

Benjamin (Benny) D. Snyder

Where: The Folly (Snyder's home and workplace)

Date: 3/28/2018

Location: Shepherdstown, WV

Interviewer: Emily Hilliard

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Benjamin (Benny) D. Snyder

Benny Snyder, 60, is a miniatures maker, woodcarver, and poultry farmer living at The Folly farm outside of Shepherdstown, WV. He makes miniatures on a 1/12th dollhouse scale of objects in his environment such as wheelbarrows, tools, scaffolding, tool sheds, park benches, watering cans, and more. He is a native of Weirton, WV and a U.S. Army veteran.

Benny Snyder Interview 3.28.18

BS: Benny Snyder

EH: Emily Hilliard

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Benny is explaining his miniatures

BS: ... price of stuff like that before, but as far as...

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BS: ...as far as any regular artwork like that, I don't seem to have it. I used to like to watch Bob Ross

EH: Oh yeah.

BS: On public television. It's all technique. I just never, really never got into that. I...

EH: Yeah.

BS: This here [miniature log cabin], I'll take the lid off it so... see my little weathervane?

EH: Yep.

BS: (laughs)

EH: (laughs)

BS: Let's see the side there. So I made... I made the hinges for this and door handles. This is all nailed together with straight pins. It's all framed and nailed together. There's 12, 1500 straight pins in here. I cut 'em off with an old pair of snips and then either press 'em in there or tap 'em in with a little hammer. I made the windows out of a little piece of Mylar and... so yeah, this was fun.

EH: So this is a little workshop.

BS: Little...

EH: Cabin workshop.

BS: Little workshop, toolshed. I got a little hand truck. I made these wheels out of little rubber washers. I use a little miniature lathe and a little miniature milling machine to do some of this stuff so I can make these hubs.

EH: Okay. So is that cast too?

BS: No, this is all just soldered together.

EH: Okay.

BS: This is made out of bass. And this wheelbarrow—this is...the bottom is one piece and then there's a solder joint right here. And you can see where I soldered the bottom into it. And I soldered a piece of copper wire around the edge to make the roll. And once I got that soldered together and then I made the wheel and this... made all these pieces. This is all riveted together. See where I tapped the rivets? I just get it on a little anvil and I put the piece of brass in a drill chuck and put the one rivet head on one end and put it together and set it up on something and then I can tap on this and do the other side so it's all riveted together.

EH: You can't even see the copper wire—it looks like once piece.

BS: Yeah, I had to file it. And you can see a little bit where the solder joint was at. But yeah, I took sandpaper and stuff like that and just cleaned it up and got it so it'll blend together. That's the only place you can really see it real good. 'Cause I had to put a seam right there—see where it's soldered together?

EH: Oh yeah.

BS: And I had a wooden block that I used for a form to do this. And then I just sat it down flat and then put the copper wire on there and solder it a little bit at a time. And so yeah, it's turned out pretty cool. There's a little digging iron. This thing [miniature barbeque pit stone chimney]—I made these just fiddling around. I got couple stones come off it. This all mortared together with cement and I might make a few more of these.

EH: So this is an outdoor chimney?

BS: Like a barbeque pit.

EH: Yeah.

BS: But what's cool is, I can put incense in here and light it and then the smoke'll come out the chimney. So that worked out pretty neat. See and then I got a little, little buzz saw there. And just anything that I... that I can think of to make miniatures of. And then I measure... I get, I get like a real wheelbarrow, and I'll measure it and then scale it down and round it off to the 16th of an inch to get it close enough. And most of the time it works out pretty good. And I got my little ladder here. And this isn't finished yet either, cause I've got to, I've got to trim these off and go ahead and hammer the ends off 'em to get 'em in there. It's all stuck in there at the moment. But yeah, this'll... it'll go up and down... I don't have, I don't have the springs on it or anything.

EH: So you measured a real ladder to get the scale?

BS: Mhm. Yeah. And I just, just go from there.

