to check out the guitar, particularly for two reasons: I want to see what the guitar is doing as it’s getting broken in, but I also want to see how the customer is treating it, and you know, if I have to give them some direction about humidifying it, or keeping it in the case. Let’s put a pick guard on it if there is not a pick guard. Let’s try to modify your pick playing because they are putting scratches all over it, you know, whatever, and they do that, they bring them back in and almost all of my

customers do. They let me check them out, and I try to tell my customers, "If you like your guitar, if it's a really good guitar, I need to see it once a year. At least once a year."

**BG:** What do shops in Lexington that don't have a luthier working for them do?

**CC:** Send them to me.

**BG:** Oh, do they?

**CC:** Or do without.

**BG:** Because no one that has ever sold me a guitar as told me that I should bring it back in.

**CC:** I spend a lot of time educating my customers. I would really like to do a documentary on instrument maintenance, because you know, I'd like to push that button and go, oh, just push that button and listen to why you should humidify your instrument, and I make my own little humidifiers and I give them to my customers. They are soap dishes, a portable soap dish, a travel soap dish with holes drilled in it with a sponge in it so people will keep their instruments humidified in the winter time. If you don't humidify your Martin guitar in the wintertime you have voided the warranty on it.

Now I tell all my customers when they have a wooden guitar, "You need to humidify it in the wintertime."

**BG:** What if your house has a humidifier in it?

**CC:** I don't care. It still can get cracks. You can't keep your house at forty five to fifty percent humidity. It's almost impossible.

**BG:** Oh, so that's what it needs to be, forty-five to fifty?

**CC:** So keep it in the case. If you keep a humidifier in there you have less chance. I don't care what you do with it in the summer time, hang it on the wall, whatever you want because in Kentucky as humid as it is, even with the AC on we usually always have a relative humidity around forty to forty-five percent in here. You can't get it too dry in the summer. It's heat that pulls all of the moisture out of the air. So, you want to always humidify. You suffer, your hair, your skin, your furniture, your breathing at night, everything suffers, so you should humidify your house, not just your guitar case, but those little humidifiers that you put in the guitar case are just a little insurance policy, that's all they are.

**28:49**

**BG:** So hanging it up on the wall is not good.

**CC:** Not in the wintertime...

**BG:** Not in the wintertime?

**CC:** Not in the wintertime, not unless it's an all plywood guitar, but then the neck is solid wood. It's still going to move.

**BG:** Ok. Well I guess I better start bringing my stuff in, huh? Because they've been hanging in the house.

**CC:** Do you play them?

**BG:** A little bit.

**CC:** A little bit? Well, the more you play them, the more you are going to know that they are not right.

**BG:** Yeah.

**CC:** You know. Some guitars never ever move.

**BG:** So every instrument you sell, you have to know how to set-up, right?

**CC:** I do. Custom set-up on everything. Yep.

**BG:** Ok.

**CC:** I don't care if it's a hundred dollar guitar, or a ten thousand dollar guitar; I want it to play easy.

**BG:** So there are three things together that make a set-up: the bridge height...

**CC:** The neck height.

**BG:** The cut...

**CC:** The neck adjustment. Straightness of the neck.

**BG:** Do you start with one over the other?

**CC:** I usually start with the straightness of the neck.

**BG:** Ok.

**CC:** Yeah, because I want a straight neck before I do anything else. And new strings, I will not do a set-up with old strings either. I want new strings all the time.

**BG:** Ok.

**CC:** Because I mean, if they are a week old, that's ok, but if they are six months old, they're not going to give me the same reading on that instrument as a newer set of strings. I like to have new strings. I like to tell my customers, "If you like your hands and you like your instrument, you really ought to change your strings every couple of months." You know, professionals change their strings once a week.

**BG:** Wow.

**CC:** They just do.

**BG:** Don't those strings stretch?

**30:15**

**[Interruption by videographer – battery change]**

**30:18**

**CC:** Yeah, I do more dog-gone set-ups on instruments...

**[Interruption – video skips]**

**30:20**

**CC:** Yeah, tuneage can be loose. Yeah they can.

**BG:** Ok.

**CC:** But that's usually not the case. A lot of time people will come in here and say, "My guitar is not staying in tune," and most of the time it is just a good set-up and strings. Now how long has it been since you've put new strings on your guitar? A year?

**BG:** Yeah.

**CC:** Yeah, well there you go.

**BG:** Eddie Pennington was getting some strings from this guy who was trying them out and he gave me a set and I took them home.

**CC:** You know, even if you don't play it, every time you get up and try to strum on them a little, but you can tune it, and they just get dead after a while.

**BG:** All right.

**CC:** They do, they just go dead.

**BG:** What do you... do you charge different amounts for different instruments for setting-up?

**CC:** No. A basic set-up is fifty-five dollars plus the strings. And then, if I do anything more, you add on top of that, but I don't charge... If somebody brings in a ten thousand dollar guitar or Martin and needs a basic set-up I'm going to charge the same thing. I'm just as cautious. If I worked on only, if I worked anywhere else besides Richmond, Kentucky, and worked on only high-end instruments, a lot of people, you know, are a hundred, hundred and fifty dollars to do a basic set-up, but they are known for just working on really high-end instruments. I couldn't get away with that and make a living in Richmond, Kentucky.

**BG:** Yeah.



**CC:** I'm pretty reasonably priced.

**BG:** It depends on the client I guess.

**CC:** Right.

**BG:** If it's a place that has a lot of guitars. Ok. So setting-up is one main thing that you have to do. You seem to enjoy it, right?

**31:48**

**CC:** I do. I enjoy it a lot. It beats a real job. I never get bored. There's always, I mean, like right now I'm actually a little caught up, but right now I'm working on a violin an upright bass, I call it a Frankenstein handmade electric guitar back there, a four-stringed banjo, I'm working on so many different things every day. I never work on the same thing every day. I never know what the day is going to bring, which is fun.

**BG:** How do you plan out your day when you've got those four instruments?

**CC:** I've always got back up. I've always got stuff...

**BG:** No, I mean, do you say I'm going to spend this much time on this; I'm going to do this...?

**CC:** Yes, I have a numbering system. I try to number instruments. Long-term stuff, big jobs, get numbered, and I try to give the people you know, two weeks, three weeks, give them an idea of how long it's going to take. Basic set-ups and re-strings I usually do the same day because I can do them in, I can do a fifty-five dollar set-up in fifteen minutes.

**BG:** That's good pay.

**CC:** Yeah. I mean, if it doesn't need anything else besides a re-stringing, I can get it out of here really quick if I don't have to make new pieces and parts for it. I'm pretty quick at what I do so I can get it in and out of here. And I have some help. I can say, "You clean it and put strings on it, and then I'll do the set-up." I look at it before we take the strings off of it and I know exactly what I'm going to have to do to it when the strings are put on there. So that helps me a lot.

**BG:** When you say numbering system, you mean the number of how many days?

**CC:** No, I number... I've got one of these instruments over there... There is one through twenty and I work one through twenty.

**BG:** Do you write it down on a piece of paper?

**CC:** No, I put a number on the case.

**BG:** Ok, but how do you know, do you look at the calendar in the morning and say, "I've got a ten"?

**CC:** No, I come in and look at what's on the bench and I'll look at the numbers that are there and I kind of try to assess... Sometimes it's who is screaming at me.

