Fred James Interview
with Abby Huggins
Prestonsburg, Kentucky
August 24, 2017

00:02 Abby Huggins: This is Abby Huggins. I'm in Prestonsburg, Kentucky on the porch of Fred James. And it is Thursday, August 24th, 2017. Fred, can you introduce yourself?

00:18 Fred James: Thank you. I'm glad that you're here. It's a beautiful day in downtown Appalachia. Fred James. I'm retired. I worked for city and state government for forty years. Forty-three years. And just retired a year or so ago and enjoying it immensely. But, during that period of time, I had the distinction, honor, distinct honor to be able to meet people in the folk art community. So, right now, we're sitting on the front porch on the swing. [laughs]

00:59 AH: Can you start by telling me a little bit about where you were raised and who your people are?

01:05 FJ: Yes, I'll go back a generation or two because it is important to our family. My grandfather was one of ten children born on John's Creek in Lower Pike County. And he migrated to Prestonsburg and later became a lawyer here in Prestonsburg and raised a family. And my father and his sister participated in a lot of the social events and things here in town. But I earned a master's degree. I went to high school and college here. But I earned a master's degree in Public Administration at Eastern Kentucky University. Where just before that, I met a little girl from Allen, Kentucky named Linda Davis and we married and went to college together and we raised two boys together and all of our three families live in this immediate area.

02:09 AH: Well, earlier you were talking about some generations past including your aunt Edith.

02:18 FJ: Yes, I became involved in history here in Prestonsburg. I did receive a history degree from Eastern as well as a master's degree in Public Administration. But, I earned that degree and it was like a breeze going to college because I loved history. And I really didn't know how to apply that until I got into college and found out that I need to study history. So, in doing that, I've had an admiration about where towns come from, where do people come from in Appalachia, in eastern Kentucky, and Floyd County. And in doing that, I found out a lot of very interesting things that make communities develop. And it primarily was the coal mining industries back in the [19]20s, 30s, and 40s, 50s. And from those coal communities, raised a culture, a population of people who built their own schools, their own churches, and they socialized as a community. And, a lot of that pride from those people now grandchildren of those earlier people, they still live in those communities and still want to stay there. They commute to work now a little bit further than they did. But, I became interested in the history part of it. And, in doing so, also at a younger age involved with Edith Fitzpatrick James, my great aunt, who actually settled here and married Thomas James and began teaching music, primarily piano and voice in about 1925 and continued to teach until 1980. So, she created a lot of public events, Old Christmas was one, the celebration of the twelve days after Christmas holiday as we know it. And, she had those festivals on the grounds of the Garfield House, here in Prestonsburg and the May House, here in Prestonsburg. So, by being her nephew, I was always, me and my other friend, who was her great nephew from her side of the family, didn't take voice and music with her. So we had to serve our part. And we had to be the ushers at all these recitals, all these piano gigs, and all these things she did. We were

always called upon to stand at the door and hand out a little two leaf program that told the names of everybody and their selections of their music and so on. And I had to wear a tie at ten, eleven, and twelve years old. And, it was stuffy to me. Years later, I began to appreciate that more and more and more when I saw her folk festival and I saw the artisans who gathered at Jenny Wiley State Resort Park. There was everything from soap makers to broom makers, quilt makers, all of these types of folks would be in the parking lot at the theater. And then the music would last about three days on a Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. And Edith used to orchestrate. And, she was a champion of culture. And she believed in it and she believed in etiquette and she believed in responsibility. And she tried to pass that on to her musicians. And, tried to keep them in good health while they performed. So, it was always a challenging thing and I learned a lot from her. And, she was the foremost in Prestonsburg as a music and piano teacher for some thirty or forty years.

06:47 AH: Can you talk about her training where she learned folk music and became interested in all that?

06:55 FJ: Yes. Edith was exceptionally interested in music and so talented that her father sent her to the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music in North Carolina and the Peabody Institute when she was a young lady. We're talking about 1918, 1915, 18, and that's where she developed her passion for folk music. And that's what she attempted to instill in all of her students that she trained.

07:36 AH: Tell me more what you mean by folk music because you were saying there's different definitions.

07:39 FJ: [coughing] Well, excuse me, you can cut that out. Well, folk music to me, I'm not a scholar in the genre of music, but folk music to me would be similar to song and music instruments as antique furniture is to modern day furniture. And modern day furniture become an antique, I understand, needs to be at least eighty years old. So, folk music, in my opinion needs to be seventy or eighty years old. Now, I call it that because she called it that. And she and her repertoire, she instilled in her students the Gregorian chant. And that was kind of like the churches that would line songs. And the chant was similar to that. It was pretty much spoken rather than by an accumulation of musicians. It was sung and spoken and you've heard the lining in the schools and the churches of early days. And lining the song was done so because the song leader had the only song book in the church. So they would sing a line and the congregation would sing the same line. [Singing] "Amazing grace how sweet the sound." And then they would sing the same line, so it went through the whole song. But the chanting had more of an Anglo-Saxony origination. Because those early pioneers into America, they brought that, the Europeans, Eastern Europeans brought that music with them. They didn't have a lot of books, but they probably had some. And so, those books entered into the churches. And, there became part of the music of the day. The recreation of that music today is folk music. It might be 1750 or it might be 1850, but it's the same song. And it's sung approximately in the same way. It can be added with instruments and so on. So, my definition of folk would be age, first of all. And I'm beginning to feel more like a folk person than I am - but anyway, going back into the 1800s certainly. The foundation of eastern Kentucky from immigrants from North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, Pennsylvania, primarily who traveled westwardly across the Appalachian Mountains. Many of them, the Scots, many of them found a terrain much like their homeland, which is the highlands in England and Wales and Scotland. They were the highlands. So, it was created, the highlands of Kentucky on that action. So, that's where the folk music is and it doesn't need music

accompaniment. But, it certainly the dulcimer, I suspect was probably one of the first instruments used in that. And probably a guitar. And then a banjo. What derived from that music, that folk music and those musicians became songwriters who sang modern day cultural experiences. That became bluegrass music. You know, bluegrass wasn't born in England, it was born in Kentucky. So, that folk music was the inspiration for musicians to begin playing bluegrass tunes. Because they are a story of lore and they're a story of families and people and swarping and Saturday nights and all that kind of thing. And then country music learned a lot from that and they expanded that themselves into what we refer to as the country, which I haven't heard a dulcimer lately in a country music song. Or a harp, for that matter. So, that's what I consider folk. And part of all of that, along with the music was the everyday culture. It was the schools, the churches, the ball teams. All of those and on Sundays, when they would go to church, everybody went to a church, they had to hike into town or into a community. But then, during the week they worked and on Saturday night, they got their guitars out on the front porch and began picking grandma, grandpa's tunes and it developed over time and the folk music evolved into, I believe I'm right, into the bluegrass genre.