EH: And... let's look at your tools.

BS: Some of this stuff is relatively simple—this is real simple to do. Just a little piece of wood and just glued together. Stuff like this is, it didn't take long to make. This, this was a challenge (coughs) because I had to solder all this together without getting it so hot that it falls apart. And I had to get the wheels just at the right height so it'll sit properly.

5:49

So that took a little bit of doing to get that.

EH: And then why don't you talk me through the tools for the toolbox.

BS: Okay. This little, little handsaw is just... see I even put little teeth on it. And this is riveted on there.

EH: (laughs) Uh-huh.

BS: And this is just made out of a piece of brass, this here is a little brace and bit. Actually I made this piece and this piece. And then I made my wood handle and then drilled a hole in it and these are just stuck in thee and put the thing on the end.

EH: And what would you call that?

BS: It's a brace and bit—it's like a hand drill.

EH: Oh yeah.

BS: And then the chisels, I just made the little handles with the wood, drilled the hole, just made these pieces out of brass. Same way with this—a little draw knife. It's got my little, little edge on it. This is all just made out of brass. This is cast—this is bronze. So I cast it—a bunch of these. This is cast. See that has a slightly different color than the brass. That's cast, this is cast...

EH: The anvil?

BS: Mmhm.

EH: What about the little bench sides?

BS: This here...those are made out of brass and I get 'em on a, I get 'em on a thing, it's called a... it's a little V, a little block you screw down with a notch in it, and I take a jeweler saw—so this was made out of just a little flat piece of brass and I lay it flat and I draw my pattern on there and I cut all that out with a jewelers saw. It's like a wee little... I'll show you what a jeweler's saw... I'll be right back.

EH: Okay.

8:20

BS: So yeah, I take a saw like this and I have a block that... there's a tapered block that I screw down—it has a notch in it so I can lay a piece on there and it gives me room to cut. And then I... I'll take, I get my pattern drawn on there, and I just draw a hole where each one of these sections is, and then I take the saw blade loose and stick it down through the hole and tighten it back up and then I can move the thing around and saw that all out. So it takes a while to do this too. And then a couple pieces here for the—there's one more board that goes here, and those are soldered on there. But the rest of it's just cut out.

And so this is another one of the things that I never, never quite got to finish 'cause I started getting into a poultry operation here and that takes the most of my time anymore.

EH: Ah yeah.

BS: Then I got some other, some more tools in here.

EH: Oh cool.

BS: And these are cast and I just make the handles. Mmhm.

EH: The pitchfork?

BS: Yeah, this was pretty tough to make this because I had to, I had to, it was difficult to cast, because you're making a mold out of this without these being all out of whack was a little difficult but, and then I just put the handle in that. That handle's not even riveted on there yet. Sometimes, some of 'em are actually riveted on. Little hoe—see I got a rivet in that one. These are riveted on.

EH: You must have good... a good steady hand.

BS: Yeah, mmhm. And you know, these were—this was, I got that soldered on there, and then I got this little rim soldered on here. And this was just hammered out on a—piece of wood. Get that shape.

EH: So that's the copper pots here?

BS: Yeah. And this is just little pieces of copper that somewhere here there's a solder joint right here, and then the bottom of it's soldered on and I'll just take sandpaper and clean it off, or real small files and clean it off and make the solder joint disappear. Same way with this one. See, there's my solder joint and then where I put the bottom on.

EH: You said everything's at a 1/12th scale?

BS: 1/12th scale. That's a standard dollhouse scale. Except for a few of these other things—like this here is like a quarter scale.

EH: Watering can?

BS: Mmhm. The same way with these. See this isn't finished. This was like a woodworker's vice. I still have to put the lead screw in it and all that. I have these in here to keep everything lined up. But this is all milled out on a milling machine.

EH: Um...

BS: So it takes some time. And this is really complicated. All these...

EH: What would you call this?

