

Sam & Joe Herrmann

Where: At their home in Paw Paw, WV

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Interviewer: Emily Hilliard

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Sam & Joe Herrmann

Joe Herrmann (b.1949) and Sam Herrmann (b. 1949), both Maryland natives, are traditional musicians who play together as part of Critton Hollow String Band. They have been a couple since the mid-1970s when they moved to Hampshire County, West Virginia. Joe is a fiddle and banjo player, and Sam is a guitar and hammer dulcimer player. Sam is also a knitter, hand yarn spinner, and owns the knitting kit company Samspun. They live on a piece of land in Paw Paw, WV where they keep sheep.

Interviewer's note:

Interview with Sam and Joe Herrmann of Critton Hollow String Band on the back porch of their home in Critton Hollow, Paw Paw, West Virginia. Sam was knitting a child's sweater during the interview.

SH: Sam Herrmann

JH: Joe Herrmann

EH: Emily Hilliard

00:00

EH: Okay. Alright. Could you just introduce yourselves and tell me where you're from and when you were born and your name.

JH: Joe Herrmann. I was born and raised in Baltimore, Maryland. What else did you want to know?

EH: When you were born.

JH: 1949, February 23rd.

EH: What about you?

SH: I'm Sam Herrmann, and wife of Joe, and I was born in Annapolis, Maryland on January 25, 1949.

EH: And what brought you to West Virginia?

JH: The coincidental meeting with Sam. So there's a story there! (laughs)

EH: Oh, I would love to hear it! (laughs)

JH: So Sam and I had a mutual friend in Pasadena, Maryland, which is part of, just outside of Annapolis, and that's how we met, through a mutual friend. And Sam had just moved to West Virginia to this property. You should ask her how that happened. (laughs)

EH: (laughs) I think my friend used to have a boat in Pasadena—is that...

JH: Yeah, yeah, yeah, this guy was a boat builder.

EH: Okay.

SH: Yeah, so I was, I came out to West Virginia with a friend that had lived here for a while and she came to visit some friends and I came along for the weekend and I was so enamored by the beauty that during that weekend I started asking her friends what it would... if there were possible places to live. And they lead me to these now friends that lived down the Hollow and they had the cabin available for caretaking, which meant you couldn't beat the price! (laughs) And of course it's what they would have called rustic and tried to scare me into feeling like I was going to be a pioneer, showing me the outhouse and no running water—didn't impact my decision at all. So in 1973, that was 1973 in the fall and so by December, I had moved here.

EH: And what were you doing in Annapolis at the time?

SH: Well that was the thing—I had moved from Annapolis quite a number of years before and had been living in Virginia and didn't really have a real clear direction except when I was in Virginia I'd grown my first garden and that in itself led me to feel like I didn't want to live in a city ever again. So I actually had left Virginia and I was driving to Colorado. It was just one of those little pipe dreams, "Colorado, that sounds like a nice place to go!" Well my car broke down and I had a friend in Annapolis that was a mechanic and so that's how I ended back in Annapolis while they were fixing my car and just happened to come out here on a weekend, like I said. And the rest is history! (laughs) As they say.

EH: (laughs) So the no running water, was that actually attractive in some way? The outhouse, no running water....

SH: Uh, I wouldn't say it was attractive, but it wasn't a deterrent. I just didn't even consider it a problem.

EH: Yeah.

SH: Maybe because I was a girl scout and I knew about outhouses. I don't know! The running water part—you know we had a creek right there that goes by the house too. But you know, it had a hand pump and it just didn't even occur to me that it was a problem—for a long time!

JH: 'Til you had babies!

SH: Even with babies, you know, washing diapers for twins in a wringer washer on the front porch. It just did not seem like it was a big deal until we built this house and got running water and thought yikes! How did I ever do that!

EH: (laughs)

SH: WE ever do that, I should say.

EH: So how did... what was the coincidental meeting?

JH: Just me going to visit my friend Paul in Pasadena and Sam and her friend Patty just happened to stop by. And Sam had just moved here in December of '73—this was I think in February of '74. And Sam was going up to New Jersey, was it?

SM: Mmhm

JH: Where her nieces were, to babysit her nieces for about 10 days I think, something like that. And I had just, I and 2 other friends had just stopped living in a house that we'd been living in when we were going to college at University of Maryland- Baltimore County. And I'd already dropped out of school and so meeting Sam at our friend Paul's, she was on her way to New

Jersey, we had just left our living situation and all we had was a panel truck, so we arranged to come stay in the cabin, where Lisa [Elmeleh] lives now.

SH: As house sitters.

JH: As house sitters until she got back from visiting her nieces and by the time she got back we had hooked up another place on the Hollow to stay. And eventually those 2 other friends I was with left, I stayed, and again, no running water, as a matter of fact there was not even a pump at the place I was staying—I had to haul water from a spring. And I was, I just, I had already had in my mind that I didn't want to be in a city either, and when I came out here, it was just seemed like what I was wanting and here I still am. Here we still are.

EH: So what did you find for neighbors and people in the local community?

SH: Uh, I think that initially it was very quiet around here- there were very few neighbors and very few cars that passed by.

JH: But in terms of community, there was like a 30 mile radius community here which was people that were very similar, had similar stories to ours that came maybe from Pittsburgh a lot of people from Pittsburgh area—Tom and...

SH: Tom and Judy... (phone rings) Let it go.

JH: Judy. But anyway, wherever they came from, in a 30 mile radius around here, people made a point to get together—covered dish, volleyball, music. I mean pretty much every weekend when it was...

SH: Which is how I made the connection here, you know just being able to go, meeting mutual friends, and then led us up to the owner of the property. So yeah, it was a very lively community of young people of the same mind. (phone beeps)

EH: Would you call it back-to-the-landers?