13:51 AH: You mentioned the Gregorian chants that your aunt would have taught people. Do you remember music from different places as well as this place that she would, can you talk more about the different genres, I guess?

14:11 FJ: Well, the chant was in fact the first music. And she labeled it Gregorian chant, which she had researched and found that name. And so, she actually named it. She wasn't the only person to name it. But, she took that as part of her instruction, as part of her vocabulary was the chant. And, the line singing. And even in her later years after she had retired from the folk festival, she really wasn't able, she retired and then the next year, she wasn't able to do anything with it. So we missed her tremendously. But you could go to her house and she could play tapes, reel to reel tapes, and there in her house, her foot would tap. She still felt the power of that music. And, I'll guarantee you she was in time, and on key. So, the chanting is the oldest I could remember of any name of that music that is there. It progressed. Some people today, that I say this, some people today go back fifty or sixty years and they feel like Bob Dylan and Peter, Paul, and Mary and other groups of that era that I can remember is folk music. Now, it might be. But, there is a distinction of time. And, the [19]60s was a lot different from the 20s, 30s, and 40s in terms of the music available.

16:14 AH: That folk music came from other folk music. It's sounds like, it’s an evolving -

16:21 FJ: Yeah, it was transported by horse and mule and it came from, like I say, Pennsylvania, North and South Carolina, Virginia. Those folks moved in to Kentucky and even farther west. But, they settled this with those song books and they used those songs in their choirs and on their front porch picking.

16:52 AH: Well, you’ve mentioned the folk festival, that I know that your aunt organized and that you're a part of now. Can you talk more about the story of that?

17:03 FJ: Well, yes. I remember going to her house, or her land, where she had pre-folk festival gatherings. The family would go. It was just a half block from my house, located in Prestonsburg on the eastern side of 321 Highway. I remember that it was different music. I wasn't used to that

music. If there was any gospel that I heard, it was in the Presbyterian church. And all of that is folk music. It was made and built 1600-1700. All of that music was folk. But we sang it different. It didn't sound like Aunt Edith out there on the square singing her chants. So, that was new to me. It really was. And at the time, I recognized that it was different. But I didn't participate in it. And that's kind of a regret. I only have two regrets in my life. One is that I didn't learn how to play piano and two I didn't learn how to sing good enough. There's some things I might do over again. But the schools here in Prestonsburg, the Prestonsburg Institute was built in 1910. And it was the first large school in eastern Kentucky that became a Baptist institute after it was founded. But, it then was rebuilt into Prestonsburg Elementary where I attended first in 1956. And, we had a music teacher that music teacher, I had that music once a week, five days a week for twelve years. It even occurred at the high school. So, today, I don't think it's taught quite that, to that scale, ok. But, it was later and not much later, just a few years after I left Prestonsburg, to go to school and to work for a year or two. I started appreciating that folk music more and more. And the reason was I started to learn how to play a six string guitar. And, golly, I did pretty good with G, C, and D [chords]. But after that, and the songs that you could play in G, C, and D were country music songs or old time ballads. The ballads are a part I hadn't brought up. But I think the folk music really transformed into ballads that were written by Americans, settled in this area. There's probably countless numbers of songs that could be considered a ballad, where it's a story of an experience in life. And it's not a ballad like you might hear today in country music where it talks about pick-up trucks and trains and ma, you know, David Allen Coe. Which I love David Allen Coe's thing. He could be a great folk artist because he could really put those words to music.

21:10 AH: So the, you talked about these more informal family, community gatherings that Edith would have with singing. How did that evolve into something bigger?

21:22 FJ: Well, I think it was just, it was meant to be that the venues were not big enough. The Garfield House doing Old Christmas celebration. You put twenty people in there and it's packed. And you're eating popcorn off strings that have been on the tree. And you're drinking apple strudel that they prepared, her sister Winnie prepared. And it was, little homemade cookies that were just great. And they would have one or two people stand up and sing a song or two. But it was a social gathering more than anything. That evolved into her home place, where she started bringing in crafters, and that was in the [19]60s, early 60s. She brought the quilters and she recognized that a quilter and a folk singer go hand in hand. So, she brought in those crafters, broom making, she had a loom in one of those buildings she had up there. And there was a blacksmith shop, you had a guy out there making horse shoes. And it was kind of like where you bring your own food.

22:43 AH: Like a potluck.