BS: This is a cross-feed vice—like what you have on a drill press so you can move the, you can move this thing that way and you can move this one that way, and you can go back and forth so you can line your bit up to do your drilling. And, but this was complicated because I had to make all the—this was all milled out, had to do all this, and then all my... the... I'm trying to think of the name of it, but all this was milled out, so I had to make this piece, had to make these pieces, and had to make the, had to mill all that out, so there's one, two, three, there's a whole bunch of pieces in this thing. And then I had to do all the... this is just a brass screw that I use for the, for my lead screws.

EH: And you said—well, would you say it's all inspired by your own work?

BS: Um... yeah, I just, I just fiddling around and once I, after I did this and I got interested in doing miniatures, and decided to really go like a regular doll house scale, and just something to... well, we used to do museum work here.

EH: Okay.

BS: We used to do museum exhibits. That's where I had access to the tools and um, and ideas and ways to do things to get into doing this. If I had my way I'd just do stuff like this all the time.

EH: Right, yeah.

14:09

BS: I haven't had time to do any of this for quite a while. Cause now I'm into chickens and ducks and turkeys and everything else. And it's a lot of work.

EH: Yeah, I'm sure!

BS: And it's difficult, you know, people like it, but nobody wants to pay what it actually takes to make this stuff.

EH: Right.

BS: Like this here, I just... I'd have to sell this for 400 dollars. Cause I've got 40 some hours in that.

EH: In the wheelbarrow.

BS: Yeah. And that's this thing here—that was probably a month to make that.

EH: Yeah, that looks amazing. So that's a... wait, you said that's a drill press?

BS: Drill press vice.

EH: Vice, okay, so you can hold things to drill.

BS: Yeah, so it goes on the drill press and you bolt it down and then you put your, whatever you're working on in there, instead of having to move it around and try to get it centered, you get it clamped on and then you can move this and get it lined up perfectly, 'cause it'll go back and forth this way and back and forth that way.

EH: Yeah.

BS: They call it cross-feed vice. And then I started making this—this is... this is just little solid pieces of brass. I was making a set of oxyacetylene tanks and I was gonna use this wire. I'd take a, take the copper wire out of this and I was gonna use that for my hoses.

EH: (laughs)

BS: And see here—there's little regulators and little gauges.

EH: Oh wow.

BS: So that still has to be soldered together. There's a little, there's a little torch handle and a little piece of copper in there for the tip. Kind hard to see it. I'll dump it out of here so you can see.

16:30

So there would be my...there's my torch handle and... oh that's still in there. And that was the little tiny piece of copper wire that would be for the tip of the torch, and I still have to make a little thing to put the little knobs on it. And then these are made up for the gauges. I think I got holes drilled in 'em already. And then we'll go—those will go on here whenever I get—I'd have to cut these, trim these off, 'cause these are just stuck in there right now. Here's a couple that have been—they're like ready to go. And then those'll go in there, and fitting where it goes on to the tank and then I'll have to drill this out and put a little screw in there, so some of this is really very difficult to do. And these are milled out on a milling machine. See the little...it's shaped just like a regular regulator on a torch rig. And so yeah, it's a lot of fun but... and a lot of time.

EH: Yeah, I'm sure! Maybe we can sit down and I can do an... you know, have you introduce yourself and...

BS: Sure.

EH: Talk about your background.

BS: Alright. Just back in here...

EH: And I'll see if I can—I have one battery left.

18:25

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BS: And then he got into doing the museum work and that's...we're, we went all over the country.

EH: Oh really? Doing models?

BS: We'd do big jobs. We'd load up a box truck and roll out of here with all the equipment and go on site and be there for months sometimes.

EH: Wow. So you would always do miniatures?

BS: No, I just did the casting operation for the museum operation then, which was making hardware for the mounting systems. We made our own hardware, so I was a part of the home base and everybody else would go on the road and go on site, and we'd ship—I'd cast the hardware and then finish it and ship it to 'em.

EH: I see.