SH: You know, I don't like labels. I don't. You know, when people say, "oh you were a hippie!" I never considered myself a hippie. I never took that label on. Certainly that's probably true, you know, they were back-to-the-landers. Even, you know, when I moved here the only concept I had of where I was going in life was not living in a city. I did not have a career track.

JH: I would say we and the people that we're talking about were looking for alternative lifestyles.

EH: Mmhm. And were there other people who had been here for a long time who were also in part of that world, or it was more young people...

JH: Not so much, not so much. But the—you're speaking more like the local community that was already here.

EH: Yeah.

JH: No. It was pretty distinct difference. But we got to meet the local community more through music.

EH: Mmmhm. Mmhm.

9:35

So when did music come into this? Were you already playing, either of you? Or...

JH: Yeah, so I had been playing since I was about 12 and had gone through different musical phases, starting with like Pete Seeger and the big folk... there was a big folk craze in the 60s and then there was the great rock 'n' roll in the 60s so I had an electric guitar and a big amplifier and then I got real serious musically and got into studying music and playing jazz, but then when I came out here, I sold everything except my acoustic guitar. And then we went to Galax probably in 1974, 75, and that's when we came across old-time music.

EH: Oh yeah, cause Clifftop wasn't even around then.

JH: That's right.

EH: Yeah. And did you meet people here who were playing traditional music?

JH: Yeah! One of the people we met was Michael Kline, lived over in Capon Bridge, which was about 30 miles away. And through Michael we met Jack Shaffanacre (sp?) and... just anybody in the area that was playing.

SH: Sloan Stags...

JH: Sloan Stags, yeah, mostly older people for sure, but some younger people. Some contemporary people.

EH: What was your entry into music?

SH: Same kind of childhood involvement, you know from 1st grad singing teacher (laughs) to going through a tiring of a violin teacher to switching to band instruments with a wonderful band teacher. Played oboe for a long time. Picked up a guitar that my brother had bought and didn't do anything with and started teaching myself how to play guitar. So, yes music had been somewhat of a part, if not a total focus. It was part of my life. You know my mom was a pianist and an opera singer. But we didn't really play music in the house together. But, so I must have had some genetic link there to wanting to play music and the first time I'd heard traditional music was when I went on a trip to Ireland by myself when I was around 20. And just going into...well it

was the British Isles... and going into an Irish pub where they had a live music session and it was much as the sessions are now but at the time I had never experienced that before and so there's a tin whistle player that really impressed me. Part of the impression was probably because he came in the back door and when the bar owner saw him there... so he snuck in the back and played with his buddies, and the bar owner saw him and he was identified as a traveler person, or a gypsy and was kicked out. So I came home from Ireland with a tin whistle.

EH: (laughs)

SH: So that's probably what I first was playing when you and I started trying to play music together.

JH: Yeah, I think you had some recorders?

SH: Yeah, recorder and tin whistle.

JH: tin whistle.

SH: Being an oboe player, I mean, of course! You know? (laughs)

EH: Yeah!

SH: Get involved that way.

EH: And now you play hammered dulcimer?

SH: That's my main instrument. I still play guitar and some mandolin. But my melody instrument is hammered dulcimer.

EH: So how did that...

SH: That was a bizarre story, I don't know if you...

EH: (laughs)

JH: Oh no, you wouldn't want to hear a *bizarre* story would you?! (laughs)

EH: (laughs)

SH: Oh, you know, it's why things get into your life, because you don't really know really where they come from. Course I could say, "Oh I must have been a cimbalon player many many years ago, in another life!"

EH: (laughs)

SH: I don't know, that's how it affected me. Cause Joe came home and told me about this instrument that he saw at the National Folk Festival they had at Wolf Trap. He just saw it, and he

heard it. And he came home and told me about it—what a cool instrument it was. And all of a sudden I decided I needed to build one.

EH: Wow.

SH: So... and I was playing banjo at that point, actually. And he thought I was nuts! Which, you know...who knows! He might have been right! You might have been right, Joe!

JH: I was going to say, maybe that's never changed.

EH: (laughs)

SH: So I had a friend that I heard was building a harpsichord, so I thought... and he was a cabinet builder as well... so I thought, "oh, well Doug could probably help me with this." Because I really wasn't a woodworker—I just had the initiative to do it. And so he invited me to come to his house and spend... I guess it was close to 10 days, 2 weeks... we didn't know what we were building, there was very few dulcimers out there in public back then. And I did find Sam Rizzetta's plans at the Smithsonian and it just all fell together.

JH: So, you had that book by Howie Mitchell.

SH: Well, that one came because the fella that I was going to build the dulcimer with, he just met his neighbor, the night before I arrived, his neighbor had moved in and he just met him for the first time. And he told him that I was coming up and I was gonna build this dulcimer, we were gonna build this dulcimer. And his neighbor said, "oh, what a coincidence! I just got this book by Howie Mitchell, *How to Build A Hammered Dulcimer*".

JH: That really is a coincidence!

SH: Yeah!

EH: Wow.

SH: It was. So between Sam's plans and Howie Mitchell's successes and failures, we gleaned information from it and so I built my first 35 pound monstrosity that... it was... it stayed together and I played it for over 10 years, probably. Wouldn't you say?

JH: Well I was just realizing that it's on that painting. So it's all the way through that record.

SH: Right. Right. So... but it was really heavy and it was mostly, it was really hard for me to go up stairs. Cause I had to hold it up... but yeah, made my own case and... I did it all!

EH: And how did you learn to play?

SH: Well I brought this instrument home and I said, “now what do I do?” I hadn’t heard one! Well, I’d heard one. I guess I did. When we went to Galax, there was a guy there that had built....

JH: This would have been the second time we went to Galax.