**BG:** Oh ok.

**CC:** Sometimes I'll do to a customer, they'll go, "I need that by Friday," and I go, "Ok, you're going to call me on Thursday and let's make sure it's on the bench," because I get overwhelmed with repair work a lot of times.

**BG:** You can talk some people into taking it a little bit longer.

**CC:** Yes. Hey, the worst thing you can say to me is, "I'm not in a hurry," because I'll have it for six months. Sometimes I'm six months behind on repair work. I'm not right now. I'm getting caught up. So when I do get a little caught up, what I try to do is work in some of my store instruments that I have to get ready for the band instrument season next year, or, you know, my mom has a ukulele that has been here for a year that I have to do a neck set on. It's at the bottom of the pile, but I'm going to try to work that in now. Its stuff that I'm not going to make any money on, but you still have to get it out there and work on it.

**BG:** So it's kind of the squeaky wheel that gets the...

**CC:** Absolutely.

**BG:** I heard your mom say that.

**CC:** That's why my ukulele is a year in the making and still doesn't have the neck on it, because too many things going on.

**BG:** So that's kind of how you organize your day is, I'm going to do this, and I'm going to do that, kind of thing, right?

**CC:** Yep.

**BG:** And...

**CC:** I try to do the easy stuff, the stuff I know I can get done in and out of here really quick, that gets done first, and then, the people who are screaming that they need it. So those are the two things that really take priority. The really easy stuff that's cash flow, we call it cash flow because it's in and out of here and we make a little money every day, and then the stuff that I know I have to get done that has a time schedule. He **[points off camera]** needed that by June. Well this is the end of April, but I knew I had to get started on that and two weeks ago I got started on that. I knew I had to get started on it, because I knew that that was possibly a two or three month job if it didn't go as smoothly as I knew it would, and it did, so I'm going to be done three or four weeks early which is great. He's happy. I'm happy; I'm going to get paid early. But on big jobs like that, that fingerboard came off easy, the neck went together easy, it just as easily could have been put together with epoxy and have been a really hard repair.

You never know when you are doing really old instruments what another repairperson has done that is going to cause you some grief. So, I always try to give myself an out and go a month, but if I give myself two weeks I'm real happy.

**BG:** So the, what makes you feel good about your day then, at the end of the day?

**CC:** Oh, not getting as much done as I can, but getting some really good repair work done, or when my customer comes in and I did something that was really easy but they go, "Oh, you're a genius." I go, "Thank you very much."

**BG:** Ok. It lights the fire in you.

**CC:** Well, when you've really made somebody happy because there is nobody else that can fix that instrument for them, their band director can't, their instructor can't, when somebody comes in and discovers what I do here, that makes me happy.

**BG:** Well you are somebody who has made instruments from scratch, and knows what the pleasure of that is, and you're somebody who does repairs, and has taken instruments and made them almost new, or sounding new, right?

**CC:** Mhm.

**BG:** Are their different feelings for...?

**36:43**

**CC:** Absolutely there is a big difference. I thought when I was younger that I did want to be a builder. That's what I studied at Taylor, and that's what I went and studied with John Monteleone [<http://www.monteleone.net>] at Long Island, and I don't think I have the temperament to be a repairperson, I don't think I'm a good enough artist.

**37:01**

**[Interruption – customers]**

**37:12**

**BG:** ... The satisfaction that you get from making instruments versus repairing instruments.

**CC:** Right. I don't think I'm a good enough artist to be a builder. I don't... There are builders, and there are builders. A lot of people out there they are builders and they just copy what's already been made.

**37:12**

**[Interruption – dog eating]**

**37:36**

**CC:** There are builders, and there are builders. My partner, who is a high-end builder, is also a fabulous artist. He takes the design, the Lloyd Loar, or the Gibson F-5 mandolin and tweaks it, and sometimes he'll put a drawing on the kitchen wall and look at it for weeks. Then I'll come in and I'll go, "What did you do to that? It looks different." He said, "I moved that line a 32<sup>nd</sup> of an inch," and it made the whole thing look different. It's just amazing what you can do to tweak existing designs that are out there, because I don't think some of the best designs out there are not evolved completely. The guitar is not a complete instrument. The violin is. I don't think anybody can hardly perfect the violin anymore. I mean, look how little this is. It's so loud, so fabulous sounding. It is just an incredible instrument. The guitar is still evolving.

**BG:** So you are saying that they are still evolving, so little tweaks that people are making to it...

**CC:** There are so many wonderful things that people are doing to guitars right now. They are putting holes in them. They are calling them "ports." Well I'm going to put ports in my next ukulele. My next ukulele is going to have a port here, and a port here, and they call them monitor holes, or port holes, and it's amazing because the last builders conference I went, we did a test and we closed the ports and then we played and we opened the ports and it made it louder. Now you wouldn't think that it would make it louder, because some of the sound is coming out of the sides. It's just amazing what people are doing with instruments right now. A lot of people are cutting this part of the instrument off right here and making a contoured area for your arm. Some of us older people, when we play our arms go numb because of that sharp edge. A lot of people are contouring the bottom of the instrument so when you set it on your lap it feels a little bit nicer. Custom builders are just doing amazing things. I think we are living in the age of the builder. The bar is set very high. You have to be really good to make it as a small shop builder right now. There's just so much good stuff out there right now. It's amazing. And, you know, there's a lot of mediocre stuff out there right now too that sounds ok, but when people want to pay the big bucks, it has to look perfect, and it has to play perfect, and it has to sound fabulous. That's what my partner, John Hamlett, his instruments are just incredible. All of them! I don't think I've ever seen him build a bad instrument. They are all just over the top beautiful.

**BG:** So he's moving here?

**CC:** He's moving here from Virginia.

**BG:** He's been a luthier in Virginia for a while?

**CC:** He's been a luthier for over twenty years. He learned his trade while working for Stelling Banjo Works, Inc., which is a really high-end; they are probably the most high-end banjo company in the country, in the world actually. They are one. He worked for them and learned his trade and now he's on his own and he's about a year or two back ordered with custom instruments that he's making. So, I would like to be a builder, I would like to be a builder but I don't really want to build full-time. I like doing repair work, I like the retail, when I slow down in another ten or fifteen years I'd like to make ukuleles. They are fun easy instruments to build. They are not hard. I mean they aren't easy for somebody who is a beginner woodworker who has never done any, but as far as building instruments they are not as hard as some and I'd like to build a few of them. I don't think I would want to do it for my only livelihood. I like doing repair work. Repair work is so satisfying because you just, it's instant satisfaction. I've repaired this instrument. I've made somebody happy. I've made a little money. I don't have to manufacture anything. I'm not on an assembly line. I'm my own boss. Nobody knows what I'm doing. My mother, she can't say, "Well you need to get this and this done today." I'm the only one that

knows what I have to do today and what people expect out of me. What my customers expect out of me for that week, or that day, or that month, and I have to hold myself responsible. I'm the only one who is going to suffer if I don't do good work, or if I don't do timely work.

**41:48**

**BG:** Ok. I want to get into that, instrument repair, a lot more, but I just want to go back a little bit to the aesthetics of, it sounds like you don't consider yourself an artist because you aren't innovative with an instrument, you said everyone is being more innovative, but what's wrong with being traditional with an instrument?