BS: As they needed it. And they'd tell me what they needed and I'd cast it. I ran a wax shop—make wax models, that way we could make a whole bunch of 'em at one time. That's the reason that we'd cast 'em instead of makin' em. We'd make one—make one master, and then use it to make a mold. And we cut the mold open and then strap it back together and get a wax pot and inject wax into it. Then open it up and then that way we could get a whole bunch of wax models, and then we'd mount them all up so that they can be put in a mold—get that all set, and then we'd mix up plaster and pour in there and let that harden, and then we melt the wax out and put 'em in a real hot oven to get to burn up all the dye and any residue and then we'd take it in there—we have a centrifuge in there, we'd take it in there and it has—it would have the little clay crucible with a counterweight on it. We'd set the mold there and put the, put the little bronze beads in there, melt it with a torch and get it all clean and ready to go and then, then it had a pin in it—you'd wind it up, and then once you're ready to cast it, you slide the crucible—has a little hole in the end so the molten metal can come out of it. It lines up with the hole where you're casting into the mold. Then when you let this thing loose, it spins around and it throws the metal up in there and the centrifugal force keeps the metal in there until it cools off enough that it starts to get solid. Then take 'em out and let it cool off and bust 'em open and we have our cast pieces.

EH: Ah ok.

BS: And I could do a certain amount of weight in each one. So that way we can make a whole lot of pieces at once. And, so it was an interesting process. But I ended up just working here—I was working for a packing plant doing printing—making printing plates and then I lost that job—I got laid off and so I'd been offered a job here one time before and had turned it down because I was already working somewhere else, so when that left I come here and I told the guy, well if he's still got an opening here, then I'm ready, so that's how I ended up here. I been here, gee, probably almost 20 years now.

EH: Wow.

BS: We stopped doing museum work, oh 5, 6 years ago because Bradley and Carol—their children had children, they have grandkids, and they'd be on the road 9 months out of the year, and they got tired of traveling all the time. And so now, and then once the, once we got out of that we've been just freelancing. I was fiddling around with several ideas—I was making some copper jewelry for a while. I managed to sell a little bit of it. It's hard to make a living doing stuff like that. Nowadays I'm just a poultry farmer and I'm trying to get an egg operation going. And I'm retired on a social security disability. I hurt my back years ago and so I have some physical problems and things that I used to do that I can't do anymore, like climbing ladders and getting on scaffold and sometimes I can lose my balance and fall down and...

EH: That's not good.

BS: No! (laughs) So I just, you know, and I do stuff around here in the summer. Mow grass, and I process a lot of this wood and just try to keep... and taking care of the birds.

EH: Yeah, yeah. Well, why don't you introduce yourself and tell me your name and when you were born and where you were born.

BS: Okay. My name's Benjamin D. Snyder—Benjamin David Snyder and I am 60 years old. I'll be 61 in May. And I was born in Weirton at the Weirton General Hospital in 1957. I went to school at Colliers Elementary School and then went to Follansbee Middle School and Brooke High School in Brooke County. And then right after high school I went in the army for a while. I was in the army for 5 years. Actually I did a three-year enlistment. I was, I went in the army—I was only 19 years old. That was in '76. And I did 3 years and then I re-enlisted for 4 more years and then I had some issues and got disgusted and I ended up getting kicked out so I pulled 2 years of my enlistment and then they threw me out. If I had been a little older, I could have had a little different... I could have handled things a little differently. I had... I had some legitimate issues but anyway, I got out of there. And I actually went to school on VA benefits for a while. And for refrigeration and heating, which was at West Virginia Northern Community College. And I worked in that field for a while doing automotive air conditioning and stuff but then, all the regulation stuff started coming out about the Freon and the refrigerants and you know, it started being more and more difficult to be in that line of work. And so I did construction work for a while. I did a lot of different things just over the years. For a while I worked for people building houses and town houses down in, down in Loudon County and Fairfax County and then I got out of that. And then I went to work for a, a company doing heating and air conditioning, putting up duct work. I did that for a couple years, then I went to this place to do the printing plates—I worked, in between I worked on cars for a while as a mechanic. I worked at several auto shops. I worked at Montgomery Wards and Kmart and a couple other shops. Back whenever cars were—you could actually work on 'em even.