SH: Yeah, and did... he had a homemade dulcimer. But if you know dulcimers at all, you’ve got to figure that there’s a ton of tension on the sound board. So if they’re not built well, they collapse on themselves. Which was all part of Howie Mitchell’s book—the ones that collapsed. You know?

EH: (laughs)

SH: SO his was already falling apart. But still, there was something about the sound of it that captured me. He was just a beginner too. I’d love to know who he was.

JH: Yeah, it seems like we were in one of those stalls in the dark and he was playing his hammered dulcimer and we were gathered around. I mean he didn’t even have a stand, it was almost like he was... I can’t remember, I mean I’m just trying to recreate it in my mind.

SH: Yeah, it just wasn’t a real visible instrument at the time. So I came home and Joe said, since he’d seen it played, he said, “well try this!” and he played uh... “Yankee Doodle.” And that’s what I tell a lot of students that say, “Well I can’t learn by ear.” And I’ll say, just find a tune that you know in your head, just “Twinkle Twinkle Little Star,” you know that one?

EH: MMhm.

SH: Pick it out.

EH: Mmhm.

SH: And so that’s where I started—“Yankee Doodle.” Even the hammers—we didn’t even know what the hammers were supposed to look like. And Joe made me these carved kind of, just the first ones that I had... just really weird! I can’t even remember what they looked like.

JH: I thought they were always the same, they were always basically the same?

SH: No. The first ones... they were eventually the same.

JH: I don’t remember the first ones. Yeah, so I just took a piece of wood and carved it so there was a hammer on one end and made the handles, the sticks as thin as I thought were... and that’s... I don’t know what you’re talking about the first ones, but that’s what I’m talking about—gave... and that’s basically what she’s always used until Sam Rizzetta made her a pair, basically the same but...

SH: Just a little different

JH: Just a little different, but it's got the same feel to it.

SH: And mine are unusual. You know the dulcimers that are out there for years now, they have these little scoopy, fancy little handle things on them and they're weighted the opposite way that mine are, so mine are weighted heavy on the hammer end and the ones that most people play are light on the hammer end and I tried to play with them before, just to be like everybody else—what the heck!

JH: Yeah, you'll see people with bags of hammers and Sam's got about 2 pair.

SH: I've got 2 pair, yep!

JH: And I have my own pair to keep in my fiddle case because it... on two occasions we got somewhere and she didn't have her hammers. So I made myself a pair of hammers and keep in the fiddle case (laughs).

SH: I play with toothbrushes in those situations.

EH: Oh yeah! My dad made me a hammered dulcimer for my 7th birthday.

JH: Oh!

EH: But he learned from a friend who's a luthier in Elkhart—or Goshen, Indiana. But growing up—just the one bridge down the middle and they just tuned it to a chord so everything sounded good, but then my brother and I never really learned to play! We would hammer on it... but I still have it!

SH: Cool!

JH: Uh-huh—it probably served its purpose, it gave you musical fascination for awhile.

EH: Yeah, mmhm. Oh I had a question... oh, do you know who was playing at Wolf Trap that you saw?

JH: Oh yeah. No, no, no that was Trapezoid people. Yeah, that was after, it was after the concerts and there was an impromptu square dance and they were banging on 3 or 4 hammered dulcimers.

EH: I always see their records at record stores now.

JH: Oh! And I had never been a witness to a square dance before either so all of this was like magic was happening—Bam! This beautiful music and all this spinning around and going the wrong way and people like keeping me in this dance—I was having so much fun. It was magic!

EH: So yeah, probably at that time it was like they were bringing it back, maybe John McCutcheon—was he around?

JH: John was probably already playing.

SH: Well, I'm not sure because it was 2 years after.... 2 years... after I started to play that I heard Bill Spence—Fennig's All Stars—from upstate New York. So it was probably around that time. So Trapezoid at that time were basically instrument builders that put this band together. It was Sam Rizzetta... Sam Rizzetta, Paul Yeaton, Paul Reisler, and...

JH: Pete Bigger.

SH: Pete Bigger. So... Pete and Paul were apprentice builders, and Paul and Sam were the builders. The creators.

JH: Reisler. Paul Reisler and Sam Rizzetta, as opposed to Paul Yeaton and Pete Bigger were the apprentices. I'm just trying to separate the Pauls for ya.

EH: Ah. Yeah, yeah. I'm gonna talk to Sam tomorrow.

JH: Great.

SH: Ah! He's a very special person. And I now play one of his dulcimers after years of playing my own, having bought one built by Jim Taylor who's no longer on this earth, to have a lighter instrument to carry. And then finally Sam Rizzetta saved my life. (laughs) Cause the beauty of his instrument for me is that it's so consistent. It stays in tune, you know, where the last one that I had, by Jim Taylor, it was a constant. Always tuning, tuning, tuning. So there's nothing spontaneous about tuning and playing. Now I could probably open this up right now and play a tune and even if it wasn't quite at pitch, it would be in tune with itself. So I bless Sam Rizzetta every day I get that out and play it.

EH: (laughs)

SH: I do.

EH: And then so you were playing guitar, so how did you get into fiddle? And do you play banjo as well?

JH: Yeah, banjo as well. As a matter of fact, banjo was my first instrument more in like that folk style, Pete Seeger style in the 60s, folk songs, singing.

EH: And was that from, like his books? Like *How to Play the 5-string Banjo*?