**CC:** Oh, it's boring. It's like reinventing the wheel. It's hard to do. To build a copy, a Martin guitar copy, a lot of people just do that. They want to build just Martin guitar copies and try to make them better and better. I'm not sure you can make the Martin guitar a whole lot better. I think they've done that. So I'd like to make something that not a lot of people are doing.

There are a lot more ukulele builders right now than there has been because the ukulele is hotter than it has been since the '20s and I think it would be fun, it's a fun, silly instrument, you can be just as silly and fun as you want to be. I was just up in New York City for an exhibit at the Metropolitan Museum...

**42:49**

**[Interruption – telephone rings]**

**42:52**

**CC continues:** ...that my mentor was part of and it was just so fabulous. But I had an opportunity to visit a music store in Soho called "Rudy's Music" and all they carry are high-end custom instruments, but they are Fender high-end instruments, and Gibsons, and D'Angelicas, and D'Aquisto guitars, and ukuleles. I just laughed because they had thirty or forty of these custom-made ukuleles and there are some companies that make the low-end, average ukuleles, and then they have their high-end custom stuff and they are called, "fleas," these one, particular ukuleles, and they were hand carved and they were just as eccentric as you can get. That's what I'd like to do, something fun and different.

**BG:** Ok, but you don't look down on other luthiers who just do...

**CC:** No, absolutely now, I would never look down on any luthier, I just don't have the temperament or the time or the situation right now where I want to just sit around and build guitars.

**BG:** So was there a moment in you life when you decided that you didn't want to do that?

**CC:** After I built my first mandolin. I built a really nice mandolin and it was the hardest eight weeks of my life. I worked really hard to make an exceptional instrument. It was very solitary. It was very focused. It was just very hard, mentally and physically. It was just a really hard thing to do. Rarely was there interaction with anyone else other than my mentor. That was it. I worked eight, ten, fifteen hours a day, built a beautiful instrument and decided, I don't want to do this the rest of my life. I don't want to just build. I am glad I built my guitar, I am glad I built eight or ten instruments, but I don't want to do that all the time. It's fun to mix it up. Even my partner, John, he says, "I love building," he's mainly a builder, but

you know, right now he's got maybe thirty instruments in his shop that he's repairing because people come to him and he prices himself over the top, "Ok, I'll do it, and this is what I get," and they'll say, "I don't care, fix it." I mean, he's really, really one of the best. All these people in Virginia are kind of freaking out because they think he's leaving. It will be a year before he leaves Virginia because we are working on this shop and the transition period, but they are all thinking, "Oh, I've got to get my instrument repaired before he leaves because he is one of the best." He's got the reputation there that I have here and I said, "Well you need to tell them," we need to put a little blurb on his website that says, "I'm not leaving permanently," because we still have family there. We'll be back there once a month to pick up instruments if we have to.

**BG:** Can you see doing, people sending instruments to you?

**45:23**

**CC:** People do send me instruments.

**BG:** Sounds like you need to have that interaction with them.

**CC:** No, not necessarily. I have a lot of interaction with people in the store, but you talk to people on the phone and figure out what they want. I don't have a problem with people sending me their instruments.

**BG:** Ok.

**CC:** It happens.

**BG:** So building instruments is solitary and you don't feel like that's part of what you want to do anymore, so you made a choice and you really like repairing instruments.

**CC:** I do. It's really hard to be, like I said, I think one of the main things too, it's really hard to be a builder unless you are just exceptionally good. It's hard to make a good living just being a builder. Getting your name out there, it's like being a musician. You've got to take every gig; you've got to build whatever somebody wants you to build. It's a hard thing to do, and it takes years to get your name out there and to get your quality and to get known. John Hamlett was lucky that he worked for another company that had a lot of people coming and going. He got to see his stuff. So he got his name out there, but it still took twenty years and now he's back ordered on instruments but it takes a long time. I'll never be without a job if I want to repair instruments.

**BG:** Well, it sounds like the best of both worlds. You can make your ukulele and...

**CC:** Right. I can make anything I want if I want to go downstairs after I close the shop and work for five or six hours.

**BG:** But you sound like you are a multi-tasker too.

**CC:** Yeah, I love to multi-task. You are absolutely right. I can do many things. I can take care of four customers at one time.

**BG:** You know, I did the Folklife festival for years [**Kentucky Folklife Festival**] and that's what I enjoyed was doing ten different things at one time.

**CC:** It's fun.

**BG:** I'm finding out now that it's not supposed to be good for you.

**CC:** Stressful.

**BG:** Well, they say, you don't remember anything because you are doing so many things.

**CC:** Right.

**47:18**

**BG:** And then I forgot where I was.

**CC:** You don't remember anything because you are multi-tasking.

**BG:** Well, I guess what I'd like to ask you more about is, do you have any stories about instruments that you repaired that you looked at first for a while and then you got a lot of pleasuring out of doing because it took so much work.

**CC:** Well, I mean, this one is one of them. I'm trying to think because my memory is always...

**BG:** The bass that's over here.

**CC:** Yeah, the bass that I'm working on right now. It's a 1950s-K and they are real desirable Bluegrass/Country Music folk instruments for people to play in bands. They are workhorses. You can just, you can just haul them around and bang them around, and this instrument belongs to this guy's wife, and she wants it refurbished, and I tried to talk him out of doing a lot of what he wanted, and he said, "No, I want this done." Of course, this did have repair work done by Homer Ledford before I got ahold of it, twenty or thirty years ago, to have a custom neck for this lady. He took the neck down really little.

**BG:** Oh, I noticed that. The neck looks...

**CC:** Really little, and Homer did that. So he customized it for this particular person.

**BG:** And it still sounded ok?

**CC:** Yeah. It broke. You have to be a little more careful when you take a neck down really thin. That's what happened. It fell over and cracked. That's why I had to put a piece of wood in it.

**BG:** Oh ok.

**CC:** It cracked.

**BG:** But it sounded ok being that short?

**CC:** It's not shorter, it's just thinner. It's thinner.

**BG:** Oh, I thought you meant...

**CC:** It's thinner back here.

**BG:** Oh, I thought you meant the neck was shorter.

**CC:** Nope, the neck is thinner right here.

**BG:** Thinner so she could put her hand around it.

**CC:** Exactly. So I tried to talk him out of having, he wanted all the edges refurbished on this thing and I went, I've done little pieces on other instruments, but I've never done to the extent that I've done on this one which is about, it was about a fifty or sixty percent of the instrument, the sides needed replacing. And I did it, and it's been a long job, it's been a big job, and it looks good. Well, ok, this wasn't as bad as I thought it could be. I'll do it again.

**BG:** Would you?

**CC:** Yeah, I mean, I'm not making a lot of money on the repair, I probably underpriced it, but that's ok. It can be done and it can be made to look like you can hardly tell that it was done.

**49:28**

**BG:** I saw you said that one other time that it's important to do a repair so people don't know that you did a repair.

**CC:** Right.

**BG:** What does that mean?

**CC:** Sometimes you can't do that. To do a repair to look like the instrument hasn't been damaged is a real art. There are some people out there that's all they do. Like, if a Martin guitar neck gets broken, and they can glue it back together, and then they can paint in the grain lines and they can do the finish to look old, still old, but put the new finish on it and make it look old and make it look like it's never been touched. Ok, I do a lot of pick guard replacement and bridge replacement on Martin guitars. It's really important when I take a bridge off the top of a Martin guitar that there are no tell-tale lines anywhere, or no tell-tale sign that I actually took that bridge off there. Whether it's cracked, or whether it's been replaced for some reason, I take a lot of nicks out of Martin guitars to do neck sets. I'm supposed to do it so you can't ever tell. That's really important.