EH: (laughs) Right.

BS: Nowadays you can't do anything practically but hook a computer to 'em.

EH: Yeah.

8:09

EH: Did you always—were you always interested in making things?

BS: My dad worked in the steel mill in Weirton Steel and he was—he was real good at... he did machine work in his basement and stuff whenever I was a kid. And so he was always real good with his hands. He built some walnut cabinets and stuff like that and he did mechanical work—he was pretty well educated. He didn't have—he couldn't get any real good position in the steel mill because he didn't have a high school diploma. Because he had an illness whenever he was a young kid and spent time in the hospital and so he never got to graduate from high school. So he could have been a die maker in the steel mill but he couldn't because he didn't have this high school diploma. So he was capable of a lot more than, than you know, he just couldn't—they just wouldn't let him into that position because of his education, but he was a pretty sharp character. And I learned a lot of stuff from him, because I tooled around with him when I was a kid a lot—working on cars and stuff like that. He used to come home from work and go down in the basement and he had a couple metal lathes down there and he knew how to weld and so, but he did repair work for people and things—welding and machine work and so I, when I was a young kid, I'd watch him run the lathe for—he'd work sometimes til 10- or 11 clock at night doing machine work. And he did a lot of, he did a lot of stuff. He built his own house pretty much by himself. And so he was a pretty accomplished man back in the day, but he has always had a handicap—he had a bad hip—he had this osteomyelitis, which is an infection of the bone marrow and by the time you know, back then in the 40s, at that time, by the time they found out what actually was wrong with him, there was nothing left of his hip. So he had like 3 artificial hips over the years and finally got where he just couldn't even walk anymore and he ended up having to go to a, a care, a care home. And he's not with us anymore.

My mom was just a housewife. She never worked. I have 3 sisters—one older and two younger, and my mother just never—she never worked. She never had a job that I ever knew. Except before they were married. She was perfectly content with just being a housewife and that's all she did. She got up early in the morning and made his, made my dad's lunch and breakfast, got him off to work, got us up, got our breakfast and our lunch packed and got us off to school every day. And never complained. That's just what she wanted to do—she wasn't interested in anything else. That suited her fine and her kitchen was her laboratory. And she was a real good cook and knew how to bake and on holidays like Christmas and Thanksgiving, she'd go to work in the kitchen. She'd bake like a dozen pies and you know, 20 dozen cookies and all kinds of stuff, so it was a big deal. So we lived kinda out, out in the country a little bit, outside of Colliers. My dad had about oh, 3 and a half acres of property.

EH: What are some of the first things you remember making yourself?

BS: Oh lord. Let's see here. When I was, when I was I guess I must have been oh 14 years old... before then I didn't really, I didn't really quite have it together enough to really make anything. Then when I was about 14—I liked to read in Popular Mechanics and my dad had a subscription to it and I was always reading 'em and I found a blueprint in there for a dragster bicycle that was made out of conduit. And it was a bicycle that you sat in and the pedals were out in front of you.

EH: Okay, mmhm.

BS: You know, so we got in the basement and we drew the lines in the concrete floor with a piece of chalk, and then made a little bender so we could bend the conduit and we bent it a little bit and got it mashed up and welded it all together and that was about the first real serious project that I got into. Then by that time I started getting interested in the cars and then after I got out of the army I, you know, I got into building this car. Had my little hot rod—I was 20 years old and I was into building the hot rod. I

fiddled with that for a while and it just slowly started doing this and that. Sometimes it was just, just a way of just whatever I could... whatever kind of job I could find. My first job, actually right out of high school was, was throwing shingles on roofs. And I did that for a while and then I worked in a stamping mill for a while—made these little steel shelves? And I ran a press and so I just kinda went from one thing to another and ended up having a pretty long resume of different things that I had done over the years. Then I just got to a certain point where I was like—I'll try anything once! (laughs)