JH: I had that book. (laughs) It seems everybody had that book. I still have it as a matter of fact. No, I just was playing the banjo, I hooked up with other people around Baltimore, there was actually this folk craze, people would get together and people were playing, having groups and they were, we found all kinds of opportunities to play. So I was in part of a group. But the fiddle came along when I went to Galax and that was the first time I ever heard old-time fiddle music,

as opposed to... like I knew what... bluegrass fiddle, but I never had any interest in that. But after hearing old-time fiddle music and then playing guitar, in that situation, um... I had a small coincidence too because a guy in the local area had a fiddle and he had some strings—it must have been something that came through his family and he didn't know what to do with the strings... I said, "Oh, I can put strings on a fiddle," although I had never done it, I knew I could put strings on... had notes on the package and I strung up his fiddle and I took out the bow and as soon as I took the bow, for the very first time ever having done it, pulled the bow across the string, I was captured. I was just literally like that. And the next day, literally, the next day, I found a guy in Romney that had some fiddles under his bed and I bought a fiddle for \$100. From this guy in Romney. And it was a very rare fiddle, I remember he said, he pulled it out and said, "Look here, this is a Stradivarius." But not only was it a Stradivarius, it was a Stradivarius that was made in China. (laughs)

EH: Wow, that is very rare.

JH: Very rare. And that was his selling point. I didn't care so much about that other than the fact that it was a fiddle that seemed like it could be played.

SH: And you could afford to buy it.

JH: And I could afford to buy it. So I played that fiddle for years.

EH: Wow.

JH: And then stepped up to other ones over the years.

EH: Do you remember some of those people that you first heard playing old-time at Galax or elsewhere?

JH: Contemporaries, yeah. This would be like Brad Leftwich and James Leva and Bruce Molsky. As a matter of fact, the first time, the first year or two that I went to Galax, which would have been '74/'75, Bruce was not playing fiddle, and then one year, like '75, '76, he showed up and he was playing the fiddle and it was like he was fully developed. (laughs)

EH: Wow.

JH: Everybody was going, "have you seen Bruce Molsky play the fiddle?" (laughs)

EH: Wow.

JH: And he had not played it the year before—at least he had not divulged to anybody that he was playing. Maybe he was doing it in the closet, but I think—I mean that's the way I remember it.

EH: Did he meet someone at the crossroads?

JH: Yeah, he may have. He may have sold his soul for to do that. I know. Oh, and John Specker.

EH: Oooh yeah, I've seen some videos.

JH: That's actually, John Specker was.... John Specker and who else?

SH: Dan Brown

JH: Danny Cornblum were playing fiddles together, this guy Tim Brown was playing harmonica, but those were the people that first year I went to Galax that I ended up playing with, all day every day. And they, it seems to me, they didn't know more than a dozen tunes, but they played them for a long time, and then when they played them, they played 'em again.

EH: (laughs)

JH: And it was, it was... I'd describe it as rock 'n' roll, which I had been heavily influenced in, so it was... it was... that was my introduction to old-time fiddle music. And then it, anyway, and it carried on from there. But they played with such, I mean we... they invited me into this, this... well they would have invited anybody that had the enthusiasm... my enthusiasm matched... it was a good match.

EH: (laughs)

JH: Yeah, we just played and played and played. And I didn't think... like I said that's the first time I heard the fiddle and I thought, "wow that's a great thing," and I didn't think, I had no interest... that I thought I was gonna go get a fiddle at that point, it was that total coincidence of this guy saying, "put the strings on."

EH: Hm. Wow.

JH: I had smoked a little pot when I did that. (laughs)

EH: (laughs) That might have helped a little.

JH: That bow across the string, you know it was like... I was totally fascinated. Totally captured. And then I would play the fiddle for 8, 10 hours a day.

EH: Wow. So, you're living you know, down at the cabin, and what were you guys...were you mostly living off the land? What were you doing for work?

JH: We picked apples in the fall. Um, until we realized we could make more money busking, which we did in Annapolis one fall night probably, right? When do you think that was?

SH: Summer.

JH: Yeah, so we had already picked the apples—it wasn't apple season. Could have been in the spring or something, we went downtown and thought, "let's take these..." Well, she had the dulcimer so it was that much later. She had the dulcimer and I had the fiddle, we had a half a dozen, dozen tunes that we had learned, went downtown Annapolis and somebody gave us 10 bucks, I think.

SH: We made 15 dollars in 15 minutes.

EH: Wow! Pretty good.

JH: Couldn't do that pickin' apples!

EH: Yeah! (laughs)

JH: And it wasn't nearly as much fun, pickin' apples. So we devised a plan to take that Volkswagen bus that Sam had, and just drive on down to Key West, Florida. Busk our way from here to there and back. And we did! And we took another friend who really wasn't a friend at the time—had we ever met Robbie at all?

SH: I don't know...

JH: There was 3 of us, me and Sam and this guy Robbie Gordon played the mandolin. We headed out in Sam's old Volkswagen bus and we would go stay in campgrounds, we would go to uh...parks and like—I know we did that in Savannah or Charleston, South Carolina. I remember being... might have been Charleston... college campuses, get these instruments out, play, we'd go to a phone booth—they used to have these things called phone booths...

EH: (laughs)

JH: ...little box, and a phone and a book, get the phone book out and look up the local vegetarian or natural foods restaurant and propose to them that we would come over there and play our music and they would feed us and that we would pass the hat and they, invariably said, "sounds like a good idea to us—bring it on." And we'd do that and get a good meal and...

EH: Great! Sounds fun.

JH: Worked our way all the way down to Key West, Florida.

SH: And come back in December or something like that. Went out to our local...

JH: That dog's gonna be good on that recording! (shutting door)

SH: That's Pip—she's deaf and blind so she just likes to be noticed.

JH: (laughs) Want to interview her? I can tell you what she's gonna say.

EH: I might have already!

SH: They, so it was... that was just the beginning of our musical career, general.

JH: Tell her what happened next because...

SH: Well then we came back and there's a resort outside of Berkeley Springs...

JH: There was... it's not there [anymore]

SH: Yeah, there was a resort and we went up there and just happened, the guy that was managing it at—the timing again was perfect. He was looking for traditional type of music to bring into the resort. So...

JH: Hammered dulcimer in particular because he had heard other people playing hammered dulcimer, right?