**BG:** How do you do that?



**CC:** I use steam. I take this fret out right here and I inject steam into the dovetail and I lift this off here with a heat lamp and then I go in and pull it off and refit it and glue it, and it's about almost a four hundred dollar repair, but I've done enough of them over the years ... I even did Donna Lamb's guitar.

**BG:** Oh yeah?

**CC:** Something that she wasn't comfortable with doing on her Martin. You just, you do enough of them and you get good. You have to keep these lines perfect. You have to do it so you can't tell, and there are little tricks to the trade. You pull that neck off of there and you touch the edges of it with a little bit of super glue so it won't crack and it won't break as you are fitting it back on there. There are lots of little tricks and that's why I belong to a couple of different guilds so I can always learn new stuff and always keep up with the newest, everyone is always coming out with a little newer way to do fix that mousetrap. It's just amazing. Twenty years ago we never used super glue. We use super glue with a lot of repairs these days. It's amazing. Its really good stuff.

**BG:** I know I've talked to Art Mize about some repairs; you want to make them reversible.

**CC:** Absolutely.

**BG:** So, super glue isn't reversible...

**CC:** If you have a crack and you fix a crack properly you don't want that reversible, but if you don't do a good job you don't align it properly until the line is perfect and you super glue, well then you've done a bad job and that's not good because, I mean, super glue, it is reversible with, you can realize it with acetone.

**BG:** Ok.

**CC:** Yeah, but you know, if you don't know how to do a good repair you should not use super glue.

**BG:** So you communicate with other luthiers through the organization. Do they have like a newsletter that comes out every month or, how often do you talk to other people?

**CC:** It's quarterly. Oh gosh. Well, I talk to, the other two guys that I work with on a daily basis just about. We collaborate and talk about repairs. What would you do on this, and would you do that repair for me, you are so good at it.

**BG:** What two guys are you talking about?

**CC:** My boyfriend, my partner, John Hamlett, and then Doug Naselroad, who comes and works for me. Doug works for me once a month. He'll come in and help me. He helped me with this bass last weekend because I was getting behind and I was getting kind of crazy and I said, "Oh, come in and let's work on this together." Believe me, we did so much work in five hours on Saturday. I mean it would have taken me a week to do it by myself and the two of us just flew into it and we downstairs and cut pieces and glued and clamped and got it done. We worked hard together. It's amazing how you can get more motivated when you've got somebody to throw ideas off of and help you with stuff. No man is an island. You just can't do it by yourself. It's really nice... I've forgotten more than I've learned I think, and that's why there are websites like, there's a really fabulous luthier, Euphenon Music in California **[unable to**

**locate website]**, Frank Ford has a website called [www.frets.com](http://www.frets.com). Well I tell any aspiring luthier, go to that website. I even bought his CD to support him. He has one that I can take home and put in my computer and sit around and play with and research and refresh my knowledge on repairs, because I work on so many things, and I do some many different repairs on so many different instruments, I might have forgotten a technique for something, so I'll go and refresh my memory about it. How much super glue should I mix with water, you know, just stuff like that.

**BG:** Well how do you do that? Do you just look at the CD, or do you dial him up and ask him?

**CC:** No, I actually go online. Everything he has ever done has been documented. He is like the nerdiest nerd that ever was. He documents ever repair he has ever done. Period. Ever. You name it and it's documented on his website. It's just amazing.

**BG:** Is it searchable?

**CC:** Oh yes, it's searchable. It's the most awesome website I've ever seen in my whole life.

**BG:** Say there's a crack in this guitar and you couldn't figure out how to do it, you would say, "Crack in guitar," in the search or something like that?

**CC:** "Crack repairs." Well, there is an index when you pull up frets.com.

**BG:** Ok.

**CC:** So there's lots of, lots of networking you can do. My partner, John, he gets on Mandolin Café and he collaborates with other, all of his friends in Virginia that he worked with at Stelling Banjo Works, he talks to them a lot. I bet he talks to those guys once a week. One of his neighbors is a luthier. I mean, you know, a guy down the road he worked with. So we are always collaborating, we are always working together. I had a guy that came out to my house on Monday who is from Somerset, I think he's from Somerset, he's new in the area, and he came here to take care of his mom. His mom has Alzheimer's, but he just built his first instrument and he's doing some repair work and he had a guitar that he wasn't comfortable doing the repair work on. So he called me on Monday and he was here and I was at home and he said, "Oh I really need to see you," and I said, "Well come on out to the house." John and I are here, bring it out, and it was 1928-K, but it was a really neat old guitar and it needed three or four hundred dollars worth of work. So we walked him through a bunch of the stuff and two hours later he was down the road and he was as happy and said, "Thank you very much," and he sends me repair work so I try to help him because I know when there is an authorized Martin repair that he doesn't want to do he sends it to me. So we all work together. There are not enough of us to begin with. We are always going to have enough repair work. So if we help each other, and support each other, we will all make a good living.

**BG:** Well good.

**CC:** Yeah.

**56:06**

**BG:** You know, in some professions they say, in some marriages they say you shouldn't date or be with somebody who is in the same business with you. Has that been a problem with you?

**CC:** No. He's better than me and he knows it, and I know it.

**BG:** Really?

**CC:** Yeah. He is even more of a perfectionist than I am. There are some things that he doesn't do. He doesn't work on electronic stuff at all as far as electronics in acoustic guitars and I do. I put in pickups and I work on electric guitars and he doesn't work on electric guitars. Like I said, when you get to be in your fifties, he'll forget something and call me and ask me, and I'll forget something and call him or discuss it with him, so hopefully somebody's brain cells will always be working so you can have someone to help you, but that's not been a problem with us and we've been doing this together for... we met in Burlington, Vermont, at a builders conference and we've been together for thirteen years.

**BG:** Oh great.

**CC:** Yeah. It's fun. I told him, when the shop was done, I had to have a workbench in the shop if he expected to have a bed in the house, and he said, ok. So, hopefully I'll get to do more work at home to which will be nice.

**BG:** So you said something about your reputation earlier. You feel like you have a good reputation?

**CC:** I do, I think I do. Keeping a good reputation is not hard, as long as you know what your limits are. It's like this guy that came to my house on Monday. He knows what his limits are. He has been doing instrument repair work for four, five, or six years, something like that, and he knows what his limits are, and you are still a fledgling apprentice, you are still learning six, seven, or ten years into the trade, I mean we learn every day. If you ever think you've learned it all then you've quit learning, you're done. You learn something new hopefully every day, but he was smart enough to come to my house. He is trying to keep his reputation in tact. He is building his reputation. He knows what he isn't comfortable doing and that is where you stop. For the first ten or fifteen years I didn't work on Martin guitars. I mean, very little, because I wasn't comfortable enough working on really high-end stuff. You have to; you only do what you know you can do good. If you don't think you can do it, hand it off to somebody else or say no, I'm not comfortable doing that repair work because that's how you damage your reputation. Any reputation, any trade you are in, you build slowly. That's why the Europeans have the apprentice system. You apprentice for seven years and you are still a rookie for at least seven years.