EH: Right! (laughs)

BS: And... but really—I really broke into doing a lot of this when I came to work for Bradley because doing the museum work, we had a whole lot of different mediums of stuff that you know, fabrics, glues, paints, metal, wood. You know, a whole lot of different mediums and different things. You know, we always had side projects. There's a few of 'em over there that Bradley had done. We had done... if you want to look at this board this is something...

EH: Sure, yeah.

15:19

BS: These were... this was a fountain...

EH: Oh, cool.

BS: ...that was modeled after these lotus plants.

EH: Wow.

BS: And then water would come out of there. It was made out of some of this. There's a picture of it right there.

EH: Oh wow, it's beautiful.

BS: So that was done here. And there's a bunch of other stuff that Bradley used to do. We did a good bit of ironwork. I've made a couple, I've made a couple of, a couple signs for people downtown here, which... there's a clown that Bradley made. It's for Barnum and Bailey corporate office and it's holding up a glass tabletop.

EH: Oh yeah.

BS: That was made out of wood and carved and painted. There's our giant catfish and a 9-foot tall marionette.

EH: And what's that for?

BS: These are for a children's theater that we do in the summertime. And we've got outdoor, we've got a little outdoor theatre down here and this timber frame structure and these marionettes are 9-foot tall and somebody stands up here and operates 'em. It takes 3 people to operate them. And the heads—Bradley made the heads—they have radio control servers in 'em so that the eyes open and close, the eyelids, and the eyes can move back and forth and the jaw goes up and down and then we have somebody operating the thing, so this is all—that was for the children's theatre. And a bunch of kids come here and they write their own skits, they come here for about every day for about a week. They make their own props and costumes, they wrote their own skits and they get it all mapped out, and then we have show time. And

that's a giant catfish that is actually hanging in the other room over there—I'll show it to you before you go. And just... a whole bunch of different stuff.

EH: Yeah. You have to be very versatile.

BS: Just... somebody comes here and says Bradley, can we do this? Yeah, we can do that.

EH: Wow.

BS: Is this yours?

EH: Oh yeah, my earbuds.

BS: So it's like catching a bug.

EH: Yeah, right.

BS: And then I just get into more and more things and then, I dunno, Imma try this, Imma try that.

EH: So when did you start on that miniature scene?

BS: Oh I think it's been 3 or 4 years ago that I was—that was about the last time that I was doing any of that. And then some of this other stuff, you know, like that wooden lock in there. The operating wooden lock—I got that out of a book.

EH: Yeah.

BS: Cause I got interested in some of the [wood] carving and stuff. It started out when I made that moon of the man in the moon thing, that was a wedge out of a maple tree that we had to cut down. And I was just looking at it, and it was a wedge and it looks like a moon—I just started carving on it. And it just... just one thing and then another. You know, I'd get an idea in my head, and I'd be like wow, let's see if I can do this. Or not!

EH: (laughs)

BS: And most times—we've had a couple things that didn't work out, but most of the time we—something we didn't know what to do, we'd do the research and figure out how to do it, and so yeah, it's been quite an experience, but it really all hinged on coming to work here because that really, it just put ideas in my head, just right and left, cause there was always, there was always other projects going on. We had done a bunch of iron railings and just all kind of stuff over the years. We had a penny carnival here one time—that's what that thing is. So we've done all kind of stuff here. We've had music events here, theatre, we had a grill-off here one time, one time we had penny carnival—we had a woman being a fortune teller. We built this great big um box with Plexiglas around the front of it. We caught like 6 big old black snakes and we put 'em in there so that the fortune teller—she was all dressed up and she sat in this little tent behind this thing with these snakes in it.

EH: Whoa.