SH: I don't remember.

JH: Didn't Hickory Wind have a hammered dulcimer? Yeah.

SH: Yeah.

JH: Cause they had played up there. It was like he said, "Oh wow, I can't believe you guys are here, you're exactly who I'm looking for. So he hired us to play every Sunday...

SH: In the restaurant.

JH: In the restaurant for 2 or 3 hours.

SH: For a meal, drinks, and money. We went... "woohoo!"

JH: 75 dollars.

SH: Yeah!

JH: Every week. That's money! Compared to... none.

EH: Yeah!

SH: And that just, at that point I think we had already chosen the name "Critton Hollow" because of Galax and being in the contest. So that's when we became Critton Hollow String Band, in that era.

EH: So has this always been Critton Hollow that you've lived here (the hollow and road)?

SH: Yeah.

EH: Critton Owl Hollow.

SH: It's Critton Owl Hollow.

EH: Uh-huh.

SH: So we adopted that name and pursued tunes. Of course, on that trip to Florida too, we were just eating up tunes, learning tunes, wherever.

JH: Yeah, that's what we were doing, right.

SH: You know, people would come by here and they'd go away and we'd have some of their tunes and you know, and locally too, you know, so we were just evolving our repertoire wherever it came. We didn't do a lot of learning from recordings back then. It was pretty much from people with a little bit of recording.

JH: Well when you say recordings, I mean when I would go to these festivals and record...

SH: Right, I don't mean... I mean records.

JH: Right.

SH: Mmhm.

JH: Yeah, they were mostly from recordings that I would make at Galax or Mt. Airy. And I would have these tunes of mostly contemporaries playing.

SH: That's still my favorite—my preference, learning tunes directly from somebody, which actually, I believe I learned a lot of tunes from Joe in his endeavor of learning tunes. I'd hear them over and over again. So when I pick up the hammers to play, I pretty much know where the tune is going. I'd learn 'em a lot...

JH: It's called force feeding.

EH: (laughs) That's the best way—to have it in your head already.

SH: Yeah. Cause I can read music, but...

JH: She's quicker, she's quicker... I think she's just quicker musically than I am so when I would learn a tune off a tape, I would be "click click" back and forth, just getting it—how did that phrase go. How did that go together, you know? Note by note by piece by piece.

EH: Mmhm.

38:08

JH: And then I'd eventually have all of that to where I could actually play it, I knew what the, at least what I decided was the skeletal melody of this tune, and then I'd play it and play it and play it, and then force feed it to Sam! (laughs) And then at some point she had it too.

EH: Uh-huh.

SH: Right and that's the difference between Joe's musicality and mine. He's driven to learn music and I just like... like anything I do, I learn what I have to learn. (laughs).

JH: She can learn a tune while knitting!

SH: Yeah, you know, so, you know, he's willing to struggle to accomplish wonderful things. I'm willing to not struggle.

EH: (laughs)

JH: I'm glad you call the not struggling to have me do that to you.

SH: Yeah, it's you know... I know the jokes are, "Oh my God, you had to listen to him 8 or 10 hours a day?!" I just went about my business doing what I did and maybe I've complained about the dishes not getting washed by anybody here and there...

JH: I don't even remember that.

SH: Yeah, you're right, 'cause I never complain.

EH: (laughs)

JH: Don't get us started! (laughs)

EH: So when did you start raising sheep?

SH: That was about 25 years ago. And oh, why did I do that?

JH: They used to be goats.

SH: They used to be goats. Milk goats.

EH: They changed into sheep?

JH: Yeah.

EH: Wow.

SH: Turned into sheep!

JH: Best thing that ever happened to our fences.

EH: (laughs)

SH: It's true. Well I don't know!

JH: Yeah, how exactly did that happen?

SH: Well the short version is, a dear friend of mine for some reason thought I would really like to learn to spin. She gave me a drop spindle. Gave me a little lesson. I found a fleece from one of my neighbors but didn't know anything about handling it. Anyway, learned to spin and you know, I'm not sure.

JH: Who was it that gave you the drop spindle... Jackie, right?

SH: Jackie. So anyway, and she offered me a wheel too and I didn't take the wheel until I felt like it had a place in my home and wasn't going to be tucked away. So that just started evolving. The sheep came along uh... maybe someone had inherited somebody else's flock. So she offered me—I don't even know how I met her, but she offered me a Romney sheep that had lambed. So they were the first two.

JH: Do you remember their names?

SH: Cordelia and Johnny.

EH: (laughs)

JH: Johnny?

SH: Johnny!

JH: Really!

SH: Yeah! He was the old guy—his little weather...

JH: I thought he died...How long ago did he die?

SH: A long time ago, Joe! Everybody else is...well, we have what I call the old age home, they're born here and they die here. So we don't market them.

JH: We don't eat 'em. No we don't

SH: They're raised only for fleece. So they're a nice fleece breed. Then I made a connection... so I spun for a long time before I decided to take a class at Elkins to actually learn... learn about spinning. You know? I don't know, so mostly it was self-taught. And then I just... my business evolved.

EH: So were you knitting already?

SH: No. No. I, well I was spinning so much that in order to validate my time for spinning, like Joe was fiddling all the time and lived by playing music and making money, so I created a kit. A kit-to-knit is what it's called. And my company is Samspun. So the kit-to-knit was everything you need in a bag with a pattern to make this pattern, including the needle to sew it up with. So you could be traveling, get this kit. So, and I marketed that to Tamarack. A hundred kits they wanted! Can you imagine that?

EH: (laughs)

43:03

JH: Really?

SH: Yeah!

EH: And it was yarn that you had spun?

SH: And it was all handspun.

EH: Wow.

SH: Yeah. So.

JH: Did you provide them with a hundred kits?

SH: Yeah! Yep, yep, yep.