I can remember when I first learned that, when I went to school in Iowa for a whole year and I went, "What? You mean I'm going to get out of school after a whole year and not know everything?" You know, when you are in your twenties and you think you're going to know everything in one or two years. Whew. Boy, that's not the case.

**BG:** When you were at Taylor, you were kind of an apprentice weren't you?

**CC:** I was. I built my own guitar. I basically just went in and worked for free forty hours a week. I started; I went through every section of the factory. Started with buying the wood, and then I built bodies, then I'd built necks, then I'd make fingerboards, then I'd assemble the bodies, then I'd do finish work, and then I ended up in the assembly shop and assembling the guitar and setting them up. I was there for, I

guess about three or four months or something like that. I built my own guitar from rejected pieces, but it turned out to be a beautiful guitar. That was a great learning experience. And the deal is, I thought it would give me more knowledge about building. I had built a few instruments at that point, but not many. It's still a factory, and they offered me a job but I wouldn't want to work in a factory.

**BG:** What makes it a factory?

**CC:** Well it's an assembly line and you do your job all day long, whether it's cutting the braces and gluing them into the guitar, or bending the sides. There are about fifteen to twenty different workbenches, stations, yeah, workstations, and it was fun, I learned a lot, I built my own guitar, and people seemed to have more respect for you if you've built some instruments. If I'd just done repair work all my life and never built anything they go, "What have you built?" It's another, it's totally different doing repair work than building. I actually did a question and answer session for you guys in Frankfort and there was a guy there that built arch top guitar, I'm sorry I can't remember his name...

**BG:** Oh, I think from Louisville...

**CC:** Yes, very nice guy.

**BG:** Frank, somebody... Frank Lay.

**CC:** Frank Lay. He didn't like doing repair work. He built some beautiful instruments, but he says, "Repair work is totally different from building," and I said, "I know. It is." So, just because somebody is a really good repairperson doesn't mean they are a great builder and vice versa. There are people who refinish furniture all day long, but they don't build anything. I decided that I had to do some building because I think my customers will have more faith in me if I could show them, look, I built this guitar. I may never build another, and I built a lot of guitars when I was at Taylor, I probably built a couple of hundred guitars in the process of going through the shop, and it was all good and fun, but nah, I don't want to work in a factory. There were only eighteen of us in that shop at that time. They must have several hundred employees now, but I learned a lot, I built my guitar and I came home, and I think it helped my repair business a lot.

**1:01:38**

**[Interruption – change tape]**

**1:01:44 – End Track 1**

**0:00**

**CC:** I tell you, there's a book by Bruce Oatley called, Understanding Wood, that is the most comprehensive woodworking book that ever was. Bruce, I think its Bruce Oatley, O-a-t-l-e-y, Understanding Wood. Mine is at home. I don't have it down here or I would share it with you. If you want to learn some basics about wood...

**BG:** Bruce, what?

**CC:** Oatley. I think its Oatley, O-a-t-l-e-y. Let me call John and ask him. Well, you just pull-up "Understanding Wood."

**BG:** Yeah.

**CC:** That's the name of it and it's a fabulous book. I have read it, I think I've read it five times.

**[Interruption – interview starts]**

**CC:** Ok, your turn.

**BG:** Ok, so you said you could learn something every day?

**CC:** Yeah, every day I learned something new. That's what's so nice about repairing; you never get bored. You are learning that every instrument is a little bit different. It might be braced a little different; especially classical guitar builders, just different stuff and you go, oh, I didn't know I could do that. Check it out. Give it some ideas. The last builders' conference that I went to I got the idea to put some ports in my ukulele. Be as daring as you want to be.

**BG:** Are you going to use that in guitars that you get? Are people going to start doing it in guitars?

**CC:** Nah, not already built guitars. It may come to that. People may come in and go, "Can you put a whole in the side of my guitar?" It's harder to do that when the guitar is already assembled. When you are building something you can cut holes because you have to reinforce the inside edges, so that's hard to do. It's like this one, I said to John, "Oh I wish I had put some ports in it," and he said, "Well it's too late now because it's already glued together." If I had done it before I glued it together, I don't want to do it now, but my next one I probably will put some ports in it.

**BG:** I like the way that's joined. Can you show us that, where the neck is going to join in there?

**CC:** Isn't that neat looking? Just a beautiful little dovetail, and when this is done it will look a whole lot different. It's not completely finished yet. It is a dovetail, compound dovetail, and I've got a little bit more fitting to do.

**BG:** Is that glued in there, or what?

**CC:** Oh yeah, it's glued in there, and then this neck is a blank, it's called a blank, it's a big huge thing. I've got to put the fingerboard on it next, the fret board.

**BG:** When you say a blank, that means you are going to carve it down?

**CC:** Yeah, I'm going to carve it down, carve it down for this to fit. So it will get a whole lot taken off of it still. That's the next process. I glue this on and start carving.

**BG:** If you cut too much off...

**CC:** Then you have to start over again, or modify it.

**BG:** Have you ever had a repair that you felt bad about because it was messed up or anything like that?

**2:48**

**CC:** If I did I forgot about it.

**BG:** Oh good.

**CC:** You never remember the bad stuff, you only remember the good stuff, Bob.

**BG:** The good ones you remember.

**CC:** I don't remember too many bad ones.

**BG:** But you get a lot of people in here asking for crazy stuff.

**CC:** I do, some crazy stuff, yeah...

**BG:** Are your customers just from the Richmond area or are they from all over?

**CC:** They are from all over. Indiana, Kentucky, Tennessee... I'm trying to think. I don't think I've had any sent from very far away in the last little bit... all over Kentucky, yeah, because I think there is only one other authorized repair center in the state and that's out in western Kentucky, so I even get people from Louisville and Cincinnati... Ashland.

**BG:** How do you get authorized by them?

**CC:** They look at some of the things you've built and some of the repair work you've done, and you're salesman is a really integral part of that decision because he's, the salesman that sales Martin guitars to me, he's in here and he's seen what I've done.

**BG:** Did you have to submit something to him?

**CC:** No, they just come in here and look, the salesman does, and my reputation I think, they got a reference from Taylor guitars and from the guy that I built mandolins with also.

**BG:** Oh ok.

**CC:** So that, you know, what work you've done previously.

**BG:** Homer was one too, wasn't he?

**CC:** He was, a long time ago. He was... Before I ever did any repair work, I think he was. He did a lot of good work, but he got older and his eyes got bad and that's the thing I always worry about is my eyes, and you can't do as good of repair work.

**BG:** You can't see what you're looking at.

**CC:** That's right. You have to be able to see it. That's why I have these little magnifying glasses all over the place. If I need to see something really little, I mean, I use them. This one has a magnifying glass in it, and the one on my bench has a magnifying glass in it too.

**BG:** Yeah, could you describe some of the stuff that's on your bench here? All those bottles and things, what's all that?

**CC:** Oh, those little bottles and things are...

**BG:** Glues?

**CC:** Dust. There's all kinds of different dust that I use for, when I'm doing a repair, like bone dust and ebony dust. Then there are little pieces and parts. There are stains that I mix up in those little bottles. Any little things that I don't want to loose. Spikes. Little bitty screws. Little hardware stuff, lots of hardware. Your basic tools: files, screwdrivers, there are a lot of special tools, specialized reamers, lots of hand tools, lots of files. The set of tools I use more than anything probably are these little guys' right here and they are called nut files. I mean, I'm actually ready for a new set because these guys work really good down here and they are worn out up here. I need to...