22:44 FJ: Potluck. It was about a potluck, which is every family brings something. Set a table out, put a table cloth on it and you have everything from fried chicken to mashed potatoes and green beans and potatoes, all that kind of stuff. So then, that grew and coincidentally, the Jenny Wiley State Resort Park built the Jenny Wiley Theater that could seat a thousand, eight hundred people. And so, Ms. Edith and Chalmer and Catherine Frazier, who was with her on occasions. Ms. Catherine was the music teacher at Prestonsburg Elementary. They got together a committee and they presented the Kentucky Highland Folk Festival. The first, which occurred in the fall of 1966. Now, also, there was presentations made at the Garfield House of the Battle of Middle Creek. So, there, there was the generals in the armies and the soldiers and they performed the story of the

Garfield House. And Bert T. Combs was the governor in 1963, 61, 62, 63. And he came to be in attendance there and he brought members of the Kentucky National Guard with Confederate and Union uniforms on where they portrayed the battle and the household and the so-and-so, so-and-so. And there she had her chants. So, her audience had grown from inside the Garfield House to outside the Garfield House up to 100-150 people. And then she still was utilizing her house. But then when she goes to Jenny Wiley drama, Jenny Wiley Amphitheater. She had some help with some of her students and they filled the parking lot with the artisans, broom makers, gun makers, candle makers, all of those crafty items that was done the way it used to be done. And inside the amphitheater, she had the music. She had, I can remember, I performed on stage one time with her. I don't know if anybody taped it or not. Linda, my wife's uncle, Denny Slone was an annual participant and he was a banjo player. He did the old fashioned drop thumb method, not the strum, but the drop thumb picking. And he did that kind of music. And one time, and I was dating Linda and he invited me to come and sing my "Cabbage Head" song with him, on stage. Well, I just, I wasn't afraid of being out in front of the public, but when you're on a microphone, singing to three hundred people, and Uncle Denny said, "Just don't worry about it. You just do your part and I'll do my part." So, I performed it with him. And years later, I did it again with Monroe, the comedian of the Opry. We did the same tune. It happens to be the oldest tune in America. So, it is a folk tune. And, it was brought versions of it. I read them. My friend and I was at his house playing the guitar one night, twenty years ago. And his wife was taking a culture, folk culture class at Prestonsburg Community College. And she said, "Freddy, I've never heard that song." And I said, "Well you probably wouldn't, it's not in the top hundred." And she said, "Could I tape you singing that song and take it to my folk class as a part of my assignment? We have to bring something in representative of folk culture." I said, well sure. So, she taped me singing that song and took it to her instructor and he went crazy. And he looked it up, he said, "This is the oldest tune in America." And he said, "May be 'Merry Christmas.'" But, he said it had - and he researched it and gave the lyrics. There was a German rendition, there was an English rendition, and I believe a French rendition that made it to America and then America Americanized it into one kind of tune, but same song. But the tune might have been a little bit different from then.

28:17 AH: Where did you learn it from?

28:18 FJ: I learned it from my Uncle Don Hunt, back in the [19]50s. He played a guitar and all us kids sitting in the living room. And he sang it one time. Well, I thought that was the coolest song. And didn't know what it meant. I had a feeling that something didn't sound right. But, later, when I got married, I found out what it was. You could look it up if you want to, Abby, it's called, "You Cuckold Fool." You heard it?

29:00 AH: Yeah, I've heard different old time bands sing it. Yeah.

29:06 FJ: Well, anyway, that was my song. I didn't learn anymore and didn't want to after that. It was always, I've sung it in several locations, different venues, I have. But back on the subject. At the point when Ms. Edith, Aunt Edith goes into Jenny Wiley Theater, she built a song singers list and songwriter's list that probably was a hundred and fifty people, maybe two hundred. And, from those, she would have them come back year after year and it became an embattlement for how much airtime do you get on stage. Well, Edith was pretty strict, but she loved the music and she didn't care. So it ended up going from 7pm until about midnight. So, there was times when a band might be warming up out in the parking lot that they get a little loud in practice sessions and she'd have to go out there and tell them to calm it down a little bit. And there might have

been some libations served out there in the parking lot along with that fruit punch that they had. And, but it was a very festive and appreciated time.

30:38 AH: Were people coming to perform and to attend from all over, and both from here? Can you talk about where people were coming from that come to the festival?

30:51 FJ: Oh gosh. They came from the immediate ten adjoining counties. One or two occasionally would come from Lexington and I have brought singers in here in the festival years ago. I've brought people in from Berea, Ohio. Ann and Phil Case, they performed, I say they've been here ten times. My friend in Ashland, the Beatnik Cowboy, Rob McNerlan, the last of the Beatnik Cowboys. He's performed two or three times with us. Limbs Fancy has been with me two or three years in a row. And then Dianne Donohoe, who took a leadership role with me in the festival after we got it, found it. She sings a capella and she sings the way Aunt Edith taught her to sing. So she's, you know, she is right on cue with her singing. She's been experiencing some difficulties. But, it's not as well attended as I would like for it to be. These days, it's very difficult. It takes a full time person to be able to do that. Which Aunt Edith worked on all year long. She did something every day for the folk festival and for anybody that has a job as I've had for forty years, it's been a little difficult trying to get all the people. But I've asked Whitesburg, Kirby, what's his name?

32:51 AH: Rich, Rich Kirby?

32:51 FJ: Yeah, Rich Kirby. helped me one year from over at Appalshop and WMMT there in Whitesburg. And, so I can go on and on. I found the key is that if you can get you a few radio hosts and give them a part in it, they'll push it for you. But it's very expensive to advertise and it takes a lot of time to do it. But we're still going to have the folk festival if we have to have it down here under the red light and two people show up. We're going to try to pass the word on. Which gives me part of my, part of this, I don't know how many people will hear this. But if they do, the challenge is to volunteer what people might know about folk music or music they like that relates to the history and the gospel and the bluegrass. And hopefully we could prepare a school age song book that the kids could be singing these songs and remember them for the next fifty years, ok. And then I would like to do a piece that features the individual artists that have performed their favorite tunes and put it more as a coffee table book that could be sold and you could turn over and see Fiddling Dewey Shepherd. You ever heard of him? Fiddling Dewey Shepherd was a pretty powerful influence here in eastern Kentucky from several points of view. But, he performed all over and Fiddling Dewey's picture hangs in the Mountain Arts Center. But, Dewey was in Aunt Edith's festival. And, oh I can't tell you all the name. Paul Nell Allen was a disciple of Edith James. He is much of a history kind of cultural nut and he studied that music and he could sit down and sing that music, one song after another. "Two Coats," have you heard the song "Two Coats?" [singing] "Two coats live and one fine I wear." Anyway, Dolly Parton sang it. Anyway, Paul Nell Allen, and Chuck Tackett, Mikey Hall, the Gun Branch Heartbreakers have performed in the festival before over the years. Uncle Dave Sizemore, these names are starting to come to me, Abby. Uncle Dave performed every year. I've had people from Letcher County on down to Knox County, Harlan County. They've been coming this year. We're going to utilize our front porch pickers. I've finally figured out a way to get them involved in the folk festival. So we're going to have a folk festival at the folk festival stage and some of the front porch pickers are going to learn folk tunes and sing them. So I'll have them captured in terms of continuing to grow this.