JH: Nice.

EH: Do you still do that?

SH: Nope. Well I evolved from kits to hats and scarves to sweaters. They marketed my sweaters for a while and they evolved to and I just let them go, I didn't pursue it because I couldn't afford the wholesale price. I wanted to be able to sell my product at what I thought was a fair price and in order to sell to them, I would have had to raise my price, which maybe they have the market—undoubtedly they must have the market, but if they're getting 150 dollars for a sweater and I'm getting 60, you know, and I've done ...

JH: Were they taking that high of a percentage?

SH: Well no, it was 50% so I was... I can't remember—I think I was marketing them myself for \$130 or \$129 something-- \$125 I think at the time, so I was only being paid somewhere near 60 dollars for each one, so...

EH: Yeah, yeah.

SH: So now my yarn is all produced with West Virginia wool, so either my flock or my friend in Morgantown's flock. I gather up the wool, wash it, blend it with mohair and send it to a spinnery where they custom spin yarn for my sweaters.

EH: Mmm. That's cool.

JH: Where do you get the mohair?

SH: Uh, from this wonderful place in Virginia. The mohair is not West Virginia. But I'm advertising 100% West Virginia **wool**.

JH: Ah!

EH: And where is the spinnery?

SH: The one I'm using now is in Pennsylvania and it's a family owned small spinnery. And I've gone all over the country, it's hard to find spinneries that can do the custom work with the long fiber. So the sheep we have are long fibered, 6, 7-inch long fiber. So there's this wonderful place in Taos, New Mexico. And they could deal with it and they were really good and it was a community. The idea that it was a community based company that hired local people. Anyway, that evolved and so did their quality of work. (laughs) So I ended up finding this place in Pennsylvania, up near Harrisburg, and it's just a small farm, they have sheep and, it's a nice little company. So I've been using them for the last 2 years.

EH: And is one of you also an artist?

SH: No, well our nephew is?

EH: Oh ok. And then the drawings on your albums or the website—there's some hand drawings?

SH: Yeah, those are a friend that's been—Kevin Kutz whose a wonderful artist. We can show you one of our big paintings that he has here.

EH: Oh, cool.

SH: Our band, many years ago. Yeah, so we try and use, we're not... we don't go often. Musically we did a few recordings with a record company—a record label where they paid the studio, studio time. But our best times have been right here in the house, producing records with our friend from Cape Breton. And a friend helped produce it. Yep. We like that a lot.

EH: So have you mostly been musicians and you've had the knitting business? Or yarn business.

SH: Yeah, I had a day job for a while to provide our family with health insurance. I worked at a friend's company—it was Washington Homeopathic Products. So I did all kinds of homeopathic stuff. And then I just decided it was time. We were old enough to not need the insurance

anymore. Health insurance, thanks to Medicaid. Medicare. So... too bad Obamacare wasn't around back then when we could have afforded it.

EH: And so you have twins?

SH: We have twins that are 28 now. Neither one plays music. Both of them have music in their brains that they can't deny. If they wanted to pick up an instrument today, they would have a whole bunch of tunes they could probably have in their fingertips without much trouble. Right, Joe?

JH: Yeah, we kinda force fed them too.

SH: They traveled with us all over the country and internationally to festivals and that's a great part of their childhood. I think they enjoyed. Cause they were also homeschooled until they were 13.

EH: Mmhm.

SH: So.

EH: So what do you—how have you seen traditional music—approach and I don't know, in general, how has that evolved from when you started playing to now?

SH: I... you know, it's a very controversial subject. We've never been, neither one of us has ever been trying to recreate anything. We just live it. So the music comes to us pretty much organically. (laughs) Passed on to us. We interpret it, our own way, we're not trying to change it, but in my mind, understanding that of course it changes. This is an example of an evolution of a melody. I do like to honor the music in the best way that it's presented. It's not that I'm trying to change it. So I heard this song, this tune on a Ry Cooder album years and years ago and I really loved it, I thought it was just so great. So in my normal way, I listened to it, put the record away and turned it off and learned this tune. It's called "Great Dreams from Heaven." And it was... Joseph Spence is credited with the melody. It's very recognizable but for people that know Joseph Spence and his music, I realize, I found out that no, it evolved a little differently in my brain when I started putting it to my hands.

JH: So you don't know what Ry Cooder might have done to...

SH: Change.

JH: To evolve it from Joseph Spence, but you do know that your version is distinctly difference from Ry Cooder's.

SH: Yes.

JH: Right.

EH: Mmhm.

SH: So I think that's what is happening—especially with the younger people that they're interpreting.... I mean younger than our peers. The next generation of people that are coming up, playing music. They can't not be influenced by music around them unless they are trying to recreate and mimic what was. And there are a lot of people that that's their valid approach to music. They want to make it exactly like Uncle Dave Macon made it. Charlie Poole made it. They want every lick to be the same, where I prefer to express the music that makes me feel good.

JH: It is a complicated topic because even in that idea of respecting it and going back to the sources, and I do respect that. There's a whole spectrum of your personal musicality and your respect for it, and some people can blend those things really perfectly. And contain all that and still have their own expressing and have that connection and respect and understanding of where it came from. And other people get, seems to me, get locked in so tight to... to recreating something that happened before that they don't seem to have any personal musicality. And for me personally, as much as I respect people that can put all that together, and do that, my brain just doesn't want to or doesn't retain all that information. I'm just interested in making music.

EH: Mmhm.

SH: And you have your own style of fiddling that someday somebody will probably study your style of fiddling (laughing), but you know, there's a distinct sound in the same way someone like Bruce that's a wonderful dynamic fiddle player that has a lot of those roots connected to what was, you can tell his fiddling. And Bruce, he's one of those people—well I don't want to put Bruce on a pedestal, but maybe he deserves to be there! (laughing) But he's one of those people that he will know the source, he'll know everything about it, the lineage, and yet he has his own distinct musicality that is so clearly him. You know, so I highly respect that, but just because—that's now what I do. Just because...