**BG:** What are they?

**CC:** There are how I file the slots in these little guys right here.

**BG:** They are going sideways like this?

**CC:** Uh huh, you go like this. This is my third set.

**BG:** Why are they a set?

**CC:** Because you have different, your grooves range from ten to eleven thousandths on up to the fifty/sixty thousandths, so you have to have different sized, look at the edge of them, different sized files for different grooves. See the different edge on them?

**BG:** Sure. So like, the E-string there would take a smaller one and then the next... Ok, I see.

**CC:** So lots of specialized files and specialized saws.

**SA:** Can you hold those up again for me?

**CC:** Sure, these are called nut files, and every edge is a different thickness.

**BG:** Oh ok, so you don't need six of them.

**CC:** There are actually eight different sizes here, but you have to remember that I have light gauge and medium gauge, and I have electric guitars and acoustic guitars, so I could need, more like twelve or fifteen different sizes, but these are the most common ones.

**BG:** Where do you buy those?

**CC:** I buy them from... there are a couple of different suppliers. One of them is called Stewart MacDonald, and Luthiers Mercantile. Grizzly, which used to just make big tools, also has a big luthier department now. There are quite a few places; probably Stewart MacDonald and Luthiers Mercantile are the biggest ones that I get stuff from. Grobet is a jeweler's supply, but I use a lot of tools that they may also. Grobet.

**BG:** Have you got some here?

**7:12**

**CC:** Well, I have more files over here that I've got from Grobet probably.

**BG:** Ok.

**CC:** You know, stuff like that.

**BG:** I see, Instrument Makers White Glue in a big thing down there, is that?

**CC:** This stuff here? Where do you see that?

**BG:** It's hidden underneath the...

**CC:** Instrument Makers White Glue...

**BG:** Right there.

**CC:** Oh yeah, this was given to me by a friend of mine. This is his own glue that he's made up.

**BG:** Oh ok.

**CC:** A friend of mine, this is actually Luthiers Mercantile, but a friend of mine that does bass repair gave this to me in Galax, Virginia last year. He said, "This is what you need, and keep it in the refrigerator so it stays nice and fresh." We were just talking about working on basses and he's a luthier, he just gave this to me.

**BG:** Oh ok.

**CC:** He was really nice. Luthiers are strange people. They have very opinionated, they have their ideas, so he gave me this and said keep it in the refrigerator, and I forgot that it was there. So there are lots...

**BG:** It's not in the refrigerator.

**CC:** I know it. It needs to be in the refrigerator. It will last longer. Then I have this stuff. I just got this stuff back in. This is called "Angel Polish." This is like forty dollars for this bottle of stuff. This friend of mine in Tennessee makes this. He has his own store. But there is a really neat story about this stuff called Angel Polish. This is the only thing I'll use on high-end instruments and violins. Ten or fifteen years ago he offered this formula to Chris Martin...



**BG:** At Martin guitars?

**CC:** At Martin guitars, and I think his grandmother or his grandfather made this polish. And he lost it, and then his grandmother died and he was cleaning out her house and he'd lost the formula, he was getting ready to get rid of all of her clothes and he was checking the pockets and he found the formula in one of the pockets of one of her coats. He started making it again. Well Chris said, "Nah, he didn't want the formula," and this was years ago, and now it's so popular I guess Chris had called him and said, "Well, we would like to have this now," and he said, "Nah, I'm selling too much of it by myself." But it's wonderful stuff. I don't know what is in it, but it is the best polish I have ever used.

**9:25**

**BG:** Do you use it on guitars?

**CC:** I use it on old instruments, like what I've done with that bass. It's got an older, oxidized finish and I'll use this and it will just make it shine like a new penny. The more you rub it, the shinier it gets.

**BG:** So how do you...

**CC:** Put it on with one rag and wipe it off with another. And you don't have to let it dry like pieced wax, it's just wonderful stuff. It's called Angel Polish.

**BG:** Angel Polish.

**CC:** And my customers come in here and ask for it by name. I've been carrying it for about ten years.

**BG:** There's no label for it?

**CC:** No, no, this is my shop one. The ones I sell up front are little bottles and they are twelve dollars and they have labels on them.

**BG:** Oh I see.

**CC:** He made this big one for my shop.

**BG:** Oh that's great.

**CC:** Yeah. I just got some more back in. It's wonderful stuff. There is lots of specialized stuff...

**BG:** Is there another one of those back...

**CC:** Yeah, I just got that... that does have the label on it. That goes downstairs in my shop. I have one down there and one up here.

**BG:** So you don't use that on wood before you put a finish on it?

**CC:** No, it has to have a finish on it.

**BG:** So that's to polish it up?

**CC:** Right.

**BG:** And I see over there you've got a banjo on some kind of contraption. What is that thing?

**CC:** It's called "The Apprentice." It's a jig that holds an instrument. So when I need another set of hands, you can turn it sideways. Want me to get up and show you?

**BG:** Sure.

**10:36**

**[CC demonstrates use of jig]**

**CC:** I don't have this in it right now; so let me take it out.

**BG:** You bought that from somebody I guess?

**CC:** Actually, this was a gift. I can clamp an instrument in here, and if I need to hold it a certain way to fix a crack or do something with it I can set it straight up, I can twist it around...

**BG:** Somebody gave that to you?

**CC:** This is a retired engineer makes this. He inadvertently insulted me at a luthier's conference. He apologized, it was no big deal, and then when I got home two weeks later I had one of these setting at the front door and he said, "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to insult you," he had said something derogatory about women luthiers...

**BG:** Oh.

**CC:** ... and he said, "Please accept this as a gift." So he gave it to me.

**BG:** So do other luthiers use that?

**CC:** Yeah, I mean, I don't know how popular it is. I like it. I don't use it a lot, but I do use it, and it's a, I like it for holding something I've just glued or done some finish work on the top of it so I know it's not going to get touched and it's not going to get moved around. But yeah, it does come in pretty handy.

**BG:** I see some solder over there.

**CC:** That's for working on band instruments.

**BG:** Ok. Is that a clarinet you are working on?

**CC:** That's a flute.

**BG:** A flute.

**CC:** That's a flute, yeah.

**BG:** Are those Bunsen Burners or something?

**CC:** Those are little torches.

**BG:** Little torches. Ok.

**CC:** Propane torches and they are wonderful for doing soldering work, for heating up a pad to seat it. For a pad in an instrument like a clarinet or a saxophone to seat properly you heat it up a bit.

**BG:** Oh ok.

**CC:** Yeah, these are nice little guys. These are little things called "Blazer torches." I love them.

**BG:** So you get those from other people?

**CC:** Yeah, band instrument suppliers. You can get this at Ace Hardware actually. Ace Hardware has these now. Plumbers use them. Used to be I could only order these through a catalogue but now you can get them anywhere.

**BG:** What's inside of them? Is that gas or something?

**CC:** Yeah, its stuff you use for those little lighters. Is it propane?

**BG:** Yeah.

**CC:** I think its called propane. Yeah. Here it is. Altura Butane. I'm sorry. Butane. You put it in that way. Yeah. Butane fuel. All kinds of fun toys.

**BG:** But you said you might have to move from here.

**CC:** I might.

**BG:** How can you set this up in another place?

**CC:** Carefully.

**BG:** Carefully?

**CC:** Slowly. I hope we don't have to, but we've moved twice before. You know, it's a really good way to get organized and get everything clean.