36:13 AH: And when is it happening?

36:14 FJ: September the 8th at the Battle of Middle Creek Reenactment location, just west of Prestonsburg on Route 114 at the David 404 exit right there, it's in that triangle. We started that reenactment back in the [19]80s, 90s. And it's been going every year since then. And there's vendors that come in and they sell apparel and they sell all kinds of different memorabilia of the Civil War era. So they'll be there. The music will start at 7, come early if you want to and do the walking tour of the campsites where the different soldiers are camped. And the cannons and the rifles will all blare out Saturday at 3:00 and Sunday at 3:00.

37:22 AH: And when did you take over coordinating the festival?

37:29 FJ: I've been trying to think of that. I can get close because I became tourism director in '90. I came here in '86, I want to say '87 because we still, yes, we still had it at the amphitheater until '93. We had the festival outside at the amphitheater and I came here in '86 and became involved in the festival '87 with Ms. Frazier and Aunt Edith, and then as tourism director, I with my committee, we started at the amphitheater. But we moved inside because of weather. So we always had a backup plan. So we stayed in the Wilkinson-Stumbo Convention Center for about three years or four. And then we moved outdoors to the parking lot at the Mountain Arts Center. And then finally, indoors at the Mountain Arts Center up until four or five years ago, probably 2012 we moved over to the battle, Middle Creek, site.

38:52 AH: Well, I am particularly curious about dance and where dance intersects with music. I'd love to hear some about how dance has been a part of the festival.

39:08 FJ: Aunt Edith learned all of the old dance numbers and she taught her chanters and singers many of those numbers. I can't bring up that one tune that I like so well. But there was everything from the Tennessee Waltz, you know, to square, kind of line dancing, no, not line dancing as we know it. But, a partner dancing and meet in the middle sashay around, under the hoop, all of those terms you could call that much as the square dancers did later.

39:59 AH: Like a reel? Or like English Country Dancing?

40:02 FJ: Yes, yes, yes. The reel. R-E-E-L, reel, yes, yes. But, there was, to my recollection, there wasn't a lot of formal dancing education classes. It all would have had to occurred on the side and there wasn't a lot of teachers. Even though Aunt Edith knew every tune, every song, and how to dance it, she taught her chanters how to do that. And they would perform on the amphitheater Jenny Wiley. They brought that part in there.

40:46 AH: So there was dance performance?

40:47 FJ: There was dance performances at the amphitheater. And I kept on, I had a group that would come in, at least one group every year. What's her name, from Hindman? I can't think of it. But, she brought her hill country dancers, she brought her group over and danced for us for years. I can't remember her name.

41:19 AH: And that was square dancing?

41:21 FJ: No, it was more of that, what you refer there as the reel. I think those two dances actually intermingled at some point. The calling it the reel changed, or was lost.

41:43 AH: Do you have memories of dances, just as a part of the community gatherings that would happen?

41:51 FJ: No, dancing was not a part of it. I know that Snookie Mead had tap dancing. And that was the only formal. And she did it after school hours at the grade school. And all the little girls had to get their little dresses and their tap shoes and she taught them how to tap dance. She did that for years. But, otherwise, any dancing that was done was at events. As opposed to learning or schooling or whatever. They were all part of an event like the folk festival.

42:40 AH: And now there is still some dancing? Like with the school groups you mentioned?

42:45 FJ: Yes, there is. And it is a part. The school groups are invited to come to the folk festival stage at the Battle of Middle Creek site. We've had as much as 800-1,0000 students. We've had Paintsville, Porter, Magoffin, McDowell Elementary, Betsy Lane Elementary, Prestonsburg Elementary. Seems like there was another elementary. But, up to ten groups came and watched the dancers and listen to the music, just to be a part of it. But they also were given a tour of the campsite, of the embattlement areas. And whether we get to do that this year, I'm just not sure. But, I doubt if we'll have the dancers this year. Now, I've had dancing. Let me tell you this. What is the name of that lady over there in Hindman? Oh mercy. Anyway. I used to host tour groups of senior citizens, in Prestonsburg, I did that for twenty years. And a lot of times, we have a lot to offer here. From the Mountain Arts Center performances, Jenny Wiley Theater performances, Jenny Wiley State Resort Park, our fine updated motels, our museums that we have, and particularly Loretta Lynn's home place, Butcher Holler in Paintsville, the Mayo Methodist Church. I'd recommend everybody go to the Mayo Methodist Church. A man built that church, his money built that church. There was a hundred Italian stone masons that came in 1900 and the stain glass windows imported from Italy, the best in the world, are still pristine as to the colors, the skin tones, the reds, the blues. And there's three major windows and it's worth going there and seeing that on Sunday morning. And seeing the, on one window it's the birth of Christ and then the resurrection of Christ, and his holiness in appearance return. So, but I would bring tour groups here and the first thing I would do, I would ask the group leaders who we were planning the visit, "What's the age group? Would they like to see mountain dancing recreated?" "Yes." So, they could participate. I had somebody teach four or five of them, or whoever wants to. We can teach them this tune. How to dance to it. She said yes, so it was a hit among these people. They felt part of the song, they felt part of the dance, they felt part of the community. And they come here, I've had them in here from everywhere from Michigan, Indiana, Ohio, West Virginia, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee. And they really are amazed at what I introduced to them about the culture and the history. Of course, I dream about that, so it was not like a job. It was something I really bragged about. I liked to showcase our talent, showcase the way, why Prestonsburg is here as it is, why is that. Well, there was one log house built across the street from us that was the first one in 1790. And then for ten years, there was a few other dwellings constructed. But then, a Frenchmen from, who had migrated to America and came out of the Carolinas and came into eastern Kentucky, looking for game, pelts, because Napoleon was getting ready to fight a war and Napoleon sent him over here to get pelts of any kind, whatever kind you could buy and bring them back. We're going to need them when we go into Russia. Kind of ironic, but Solomon de Rossi came to Prestonsburg, built the house, up here, a log house, up here in

