

Glenn Bolick Interview – *took place in a cabin on Glenn’s property. The cabin we did the interview in was actually one of the first school buildings in Watauga County, it was moved from its original site to Glen’s property. Some of the interview has been reorganized for narrative structure.*

**Q1 – Who are you when and where were you born?**

I’m Glen Bolick, I was born right here in Bayless Camp, North Carolina, that’s the name of this little community, on June 30, 1939.

**Q2 – What did your parents do for living and did you contribute to the family income in any way?**

Well, I’m a fifth generation saw miller, so my family was sawmill people, timber workers, for years and years, and farmers, they had their own little farms I guess and did other things. I grew up here helping my family and grandparents on the farm until I reached 18 years of age and worked at a rock quarry as a rock crusher down in South Carolina with my brother-in-law.

My mom would have a big garden and there was ten of us kids, I’m number six out of ten so there’s five boys and five girls, two boys older than me and three girls. We just worked in the garden and we had a little apple orchard on the hill up over there and we always canned a lot of apples and fruits and vegetables and stuff and build a fire under a black pot and she would peel and wash the food and get it in the jars, and you put it in that pot and boil it, and put a quilt in there or something so they wouldn’t rattle around while it was boiling.

She would put up hundreds of jars of vegetables and stuff. Because my dad, he wasn't here a lot, he was at the sawmill camp and he would sometimes move the sawmill into other counties, he was not here during the week at all. She raised the family and the crops and things like that. We had horses here we worked the farm with and we logged with them too, he had the loggin horses at the sawmill. When they got too old to pull the loads anymore we worked them here on the farm for a few years so we had these old broken down horses to work the farm with, which was fine, they did well on the farm.

**Q3 – When you say your father moved the sawmill around, did he own the sawmill? And did he take it to different lumber camps?**

Yeah, he had his own sawmill and the motor to pull it with, you know, the whole outfit and it was not on wheels like they have'em now, it was called a ground mill so you had to take it apart and move it, you would load it onto a truck, like a lumber truck and haul it to another location. Sometimes if it was a large boundary of timber you might have to move it three or four times on that boundary of timber and sometimes you can just put it on a sled and pull it with horses, parts of it.

When I got old enough to work the sawmill, I helped move the sawmill different times and it seemed like he knew exactly where to dig the holes to set on and it had to level and plumbed up and everything. We have say there'd be six or eight men and we would start in the morning and take that sawmill apart and load it on to the truck, it was heavy stuff, and you had to slide it on very gentle like, we would slide it on, we didn't have tractors or anything like that. You'd slide it on the truck and take it to another location and set it down and have it almost

ready to run by the next morning. So Daddy'd go to sleep that night and come back the next morning he'd come back in and level things up and start sawing the next day, you could do it that quick if you had a good crew. Heavy stuff to move, but that's the way it was, and back then we didn't have tractors or bulldozers or stuff, he did have a little crawler with a blade on it that he built roads with sometimes and he would log with it too.

We went to Virginia, near Abingdon, Virginia when I was probably 15 or 16 years old and I don't remember having any horses there, they logged it with a little crawler bulldozer with a blade on it. And they'd cut the trees down and cut the logs up into log lengths, and then you had these nail grabs that you'd drive in the logs to pull it with, and you'd take that cable off of the bulldozer wench and you'd run it through the rings, and you'd have logs scattered all around but you'd run it to where that when you pulled it up, they would all run down behind that bulldozer and down the mountain would come all those logs.

I first went to a sawmill with my sister, she would cook for the loggers at the sawmill crew, and her husband worked on the sawmill crew. We went to South Mountain down in Burke County, what is now a park right where we sawmilled. I was 10 years old, and she was cooking at the sawmill camp and I carried water for her to cook with, she had a wood cook stove and I would take two peck buckets down to the stream and carry water for her to cook with and to wash dishes with, 10 years old, that's the only work I did was carrying a little stove wood and kindling and stuff, but I remember those days.

Of course Burke County was well known for the liquor making in those days and my dad he was a good Christian man and he didn't like hearing cussing and carrying on with his crew, but they was walking from the sawmill to the cook shack, we called it. They had a little bunk

house, like in Western movies, they slept in this one place and the cook shack was a little two room house, that she had a big kitchen and a big table to set at with the crew to eat in and she and her husband and myself we slept in the little backroom there, kind of a personal space.