**BG:** Moving?

**CC:** You have to look at it, you have to make lemonade out of that lemon or else you'll go crazy. But it will be ok. It will be fine.

**BG:** I imagine when you are in some place like this for a long time you adapt things to work for you, then you have to rethink it out.

**CC:** You have to look at the space you have. I have my shop spread out pretty big downstairs and I might have to, there's no way I'm ever going to find another building as big as this, I don't really need as much space as we have here, but I do need a certain amount of space for my tools and stuff like that.

**BG:** Well I saw downstairs that you have a workshop, and we might take some video of that, but I also saw an area where it looks like the ukulele group...

**CC:** We have a classroom where we teach piano theory classes down there. I also teach my set-up classes down there. I move a bunch of tables in and put pieces of carpet on them and then when I teach repair classes, how to set-up your guitar or whatever, everyone brings their instruments in and we set them on the tables. That classroom space is just invaluable, it's really nice to have it.

**BG:** Wait a minute. You said earlier that set-up takes a lot of skill to do. Are you teaching people to set-up on their own?

**CC:** I'm teaching them the basics. That doesn't mean that they can go out there and make a living at it, because it is very tedious. Like when somebody comes in here and pays me to do something, they'll want it done right, but I teach a set-up class, and I teach you the basics of how to adjust the saddle up and down, and how to straighten the neck, a lot of people are just afraid and totally freaked out about trying to adjust their neck, and as long as you are cautious about it, you can do your own instruments. Don't do somebody else's, but do your own. How to adjust the nut, how to tighten everything up like the keys so they aren't rattling. How to check the inside of the instrument with a, this is probably one of my other tools that I use a lot, a light. I don't want to turn my light on, but we have a light that we put down inside the guitar and a mirror that we use to check and make sure that nothing has broken lose.

There are basic maintenance stuff that people can do to maintain their instruments properly, and there are a lot of people that own ten to fifteen instruments. Well that's pretty expensive for them to bring all of the instruments in for me to repair, so I don't mind. I charge a hundred dollars for a clinic and it's two to three hours. Every now and again when I get enough people on my roster, I like to have five to seven people, we'll do one. It's fun.

**BG:** So there are people who just own guitars or instruments...

**CC:** Who will want to learn how to do it, and believe me, if I teach you how to do a set-up you'll understand it a whole lot more than just reading a book. It's one thing to read a book...

**BG:** We were talking earlier about setting my guitar up. If I took that class would I never bother you again about it?

**CC:** No, because believe me, there's going to be a time when you are going to go, "I can't get that buzz out of my guitar!" and it will be a high fret, because I can't teach you about everything because there are high frets, it might have a fret level, or you might have a little too much back bow. Just because I

show you how to do something doesn't mean that you can do it perfect. Believe me, sighting a guitar neck is something that everybody can't do.

**16:11**

**BG:** I feel like if I took a class like that I would think that I would ruin my guitar.

**CC:** No you wouldn't ruin it. You'd have fun playing with it though. There are some people that want to piddle-paddle around with their instruments.

**BG:** You can't really ruin it I guess, right, because you can always fix it?

**CC:** Yeah. Well, unless you just start turning the truss rod and break it, that's one way, but you have to be, and that's one thing I emphasize, half of a turn is a lot when you are adjusting a guitar neck.

**BG:** I wish you had told me that the other day.

**CC:** Did you break your neck Bob?

**BG:** Nah, I'm just kidding.

**CC:** I mean, we are talking, just a little bitty turn. Watch this. I'm not sure which one of these I need for this one. This has an adjustable truss rod. When I say a turn, I don't think I have it yet, that's a turn, that much.

**BG:** Gosh really, ok.

**CC:** That's a lot right there.

**BG:** And that moved it.

**CC:** That probably moved it. I'm going to look at it and see in a second. So you've got to be pretty... yeah, but it needs a little bit more. It's no big deal. But you've got to know how to look at it and to know what to do. You can't be willy-nilly and go in there and start messing around. You gotta, like the girl, another person who helps me out sometimes, she is scared to death to do neck adjustments because she's afraid she's going to break a truss rod and once you've, well let me tell you something, when you've heard a truss rod break, it's like a shot, you go ok, I just ruined that guitar because, and I do have a new tool that can fix it, but most of the time you've ruined that guitar when you've broken a truss rod because a lot of guitars aren't worth pulling the fingerboard off and putting a new truss rod in.

**BG:** What, is it spring loaded or something? How would you ruin it? It's just a rod isn't it?

**CC:** It's a rod, but it's a rod that is bent in such a way that when you tighten it, it bows the neck forward or back.

**BG:** Oh, I didn't realize that.

**CC:** It's a torque; it's a truss rod that counteracts the tension of the strings, which is about one hundred and twenty-five PSI.

**[Interruption – customers]**

**18:16**

**CC continues:** So yeah, you can mess one up pretty quickly if you try.

**BG:** Ok.

**CC:** But, if I teach you in class, you are going to understand the do's and don'ts, and you're going to understand how far you can go, and we'll do hands on, you will actually do repair work while you are there at the class.

**BG:** Ok. I'm going to take a class this summer on how to fix my window at my house.

**CC:** That's great.

**BG:** And that takes all week actually.

**CC:** That's great. You can come to my house when you are done.

**BG:** I'll be certified and set. So we were talking about the space down there, you also have a ukulele club that meets every other week?

**CC:** Every other week. We have a ukulele club we started about a year ago. We play and sing and have so much fun. It's great.

**BG:** Now do you have traditional artists come down there and jam ever? Like with stringed band music?

**CC:** Well, anybody is invited. Actually, we have this guy, Chris Sullivan from Lexington; he comes and brings his saw **[uncertain of term]** and his Dobro and plays with us occasionally. You can bring anything you want. It's mainly a ukulele club, but we don't care if you show up with something else.

**BG:** Is this the only ukulele club in Kentucky that you know of?

**CC:** I don't know. That's a good question. I should get online and Google that, but I don't care, I'm not going to go anywhere else, I want to stay here. That's why I want to have the ukulele club here, I won't travel to Louisville or anywhere else to go to one. I mean I guess I would once or twice to see how they do things, I don't know. There are big ones I know in other cities, in New York there's a big ukulele club, in Colorado I know there is a big one, there is a big one in Santa Cruz, California, that's actually on that documentary that I was telling you about.

**BG:** Are you guys going to perform for other people?

**CC:** If we get... We're getting better. We're getting pretty good. Actually, the people who weren't very serious have all dropped out and all the people who are real serious are coming. I mean, I'm not talking

serious, serious, I'm talking about people who want to practice and want to learn and want to learn more than three chords. The first group of people, they were, they didn't practice, they didn't care, they just wanted to play easy, easy stuff. Now the new group of people that are coming every week, they really want to play some good stuff. So we are having fun and we are getting better, so we might play out sometime.

**BG:** What do you mean, good stuff?

**CC:** More than three chords. A little more involved.

**BG:** More than three chords in the song.

**CC:** Yeah. A little more involved music. If you can't play more than three chords, why are you doing this? Let's get a little more; let's practice a little. Let's be a little more dedicated.