town. And began trapping beavers. And he collected thousands, deer skins and beavers and elk and buffalo. And then took it out here on this river, floated it down to Cincinnati, floated it down to Louisville, floated it down to Paducah. And, floated all those beaver pelts to Napoleon in France and they made real warm hats out of those beaver hats and he went and fought the war, he didn't count on it being below zero. So anyway, he lost that, he lost that venture. So, the tour groups that came to town, I had so much to share with them. They enjoyed it, they made sitting on the bus more enjoyable, I guess you would say. But they enjoyed the dance as well as anything. And the food. I customized every meal that they ate with exception of breakfast where they ate on their own. But, for lunches and dinners, I would have old fashioned cooking from what grandma used to fix, roast beef and taters and green beans and pinto beans and cornbread with a stalk of onion. And so, I tried to feed them that and didn't surprise me, but they said, "Wow, this is like what my grandmother used to fix and what we fix today." I said, "Well, I hope you enjoy." And they did.

49:36 AH: Yeah. Can you talk more about food, growing up here or as a part of these different gatherings?

49:52 FJ: Well, in earlier days, it was a rural life here in eastern Kentucky. And folks had to cut down logs to build their houses, they had to carry rock from the creek bank. They had to fence their property for their livestock, whatever it might be. Preferably at least two horses and several cows. And, they derived the milk from cows and goats. They lived on a farm. Now we don't have a four-thousand acre farm here in eastern Kentucky like you might see in western Kentucky or wherever. We just don't have those here in the mountains. The geography makes it such that if you have land, if you don't have a river bottom area, you got to go to the hillside and start cutting down trees and pulling trees out and pasturing your goats. So, they made their own food, like they made their own houses, they made their own entertainment. They worked their jobs. They bartered many times and a lot of times, somebody would make, have a bushel, five bushels of corn and be able to bring it to the market, which were the little town hubs throughout. And they could trade those five bushels for a new pair of shoes for their family. So it was the trade, barter type issue. And the foods they had, obviously, they had corn. The Indians introduced it as maize. The Native American Indians. And, but corn was the primary crop because it made the meal, they all had, wherever there was a settling of a community, you'd find a grist mill that had a creek that could turn the wheel to ground the corn to make cornmeal and therefore bread. So, they had that. That was the staple food. The rest of it was green beans, pinto beans, I call them soup beans, the brown beans. And then of course, the summertime fresh vegetables, lettuce, cabbage and so on. Now, some individuals, probably a lot, after Alexander Hamilton and George Washington imposed the whiskey tax on the settlers after the Revolutionary War. And the Pennsylvania farmers that made their own whiskey got upset because they were being charged by the gallon and the big city boys was being charged as a license, a business license. So they got mad, they had what they referred to as the Whiskey Rebellion in the 1790s. And so what happened when Washington sent troops and they squashed the rebellion, but it reminded those farmers of the very reason they fought in the Revolutionary War for no taxation here without representation. So, all of those whiskey maker farmers and most of it was clear, corn whiskey moved to Floyd County, Kentucky. They all came out of Pennsylvania and moved right here. Well, other counties as well. But anyway, they used the corn to make moonshine. And that art became a staple revenue source for many families and they could bring that moonshine to town and go back home with household items. Might be an ax, it might be a hatchet, it might be some hard object they couldn't make. But they could trade that because they had an abundance of farmland up on the

hillsides and it the valleys for corn. And they come to town and trade the corn whiskey and also bring back a big flour full of sugar to make the next batch, fermentation. So, that was a big food source was corn. And then, the recipes, all the bakeries, all the families learned how to make, they had apple orchards and pear orchards where they harvested apples and pears and peaches and made their pies for their pie social. It was a great thing to bring a good apple pie into a church dinner on the grounds, so to speak. Everybody brought their favorite food. And everybody ate well. There was no hunger. There was no hunger. Everybody, families took care of each other, neighbors took care of each other. You might have the best land this year for corn. I may have the best land for some other crops, beans or potatoes, or so on. So, it was a trading affair. And then the kids had their property. So all the families really came together with their food sources. Very little of it bought in stores, there wasn't many stores. But they could trade and get theirs. And then the store owner, how he got green money was he could sell that corn to a city slicker. You know, a bushel of corn and he could sell it and make green money. So, that money and that currency thing found its way through all the economy, obviously. But people here, they grew their own. Cookbooks, probably most churches will bring their congregation together once every three or four years and ask them to submit their favorite recipe. So, you've got how to fix so-and-so foods or pies or cakes or grits. Mine is grits, by the way. I can do grits. Cheese grits, they're good, Abby. They are good. And homemade biscuits, I can do those too. But they brought all of those together and was able to create an economy based on what they can produce on their own and of course corn corn grits and flour. They grew their own food, basically. And they would have their ice houses where in the winter time, they would go out and saw the ice out of the creek and take the saw shavings from their saw dust and pack that ice in these ice caves and close them up and they could bring out a chunk of ice and save milk for two or three days and put it in the creek. So they had ice up through harvest time for the next year. And then they of course canned all their foods from vegetables, beets, all those vegetables, asparagus.

57:58 AH: Who taught you how to make biscuits?