SH: I like to know if a tune's from Kentucky, or...

EH: Yeah.

SH: I like to know basically where it came from, I usually know where I learned it, but I don't need to know that it was from his grandfather's uncle that was passing through. You know, they're wonderful stories when I hear them, but like Joe said, it's not what I'm interested in either. Or learn... And that's probably where a lot of tunes came from!

JH: So how many people who get so tightly involved in reconstruction would take a tune from Ry Cooder like "Great Dreams from Heaven" and be able to love that tune and love that music and see the relationship of that to the other music that we're getting from old time fiddle music and say, that's all the same to me, I love that, that's a beautiful piece of music.

EH: Mmhm.

55:07

JH: Be able to take that piece of music. They won't find that, so... and I never want to get into any contention with anybody that wants to do it another way, or does it another way. And I can say that I think my brain just doesn't retain all that stuff! (laughs) And I don't care, that's fine! Maybe because I don't try hard enough!

EH: (laughs)

SH: (laughs)

JH: I don't want to!

SH: Now you're starting to sound like me—only learn what you have to when you have to!
(laughs)

JH: I mean my brother's also good at that. He's very distinct musician, but he knows the lineage and has the connection. Do you know about my brother?

EH: What's his name?

JH: Do you know I have a brother John Herrmann? He's in North Carolina?

EH: Oh, John Herrmann? I was mixing him up with John Herrod. I do know that name.

JH: He's been involved in a lot...

EH: Where in North Carolina?

JH: Asheville.

EH: Okay. Yeah. Okay.

SH: Different state.

EH: I think my friend Sally [Anne Morgan] may have played with him—she's in the Black Twig Pickers. She's a fiddler. Um, And what about like the Appalachian label? Do you consider yourselves West Virginians? How do you interact with this idea of Appalachia and Appalachian tradition?

SH: I feel really connected to it myself, I totally absorbed where I live. And a lot of the connection that I've made is through music. Appalachian is where I live, you know? I call it the foothills of the Appalachians, you know, around here? Um, and... I just... I don't know what else to say.

JH: Yeah, I mean we don't have that, again it's the same as the traditional music...when those people who have it through their family, and it just is that way, you know, and we don't have that, we can't have that, we aren't that. And locally, people love us. And we love them, but we're not part of them in the sense that—you know, take the Belfords or something, it's just people. So it's just, I don't know! It just is what it is, it's a new thing. It's new for them.

SH: So we've been here for over 40 years.

57:57

EH: Mmhm. Right.

SH: But because we weren't born here, we don't have the same credibility as other members of... I'd say this community we have a valid place, but as far as... it's just the way it is... it's just the way it is like he said.

EH: Yeah.

SH: And that's okay. I love it here. I love the people, the culture, so much about it. Of course there's things wherever you go that you don't appreciate, and you wish were a little better or different and that may be my own upbringing and you know, appreciation of recycling and things that I see... I don't want to change their lives here because I was born somewhere else, I chose to live here because I valued what they had to... what the area had to offer. Even if it's just a bunch of trees.

EH: (laughs)

JH: I think you just have to be confident in what you do, so we move here with confidence that we want to be here, we like it here and we don't want to change anybody and we want to be open and as long as we're open and extending our willingness to meet and love people, they kind of meet you on that level. They know that we're not part of the historical past of this area, era, area.

SH: But so many people have had to leave the area anyway, you know...

EH: Yeah.

SH: And you don't know how many people we meet all over the world, all over the country that have said, "you know, my dad grew up in West Virginia." Or "I used to live in West Virginia," "I was born in West Virginia." And um, there's... they still have that connection in their hearts, it's interesting.

EH: Mmhm. Yeah. I mean, it's more of... I don't understand state pride very much being a Hoosier, but it's very different being here. I don't feel like I have much of a, much pride for Indiana.

JH: So you sense that people here do have a lot of state pride?

EH: Mmhm. Yeah and I also think that—I always ask you know, how people negotiate or relate to place, but just personally I’m interested in it too because I’m very aware of the fact that I’m not from here and doing this kind of work. You know, I think there can be some complications, but there can be positives and negatives too. Um, of outsiders showing interest and... people realizing, “Oh people from outside are interested in these...” You know...

SH: Well...

EH: It’s positives and negatives.

JH: Yeah, yeah!

SH: Meeting Jeannie [Mozier] today, you’re going to get maybe see, hear that side of... cause in Morgan County, there’s a lot of that fighting, I have to say fighting, resistance. The best community gatherings where the outsiders and the insiders got together was the Roots Concert. The Roots Program. Why is that? Because it gathered in the local, so in other words, the local citizens did not have connection with the artists, and they thought the artists were taking over their town in general. “Oh, you can’t do this anymore,” and “What happened to the good old days when we...” But meanwhile the artists were bringing in a lot of tourists and adding this beautiful culture. Schools, you know programs in the schools. But getting them together... so they would never mingle the residents that have been there for generations would not mingle in arts programs that were open for everybody.

EH: Yeah.

SH: Until the Roots concert. The Roots Program had people from both—from all sides. And so you’ve got them into the Icehouse, this wonderful arts community. And that would be like, “Oh, now they’re here, they’ll see there’s nothing to be afraid of and there’s wonderful things that go on here. They still don’t come back on their own.”

JH: Yeah, I’m not sure if they’ve capitalized on that, it seems like there’d be a way to capitalize to find out more of what the local people—I mean there’s lots of young artists that do anything, you know?

SH: And there’s a better word than local.

EH: Yeah, right.