BS: And me and my friend, we got in there and we painted all this vegetation stuff on the back side of it and had doors on the back so we could get in there, and we put all these snakes in there—there was a couple great big ones and a few smaller ones. And then we had a little shooting range with little slingshots, shooting at targets, and we shot dog food, kibble. And just... we had a Rube Goldberg like a miniature golf thing and just all kind of stuff we dreamed up. And um we actually had, we had done these um, we had done these carnival, carnival things that we etched—that were etched. We made a, made a

little, a piece of, of paper that would use an inkjet printer and print the design and it would iron the design on to, on to a piece of brass and then we'd put it in this copper sulfate with a battery charger and etch and I think there's one over here—I'll grab one to show you (walks away).

EH: Okay.

22:00

BS: So we did...we made these things for that. And—can't open 'em up! (shuffles through bag) So there's a...

EH: Oh, cool!

BS: So that was etched.

EH: That was 2011?

BS: Yeah, must have been. And we have—there was some other ones we made. There's some in here. And they're smaller Folly. That's the timber frame that we have down here, that we have our events in. We had one other one that we did, but I don't see one in here, but... we called it a round toit... it was a round little thing that was etched and it said toit on it. And then when somebody says "I'll do it when I get around to it, we can give it to them and say, "there you go, you got a round toit!"

EH: (laughs)

BS: So it's been (laughs), it's been quite a trip being in this place.

EH: So how did you get into jigsaw puzzle work?

BS: I just... I was looking in these, looking for projects, and I got interested in doing a little bit of the carving and I just—I ordered a couple books, scroll saw books and got a few patterns out of it, and then I did a few of them. I have a few other ones that I... a whole bunch of patterns and then I... I have that little wooden car over there—I got some books on that, and I have some other patterns for ones I've never made—a little stern wheel boat, a little airplane. I did that for a while and then I, then I do something else. It's been—there's been so much stuff that it'd take me a while to remember it all anymore. (laughs)

EH: (laughs) Right, right. So what do you hope to do with the miniature? Like what are you gonna do next and what's your ultimate...

BS: Right now I don't know if I have time to do it anymore. You know, I spent a lot of time doing that, but like I say, I have gone to a couple shows and set this stuff out, but it's really difficult to... it's... you can't... it just takes so much time to do all that that it's hard to, like I say, people don't want to pay what it actually—so you could go broke, just spend more time making it than you could possibly get out of it.

EH: Yeah.

BS: I got into the poultry thing and that takes most of my time anymore.

EH: You must be patient...

BS: Yeah.

EH: ...to work on those little intricate...

BS: Yes, I have a pretty fair amount of patience.

EH: (laughs) Wish I did.

BS: I've learned that over the years. I used to be very impatient. And then I realized that that's not—that doesn't work for me. So I've learned that here too. Mostly being patient, taking my time. Yeah, it's been quite an experience.

EH: So the miniatures are just something you like to do?

BS: Yeah. I'd do it more now if I had the time. And I may get back to it at some point, but I have other projects that I'm working on that... I've got... I'm working on a kitchen in here—trying to get the kitchen set up.

EH: Not a miniature kitchen?

BS: No (laughs), a real kitchen. And egg operation and just trying to get that going and building pens for the birds. Chicken coop I've got out here was in Carol's sister's property a couple miles outside Shepherdstown. She had to get rid of it for her insurance. It wasn't being used anymore. It was on the property when she got it. I was talking to a friend of mine and he said, yeah she's gotta get rid of this chicken coop. I said, well you know, how big is it? What kind of shape is it in? 'Cause we had a chicken coop up here years ago but it caught on fire and broke down. So he went back there and looked and he said oh, that thing's in pretty good shape and it's got real nice heavy wire on it and everything. So I talked to her and I said, and I went over there and I tore it all apart, I went on the roof, took the tin off, took it all apart and then my friend, we loaded it onto a flat trailer and I brought it over here and put it all back together. And it's now there and a couple years ago I just added that chicken yard on to it and then I got a couple other pens I built out here for turkeys and ducks.