57:59 FJ: A young lady by the name of Patty LaMaster. She used to work at Billy Ray's. Had the best biscuits in the world, where I gained my weight after I became, didn't have to cut firewood for heat. I had a thermostat on the wall and I ate at Billy Ray's. And she said she got her biscuits, they were so good. But she got them out of a package from a place in West Virginia called Tay's Valley. And I was so disappointed. I said, "Well, if you had to make these from scratch, how would you do it?" So, she told me how to mix the milk with some part of flour and how to put the buttermilk, how to stir, let it sit, let it warm, then roll it out in your hands into biscuits. Little bit of sugar, just a little bit of sugar and a little bit of salt, not much. That's where I learned to make the biscuits. And I can make bull dog cream gravy too. The bull dog cream gravy is my specialty. And with those cathead biscuits and those cheese grits. Cheese grits, I became very conventional on those, I use microwave. And on those grits, I can stir them and get them boiling and drop my instant grits in it and stir in and then put the cheese in there and warm it up just a little bit more. But you've got to be careful, they can overcook in a heartbeat. Got to get it out of there when it's time.

59:44AH: And you had mentioned a particular cookbook that's in a lot of homes still in Prestonsburg.

59:49 FJ: Yeah. Want to pause? Let me see. [Recording paused] What's Cooking in Kentucky? I'm pretty sure. And a lot of communities do the same thing. They let it serve as a fundraiser for the

Women's Club. They compile all that, they pay the publisher and they make a thousand bucks or something. I can't find it.

1:00:16 AH: That's ok, that's ok. But that's a trend that communities have those cookbooks.

1:00:25 FJ: And my good friend who's in Bowling Green, Kentucky wrote a book called Eating Your Way Across Kentucky. You ever heard of it?

1:00:32 AH: I believe I've seen it in a restaurant.

1:00:35 FJ: Gary West.

1:00:35 AH: Yeah.

1:00:35 FJ: He wrote that, at my urging. I got him to write his first book about King Kelly Coleman, over in Wayland. I introduced him and got him interviews with Kelly. And then he said, "I've been thinking about another book about eating." I said, "Gary you know every tourism director in every town. Call them and say, 'Where's the favorite mom-pop spot?' And go visit and they'll feed you and you write about it." So he did. Oh mercy. He's my dear friend. Food. My grandmother, we would go to her house - am I on?

1:01:32 AH: Yes.

1:01:32 FJ: Ok. my grandmother was born and raised, and my grandfather, born and raised here in Floyd County, Kentucky in an area known as Left Beaver Creek. And, they grew up, there was no poverty in 19 - the Depression was tough, that was tough. But, late 30s, 40s when my parents were growing up, my mother lived there for a while. But, they had gardens, like I mentioned earlier and it was that that made up for obviously back then, low wages. People wasn't paid much money. But, things didn't cost much. $1200 Volkswagen, brand new in 1966, I mean. But, my mother tells the story of when the war, World War II, her uncle, her mother's brother served in the war. And her brother and brother-in-law were in the war. She was in high school. But, they lived right over here in town. I can show you the spot right over there under that, on the other side of that parking lot right there is where my mother went to live while she went to high school. And, they had a garden in the backyard. Everybody in town had a garden. And so, but she said, there was tough times, like during the war, she can't remember the Depression, she was born in 1931. So, she don't remember much about that. But she remembers that her mother would harvest and then cook a giant kettle of pinto beans and scrape meat, leftover meat, ham, pork, ribs or whatever and put in it there and fix cornbread. That was the meal. And, to make it worse, they didn't get to eat the beans. They would cook the beans in that water for two nights and just use only the soup, that's all they could eat on top of that cornbread. And then the third night and the fourth night and the fifth night, they could eat the beans with the cornbread. So, I mean, that's a story about food. And everybody did that. There was, you know, during the war, everything stood still, in terms of jobs and so on and so forth, the economy. But then, what ruined the world in terms of food was the appliance age. They learned how to make refrigerators, they wired electricity in your house, you had a refrigerator, therefore, you could buy milk and food at the grocery store. You kept it in the refrigerator. That ruined food in America. And the reason was, you depended on it. I say -

1:04:59 AH: Ruined.

1:04:59 FJ: Tongue in cheek. It was a necessity and it was jet age to have a refrigerator. Matter of fact, one of my grandfather's brothers that lived over in John's Creek, they mined some coal on his property in 1972 and he made the first large sum of money that he made in his life and his kids took their part and went to Pikeville and bought a refrigerator and brought it over and set it on his front porch and said, "Dad, now you've got the convenience for food." So they left, they came back a week or so later, they opened the door and he had hung beans in there to dry. He thought -

1:05:50 AH: In the refrigerator.

1:05:51 FJ: In the refrigerator. He said, well it protected them from the bugs. So he was making shuck beans. Now, shuck beans was a popular food. You know what dried beans? I have done that myself, I've dried my own beans and made them before. But, otherwise, the, my goodness, the heritage in this county. If you go through here, if you go through very fast, you'll miss what people are doing. Because they still have, some people in area have horses, they have cattle, you can't find them back. But they do have. And, they, that supplies a lot of their welfare.

1:06:48 AH: Well, we've talked about a lot of things. A lot of music.

1:06:52 FJ: Well, we've talked about a lot of things because I've seen a lot of things. Seen that commercial on TV? Whatever the name of it is, State Farm, whatever it is. The guy's taking the girl through and showing them, said, "Yeah, we've seen a lot of things, we've done a lot of things, because we've seen a lot of things." They have a moose head on the wall or something. I feel like I'm leaving, I'm missing something.

1:07:17 AH: Are there other stories that come to mind? That are music, dance, food related or just about life here in Prestonsburg.