SH: Because I’m local, I feel local, I’ve been along... you know it’s the generational connection that I’m talking about—the people that were born and raised in an area. So of course, changes here, I’m gonna have the same reaction. You know when they started developing Hook’s Mountain and changed the name to Eagle Mountain?

EH: MMhm. I saw that sign, yeah.

SH: You know, the lights across there? You think and when they paved the hollow, the dirt road?

JH: (laughs) “You think that makes me happy?!” (laughs)

SH: Do you think I didn’t have a reaction to that? “Oh, it’s because of the resort down there, that’s why they had to pave the road.” Well, ultimately not having dust come up in your car and stuff in the summertime, it’s okay. You know, there are changes that are okay. And some of those changes that has happened in Morgan County, they are okay, but it’s hard to embrace them, I guess is the better word.

JH: See, I think music specifically helps to cross those barriers. Cause people are resistant.

EH: Yeah, I think that’s true.

JH: I’m sure it’s true.

SH: SO Jeanne will have some good insight on her take on that.

JH: Yeah, you could either be careful, or you might want to lead her in that direction. (laughs)

EH: Okay.

SH: Yeah, she can... might be really angry and cross at the resistance that she’s come across. But she’s worked really hard to bring prosperity to Berkeley Springs.

JH: She has. She is a major force for the town of Berkeley Springs. What it evolved from the 70s to...

1:05:03

EH: And then what about other musicians and artists in the area who I should talk to?

SH: Oh gosh, well let’s see. You should talk to Paul Roomsburg, who’s a musician. He’s been the forefront of keeping traditional music gatherings going.

JH: Yeah, now he’s a farmer and he’s been a school teacher, and I mean music is a major part of his life but just letting you know that... he’s over in Hampshire County, were you are right now, in case you didn’t know.

EH: I saw the sign.

SH: If you’re around on the 30th...

EH: I could come back—what’s the 30th?

SH: It's the last, the 35th? Pigtown Fling, which is a private party that he's had for years—he and his wife Lisa have hosted it, and there's... it's a gathering of... he started it mostly to get musicians together, so they have a stage and people get up and play all day, or in the evening actually, but there's jams all day, all night long, the best covered dish you'd ever want. And after 35 years, I mean it's a big production for their farm. They raise greenhouse and stuff.

JH: I'm just trying to think how this connects to what you're doing 'cause I'm not perfectly clear, but... you know, what is an artist? I mean he's truly inspired. His life is inspired by music, but he's not lived his life as an artist.

EH: That's fine. I mean, it's traditional culture...

JH: Oh yeah, it's traditional culture.

SH: And they artistry of their folk art...

JH: Oh yeah, absolutely.

SH: They have all these incredible folk art that they...

JH: They have a greenhouse.

SH: They make anything to hold a plant. You know, they'll get an old boot.

JH: Every year when we go, we go over to get our...

SH: Wheelbarrows turned over with seams planted in them...

JH: This year he had a ladder house—a house completely built out of wooden ladders.

EH: Wow.

JH: I mean it wasn't covered, but the roof was just like ladders going up and one down the middle and the walls were made out of ladders. I mean, it's art!

SH: So yeah, as far as artists, there are quite a number of artists in Hampshire County. But Paul is as far as the music in Hampshire County, he will credit Joe, he'll include me but it's really Joe because he's influenced so many other musicians in Hampshire County. But he's got something called the cabin—he and his dad bought this old cabin—log cabin, and it's a community gathering place, they call it the cabin jam. No electric.

EH: Okay.

SH: So it's no... just...

JH: Woodstoves, kerosene lanterns.

SH: And the jams happen year round, everyone can call a jam and you might have anywhere from 8 people to 30.

EH: Cool.

SH: Of all musicians from all over.

JH: It's a healthy old-time music scene.

EH: Okay. Mmhm.

SH: And he's a multigenerational resident—he and his wife both are.

JH: Yep, Paul Roomsburg.

SH: And he can lead you down other paths too.

EH: Okay.

1:08:50

SH: As far as artists in Berkeley Springs... phew.

EH: And also it's someone tied to a traditional lineage or place-based lineage, so you know, there's so many potters, but it would be someone whose doing a specific tradition...

SH: Right! That's what I just started....

EH: Yeah.

SH: I wonder if Glenn Orr would be, but he's not, he's... most of the artists in Berkeley Springs are transplants.

EH: Yeah. And transplants are fine, but it can be a fine line sort of like a fine arts potter vs. someone who's doing these lines from other traditions.

SH: Robin Pancake. Yeah, Robin Pancake. In Hampshire County.

JH: Who's that?

SH: She's an artist, she does glass, and we've got a little thing in the window. She does a lot of different things.

JH: The name's familiar.

SH: Right, well Ann Pancake is her daughter.

EH: Oh! Okay.

SH: Do you know Ann Pancake?

EH: The writer? Yeah.

SH: Yeah. We met her out in Seattle.

EH: Oh! Cool. Does she live in Seattle?

SH: Yeah.

EH: Oh, okay.

JH: Yeah, we just happened to be staying right across the street from her!

SH: With friends.

EH: Oh, that's funny.

SH: I'm not sure who her... I think Robin is her mom. But, so and Barbara Pancake. She was a dulcimer student of mine years ago.

EH: Oh wow.

SH: But she's a.... Robin Pancake would be her.... I think Barb might be gone now.

EH: Okay.

SH: But there's Pancake Farms (laughs)

EH: Well is there anything else you want to add?

SH: Oh, I think I've blathered quite enough!

JH: Blathered! (laughs)

EH: Okay. I was wondering if you guys might play one? One or two?

SH: Well, we could sing something I guess, or you might fiddle.

EH: I might actually run to the restroom, but.

JH: You don't want to play your dulcimer? You want to use the restroom, you said?

EH: Yeah.

1:10:56

END OF TAPE