**BG:** On ukulele you have to sing with it too, to make it sound good.

**CC:** No, you don't have to, but we do.

**BG:** Yeah, ok.

**CC:** But we do, that's the fun part of it. Singing and playing.

**BG:** Cool.

**CC:** We have a couple of people that are very accomplished that come and they are very entertaining because they are very good. We have kids and we have old people, and we have everyone in between. We just have a great time. So maybe in five or six years we will have thirty or forty members and we'll get out there and play in the nursing homes or on the circuit, whatever.

**BG:** Well I've got dulcimer players who would always say, when I had the Festival going on, they would say, "Oh can we perform at the Festival." Yeah, ok, sometimes we would have like fifty dulcimer people on stage, it was kind of overwhelming, but it's interesting too, so I was just wondering if the ukulele club would do something.

**21:30**

**CC:** We will eventually. We aren't there yet. We're just having fun getting to know each other and learning the music.

**BG:** Is there food involved or anything?

**CC:** No.

**BG:** No?

**CC:** No, and I wanted to do that, and they all boo-hoed it. No food or drink. They didn't want to put me out, and its here. I said, "Well every week or every other week somebody can bring something." "Nah,

we just want to come and play music.” That’s all we do. Now I would like to, maybe once a year, I know in California, I think it’s in the San Diego club, once a year or twice a year they meet in this restaurant and they have the ukulele jam. People get up who have never performed before get up and they have performances, and you sign-up to perform, but all the people in the audience are playing along with you, if you want them too. They have a copy of what you are going to play, and then you get up there and sing and lead the whole group and play and sing and they eat and they party and have a great time. It sounds like a lot of fun. So maybe sometime we will do something like that, but right now we are just...

**BG:** I told you I bought my son one and he got into it because of that heavy set guy from Hawaii who played...

**CC:** Brother Iz (Israel Kamakawiwo’ole).

**BG:** Yeah, he played...

**CC:** “Somewhere Over the Rainbow”.

**BG:** Yeah, “Somewhere Over the Rainbow.” It was beautiful.

**CC:** Now the new guy, Jake Shimabukuro, Google him, because he is fabulous. He is in that documentary, if you want to take that and watch it. He’s just phenomenal. He’s just like a prodigy, and he’s playing with everybody. This guy has been playing ukulele since he was four years, and I guess he is twenty-five or thirty and he is just wonderful. Jake Shimabukuro. All the best guys are from Hawaii.

**BG:** It’s kind of been bred I guess. Part of their traditions...

**CC:** Yeah, that’s what they play. Exactly. That’s where the best guys are.

**23:12**

**CC:** Anything else?

**BG:** Well, do you feel like we covered everything?

**CC:** I think so. We covered a lot.

**BG:** Yeah.

**23:30**

**[Room tone check]**

**24:40**

**[Additional questions]**

**BG:** That butter knife thing, the knife we were talking about...



**CC:** Uh huh.

**BG:** What was that?

**CC:** It's a thin blade that you use to remove, once you've heated this up, to remove a bridge, to remove an extension of a fingerboard, and to remove a, it's just a thin blade...

**BG:** And you don't have to buy a fancy...

**CC:** Well I have fancy tools too, but the ones you make are the neatest. I have a whole drawer full of these guys. Check these out. You never know, this is just some of them, and a lot of these are painter knives for painting, you know, to get in and feel a brace that is loose, to help remove an internal bridge patch, to spread some glue. This is for feeling a bridge patch; I made this one, on the inside of something. This is to get into a little bitty place and work. Aren't these neat? Just fun little tools, and a lot of these are painters' tools.

**BG:** Ok. What's your favorite tool you ever made?

**CC:** My favorite tool I ever made?

**BG:** Yeah, did you come up with something?

**CC:** Oh god, umm, oh that's a good question. My favorite tool I ever made... I have a couple of favorite tools, but I didn't make them.

**BG:** Oh ok.

**CC:** Let me show ya. I love... these are just funky little things. I will bring them over there on the bench. Give me a second. I think two or three of them are right here if I can find them. This is a tool, believe it or not, when you have a mandolin strung up, this is a hammer from off of a piano, when you have a mandolin strung up and it has a moveable bridge on it, sometimes you have to move it, it's really hard to have to grab ahold of it and move it, but I can just tap the edge of that bridge and bring it back. My boyfriend came up with this.

**BG:** Is that from a piano?

**CC:** Yeah, that's a piano hammer.

**BG:** Ok.

**CC:** And I can tap it and it doesn't hurt anything. I've got another couple here that I want to show you, but I don't think they are there. I wonder where they are. My bench is such a mess right now. So it's kind of like, the little things are the fun ones, and I can't put my hands on them right now I don't think. I have friends that have built tools for me and I can't find anything right now. You know, I mean, you make little sanding things like this all the time. I just love little things like this.

**BG:** Will you show a little bit about what you did with the bass there?

**CC:** Oh sure.

**BG:** Because you were showing that to me, but...

**CC:** Ok, let me come over to this side. This is an old K. The first thing we did, I took the fingerboard off of it and I spliced in a piece of wood because it was cracked right here. It had been dropped. See, you can't hardly see that. Then we put the fingerboard back on and sanded this down and you can't hardly even tell. Even the stain came out totally perfect. So that repaired this neck because it was made to be really little and it broke. And then, when people are using upright basses, when they are done playing they set them down on their side on the ground, so what suffers are the edges. So this one has had fifty or sixty years of suffering, and almost all the edges here, all the edges on that side, they were all broken off. So I have made pieces out of this piece of Maple right here. I've cut up this piece of Maple and, you can see where the contour, cut off from this solid piece of Maple to make all new pieces for the back. Now for the top it was Spruce, and we about half of that was gone. I had to cut pieces out of a Spruce blank and glue them in there and sand them down and contour them and now I'm getting ready to finish them with stain and lacquer. And that was about a seven hundred dollar repair.

**BG:** You did some things to the front too I guess.

**CC:** Yeah. I had to do the edges on the front too, and I can't turn it over right now because I'm staining this right now. It's turned out real nice. Here's the deal. This lady wears dresses a lot in church, and all this stuff that was broke off would constantly grab her clothes. She hated it. She said to her husband, "I want my bass fixed," and all this junk here, this one we didn't fix because it wasn't really bad, but all of this was just real jagged and grabby, grab your clothes, so now it's nice and smooth. Because a bass, you're hugging it when you are playing it.

**BG:** So to keep it from happening again, you are going to tell her to do something different?

**CC:** Nah, it will happen again.

**BG:** Ok.

**CC:** There's no way around it. Unless they are really nice with it. Laying it down on carpet is ok, but when you are in a lot of these old churches, they don't have carpet, they just lay them down on the concrete floor, the tile floor. Hauling them around, this has had fifty or sixty, seventy years worth of use.

**BG:** Did you say that Homer put a skinnier neck on that?

**CC:** No, he took the neck that was on it and shaved it down. Took it down a lot. Yeah, it's really little, and that's where it busted, right there. So it got dropped and had a big crack in it right there.

**BG:** Now it's still going to take the action of the strings.

**CC:** Yeah, it's fine. It's good now.

**BG:** Ok. Well I think that's, we got a lot here. Thank you.

**CC:** You're welcome. Thank you.

**BG:** Is it ok to put this in the archive where they are going to give?

**CC:** Sure.

**BG:** Ok, I have a little thing for you to sign.

**CC:** Yeah, a release form.

**BG:** Release form. Yep.

**CC:** Sure, I don't mind.

**30:19**

**End Interview – End of Track 2**