1:07:32 FJ: Well, it may not be related to long ago history, but I think it's in the blood. I really do. When I bring these tour groups in and I tell them about US 23 Country Music Highway, Billy Ray Cyrus, the Judds, Ricky Scaggs, Tom T. Hall, Loretta Lynn, Chrystal Gayle, Dwight Yoakam, Patty Loveless. I mean, they're just in amazement. I said, it's the, this hundred fifty mile of highway has more super country music star than any other highway in America. Well, by the time I got through with them at the end of three days, I'd exposed them to a lot of picking. And, I'd tell them, I'd say, and I'd set this up sometimes, I'd have some little girl, well, I did, I took Loretta's niece was about six years old. And over there at Herman Webb, who was Loretta's brother, he'd be keeping her sometimes and she was about six years old. And, I'd have it set up that she'd sing "Coal Miner's Daughter." Well, they'd come in and I'd say now, "Everybody in eastern Kentucky has talent, it's amazing." I never did say they could sing. But I said, "They have talent. They have produced all these superstars." I said, "That little girl right there, you'd think she could sing?" They'd say, "Well, let's hear her." I'd pick her up and stand her on the candy counter and she'd sing, "Well I was born a coal miner's daughter." Well, they just melt. Kids do that to seniors. If you want to melt a senior, just show them a grandchild. But anyway, I would talk to them about the talent and I would say, it's in the water. Nobody has the water like we have right here. They're like, "What?" And I said, if you all will drink enough water while you're here, if you can't sing, you'll go home and you'll be singing. I knew they would, they'd sing. They might not be what I told them. But, anyway, I'd say, "It's in the water." Well, on the final day of the trip when I would

step on the bus or the motor coach to say goodbye to them, I would say, "I was just kind of kidding you about the water. We haven't drunk tap water at my house in eight years. I drink bottled water." And I said, but while I did drink it, I could sing, it's amazing. So, they'd say, "Well, if you could sing, we want to hear it." So, I'd sing them my "Cabbage Head" song. They went crazy. That ended the day, they went loco, crazy. But then I would tell them, "The talent comes from grandpa and grandma. Because as a little one, I would sit and my parents would learn how to [inaudible] and I would sit and learn from everybody how to play guitar. It was easy. When I just did what my uncle did and what my grandpa did. That was the step-down of musical history is that it was reverberated by grandma and grandpa. Whether it be choral, church, bluegrass, folk. It influenced me. And as a matter of fact. And I could attest to this, during the mid [19]60s at the advent of the British invasion, you're not old enough to remember that are you? You heard about it?

1:11:53 AH: Yeah, I know about it.

1:11:53 FJ: Ok. Everybody from the Beatles to the Rolling Stones, the Zombies, all that. Every other household had a kid in there listening to that music. And then, the next third house down, they were learning how to play music. There was bands formed right here in this town because they wanted, we had dances here in this town. In the [19]60s, up through 70. I left, got married and left. But almost every weekend all year long, we had groups that performed. And we had them over here at City Hall when City Hall was over there one time. We had them at the high school gymnasium. We had them all over the place. So, it was part of growing up, the music was. Because we was interested. Everybody else did it too, I guess. But it was grandma and grandpa that laid the foundation and that's who should get the credit.

1:13:04 AH: For passing on.

1:13:05 FJ: Passing on. I mean, they could have gone home and rested. Worked hard all week. But they took the time to train their kids how to play. I couldn't, their families. I know of families who their kids would pick up a guitar because their daddy plays so well, and they can play. I'm astonished at that because I've been trying to play one since 1966 and I still only know G, C, and D. I haven't taken a lot of time on that. But anyhow. So, yeah. It's the tradition, the culture, the heritage that you and I call our folk remembrances. And that's important things of our lives. It made us what we are today. Because of the work ethic. Can you imagine your grandfather going to work in the coal mine and being in a seam this deep, forty inches deep with a carbide lantern on his helmet, crawling back in there and picking corn, uh coal? Six days a week. My mercy. Our people are as ingenious here in eastern Kentucky as anywhere. We're probably foremost in building highways. Because we take these big pieces of machinery that we used how to mine coal with and we make these cut through, through these mountains so the highway goes through the mountains instead of over the mountains, which takes four days. Now we can get to Belfry in an hour or we can get to Hindman in an hour or less. So, they are very ingenious. We would like for the talent that when it goes away to college that it comes back here. We appreciate that. That's very important because that's, it's going to die, you know. All the business owners that had businesses on that part of Core Street all the way up there around that T-Bone up there, the ones that own those buildings have passed on. They're gone. There's one, two, there's two people up there whose fathers' have been working there since 1950, barber shop and a jewelry store. But, it's very difficult to impress upon kids when they're smarter than you are. Because they can get smart

just like this. And I've got to go, "Well, I think Thomas Jefferson was president in 1804, I'm pretty sure if I remember." They go [mimicking using a computer] "Oh yeah it was 1804-1808."

1:15:58 AH: On the computer.

1:15:58 FJ: Yeah. You know, there's no more encyclopedias. The encyclopedia is on your lap. And, I'm not trying to get into the social sphere here, I guess I am. But, what will we do if the grocery store closed? We'd starve to death in thirty days. That's all the food I've got stored in my basement is for thirty days. I'd probably starve to death. This was, this was what you would call a river bottom. This whole town is set on a river bottom. And it's a natural, obviously, phenomenon because some mountains come down like this, but the big river came through, deposited sand and da-da-da-da-da. So, anyway, over a million years, this was all made flat, thank goodness. But, I don't know where the, who's going to do the work? Won't be me. Who's going to cook shuck beans? I don't know. Who's going to cook that apple pie? [To Dog:] What's bothering you dog?

1:17:37 AH: Yeah, I was wondering if you could speak about that passing on of culture and tradition and music. What hope or non-hope you have for it?