EH: How many birds do you have?

BS: Oh, I got about 30 chickens and about 7 turkeys and about 18 ducks. Actually we butchered a couple turkeys here recently—a couple at Thanksgiving and we had, we had one of 'em for Thanksgiving dinner.

EH: How was it?

BS: Oh, it was great.

EH: Yeah, I bet.

BS: Because they're mostly free-range. I have 'em locked up right now but um whenever the weather's good, I let 'em out—they go back in there in the evening, same thing with the rest of 'em, so they run around here all over the place. Eat all the bugs and everything. So it makes really good eggs. I'll give you a dozen eggs to take with you.

EH: I'd love that.

BS: Oh yeah, they're good too.

EH: Thank you!

BS: They're not like grocery store eggs.

EH: Yeah, they're really bright yolk?

BS: Oh, bright yolk and really white whites and a little harder to crack open.

EH: Yep, yeah.

BS: But there's no chemical fertilizers and no antibiotic, no nothing like that. It's all totally natural. And I let the chickens out every morning and lock 'em up at night.

EH: Nice.

BS: So I'm working on having more.

EH: Yeah.

BS: Had some predator problems. I had a fox coming around here and just yesterday I had a dog came around here and killed some chickens, so somebody's dog from around here, or a couple dogs that looked like a Chow mix or something. And...

EH: Well maybe I can take some pictures of your work and I might even take a little video of you talking through it briefly like you did already. But is there anything else you want to add?

BS: Ah... I think that pretty much covers it. I mean, there's... like I say there's so much stuff that I've done here that it's stuff that I've done—projects that Bradley had come up with and he's say here, this is a project for you. And then he'd have other stuff he was working on, like making them signs. I've had several signs for businesses downtown which are no longer there—it's a shame. But I made signs that were made out of that big slab of cedar—it was all carved out. I made one—it was modeled after their business card. And then I scaled it up and drew it on there and carved it out and had to do the same thing on both sides and the next sign I made I did the same thing, but I put gold leaf on part of it. So I got a little bit of experience doing that. So that was nice, but both them businesses are gone—one of them changed their name and that sign disappeared and the other one—the girl stayed in business for a while and then she left. We have a few other signs—we have a few other signs downtown. The Mellow Moods, which just changed hands—we had made the signs for that and we had made the railings that are there.

EH: Was that a wooden sign? I'm trying to remember.

BS: Uh, it's copper—some copper sheet and some wood and an iron frame. And I made, I made a hanger for that and I made an iron hanger for that store called Refinements—it has a peacock on the sign. So I did the iron part of that. And so... we worked on the railings on some of the gate and railings over here at the church over by the post office. And oh, it's just—I had some neighbors that used to be over here, and I made a—a modified horse gate.

EH: (sneezes)

BS: Bless you.

EH: Thank you.

BS: I modified a horse gate for them and hung it up over there. SO it's just been a roller coaster.

EH: Yeah, I bet there's a lot of ironwork here in the historic town.

BS: Yeah, uh-huh. We've done tons of railings. There's railings clear down towards DC that we've made and a few other places around here. Anything that was odd or something like that and people would get a hold of Bradley—can you do this? Can you do that? Sometimes he'd say, yeah, we can do that. And then he'd say, Man! How in the heck are we gonna do this? I have no idea how to do this! And we'd just figure—see if we could figure it out.

EH: Cool. Well thank you so much.

BS: You're welcome. It's been a pleasure. I wasn't sure really what to expect.

EH: (laughs) Yeah, no one ever does.

BS: Cause I don't usually get interviewed or stuff like that.

EH: Right.

BS: Yeah, this is a first for me.

EH: Cool! (laughs)

BS: (laughs)

EH: Well I don't think I've interviewed a miniature maker before. So a first for me too.

BS: There's a lot, there's people around here...

32:44

END OF TAPE