1:17:56 FJ: Well, ok. Passing on what I think are critical aspects. Things are going to change with technology. Things will be done differently. Abby, you want a pizza, why yeah, well let me order one. I can order a pizza right here and a little hover craft will roll up twenty minutes later and drop us a pizza off. Wow, is that neat. So, we're going to have to adjust and I just saw where Wal-Mart and Google have joined together. So, you're going to, you won't go to Wal-Mart to shop, you'll open this up and say, cornmeal, and you'll check yes. A gallon of milk, a dozen eggs. And they're going to bring them to you. You can shop if you want to. There won’t be much of a line. I'll still shop because I want to see people. That's the only reason I do the shopping around here. I like to meet my friends from days past. And I'll see one I haven't seen in twenty or thirty years. So, moving on is beyond my fathoming. I can't figure it out, how and what this town's going to look like, or America. It's going to look like, if everything remains the same, minus the inventions and technology. What it will look like. The values, if you want to go to Corbin, Kentucky, I can tell you how to get there. My grandson can't. My granddaughter got her driver's license. She couldn't tell you how to get to Corbin. She has no clue where Corbin is. But she can go on her telephone and say, "Siri, take me to Corbin." And she can get there. So, things are going to be done different. I'd like to see them happen. But, the culture and the history, what my focus has been on, tourism was grateful enough to buy me, or to buy us a thousand dollars’ worth of patriot outfits. Three corner hats, ruffled shirts, buckled shoes. And, where we had the recreation of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, right over there in that parking lot. And I got twelve citizens and they all dressed up, they all had a part in the display of how that piece of paper meant so much to them. We didn't get to do it again, but maybe we'll do it. I’ve still got some of the uniforms. But I've got a lady in the school system and she comes and borrows my outfits so the kids can dress up and do patriot's day. So, there has been some good come from the outfits. I've got the hats and the coats and all that stuff. It is going to be interesting. I'm worried about, I tell you what, if there is such a thing as worry, is the physical fitness of our youth. They don't eat healthy. They, what they eat, well, they don't eat healthy food. And they don't eat healthy. And, I'm concerned that the fitness of our youth is kind of, needs a resurgence. And I don't know how you do it. The president of the United States should reenact physical fitness programs in the schools, I'm a firm believer in that. When I grew up, we didn't, we had a bicycle, but we had a bag full of marbles. We'd go out and play marbles in the playground. And somebody had a basketball. We played, from daylight to

dark. I was physically fit. And, today, it's not the case. It's, I think it's sad because those people, they're not going to be healthy someday when they're sixty, fifty, forty. They're not going to be healthy, so I wish something could magically appear in America that fixes that. I don't know what it is, I really don't. Maybe we should have family outing experiences. Maybe we could develop a farm with log cabin housing on it and you could bring your family there and the next day, you could go in and see how they make candles, or see how they make brooms, or see how they plant corn, see how they harvest. So the kids can understand more about where this comes from. If you throw more than one little morsel of food off your plate into the garbage, you hadn't worked in the garden. You eat everything. So, other than that, eastern Kentucky is dealing with and will continue to deal with the demise of the coal industry. If a thousand people don't have a job today that they had last year, multiply one thousand, just for the sake of discussion, fifty-thousand dollars a year in a coal mining job. Let's just say that. Fifty-thousand times one thousand. That's a lot of money, that's a half a million dollars. That economy, I've been concerned about it. My son had a coal company, engineering company. He had to stop, nobody could pay him. And these, today, I think the only, and I'm sure there is an exodus. I'm sure there are people that were former coal miners that are traveling to Georgetown Toyota or traveling to Winchester or traveling to the cookie factory, whatever. I think that is going on. Only way our economy has survived in eastern Kentucky is two things. One is spouses have a job. Spouses, I'm a coal miner, you're a nurse or you're a school teacher. I'm a coal miner. Well, if I don't have a job, we're dependent on your thirty-thousand dollars a year. So, that will pay the rent, you know. But there's no expendable income for entertainment, travel, or whatever. So, I'm very concerned about that. I asked a friend of mine who works for a company that picks up trash, garbage. A year ago, I talked to him. I said, in other words, if you have trash, you put it in the dumpster and they come and get it and haul it off. I said, "What about your business?" He said, "We're down 25%." 25% is a fourth of that business. So that translates into a fourth of the spending power that business for employees or benefits or whatever. So, I'm not sure, I think there is salvation. I think that these hilltops, Stone Crest golf course is a perfect example of a hilltop that was turned into a lunar landing spot, roughage, cut down the hill. It's a championship golf course that brings thousands of dollars to this town every year. Well, there's another strip mine, top of the hill, right up the road here. We've got land now. We didn't used to. All the land we used to have was taken up by grandpa, his brother, my daddy, my son. You know, we owned that four hundred acres and you wasn't going to buy it. But you leased the coal so we got these, we got these areas that are available. And I think, I took a grape plant and threw it in a whole in my backyard four years ago. And I can't eat all the grapes. It's unbelievable. So we have an agrarian future, but we have to utilize it. We have to be able to turn these areas. We've got a thousand horses over here on top of the mountain. My son took me up there. There's a thousand horses there in the next spot. Well, what's the value of that? Well, nothing if they're just running free. But if they're controlled and maintained, there could be an industry of horses to sell. They also eat the grass. But, we need corn, we need our own vegetables planted on tops of these mountains. I think it'd take a major investment to do that. But I think it's there. Fish farms in these ponds and so on.

1:28:45 AH: Well any concluding thoughts that you have?

1:28:49 FJ: Only that we as a people, whatever stage of life that we are in, we must pause at some part of the day or week or a period of time during a year to experience our history, experience our culture and our heritage through festivals, foods, vendors, occasions. We need to participate in that. And develop the means to perpetuate all of the culture that we've had. It was good, there was nothing wrong with our culture. Some of it was illegal, the moonshiners, but it made a living.

I'm not making excuses. But, you know, the coal miners they worked hard, the railroad people, they worked hard. The gas and oil people. They work hard every day and the truckers and the people that formulate in these communities. I know they're busy and I know it's hard enough just to get their kids to school on a daily basis. But I would like to see a refreshment of our history and our culture. History repeats itself. And, we're not back to square one like we were in 1920. But, it could be with the youth. This younger set, and I want to have these boys and Sundy Best to help us with the festival and get them connected to it, get these work books and song books and stuff and maybe that's the medium that we need to have out there in the schools. Thank you, Miss Abby.

1:30:58 AH: Thank you Fred. Thank you for your time and stories and what you do

1:31:02 FJ: You’re welcome.

1:31:03 AH: for music in this area.

1:31:06: [End of Interview]