Anyway, it was so muddy and it was a long ways to drive from the sawmill around to get back to the cook shack so they was walking through the woods to come eat lunch. They was cutting down liquor stills every week in that area and they was walking through the woods and these FBI or G-men whatever they were, they jump out from behind the trees with these big Tommy guns, and they had the crew stopped right there in the trail and questioned them and they said, "Well we was going over to the cook shack to eat, we've been sawmilling up on this hill here." And I think they knew the story mostly but they questioned them and they finally told them so, "Go on and let your crew go ahead and eat, we want to talk to you a while." So the crew went on to eat and they kept him (Glen's father) there until, well just until about they got back from eating and went back to the sawmill to go back to work.

Stories like that you know, even if you were 10 years old, you remember that type of thing. And I remember Dad talking about, there was a store down there and the whole crew would go over there at night and sit around and talk and tell tales and stuff, I never got to go over there, (laughs) but I got to hear some of the tales. My dad would tell stories about years later, "Well, ya know I think some of those guys where FBI men some of them were just over there to see what other people knew," you know hiding out in the woods, making liquor.

### **Q3 – What do you do for a living?**

Well nowadays, bought the same as its been for a lot of years. After Lula and I married in 1962, I met her in Asheboro, North Carolina when they moved 221 and they built that bypass there and we would move from town to town and crush a big pile of gravel and then move to another place from South Carolina to Durham and then from Durham to Asheboro.

And Lu and I met, she was working that time at the Clockman Mills in Asheboro and she lived 20 miles south of there over in Seagrove, where all the pottery people are. She and her friend had not gone into work, they went into work at 11 o'clock at night, and me and my friend we slept in a little camper trailer, and stayed in a little trailer and worked at the rock crusher, you know, and rented a little trailer or something there, so we pulled into this drive-in grill beside of a 53 Chevrolet, (laughs) where these two girls where sittin' out in front of this little drive in grill and we made conversation with them, a lot of people did that back in those days, that was the way to meet girls you know.

But anyway we met there and only dated, three or four months and we married and I worked on at the rock crusher for a few months and then her dad and mom wanted us to come work for them in the pottery business. They would have a lot of orders for pottery for a soap and candle company. So she and I both quit our jobs and went to work for her dad. And I moved my trailer from the trailer park down to his property and we were right there at the pottery shop. And it was fine and we worked there for 10 almost 11 years. And my mom was still living, my dad had passed away at a pretty early age. Mom was still living here in the mountains and we would come up here every two or three weeks and spend the weekend and then we would go back into the pottery. I kept wanting to get back to the mountains and my

kids were seven and nine years old when we moved back to the mountains here. So I got a chance to buy this old house, it was my great-grandfather's house and part of his farm, the old house was never insulated and it was very cold in that thing in the winter and we about froze, but that was the only building here when we moved here was that old house. But I had the sawmill, we bought the sawmill and had it up here and my son was nine, ten years old and he started working with me in the woods and the sawmill, and we had a horse that we logged with.

We made a living, I don't know, we sold pottery and we sold a little lumber and we cut firewood me and my son, and sold that. I got a dump truck and I hauled gravel for people, bought a tractor where I could do some yard work, I did stuff like that. Bout the same you know I still, just self-employed, I'd take whatever came along. I'd take some jobs as a carpenter's helper cause there was a lot of building going on here in the mountains back in them days, still is, I could get a job just about anywhere, I always took pride in myself that I could do a lot of things. I could run heavy equipment, I learned that at the rock crusher, how to run a bulldozer, or a front loader, or a power shovel, or a back hoe or track hoe or whatever.

Jobs would come up odd jobs here and yonder, that I could do. My brother, one of my brothers had a backhoe that he put in septic tanks and done a lot of ditching for people. Another brother had a bulldozer, he built roads and made house seats for people. So they'd taken a big job at Blowing Rock, some company, the Amway company for the owner of that thing. Anyway they convinced me to buy a front-end loader to haul the stumps with, we had to haul a lot of stumps. So I went *waaaay* into debt and bought a front end loader, and the job didn't last one third of the time it was supposed to. So I was in debt big time for a front end

loader that I didn't need, but I did dig a nice basement under my house while I still had that thing. I took that and dug a nice basement and me and my son went in and built it. I cut the lumber for that room, that I've added on to there with my sawmill, I've done the work for myself.

My son and I would tear down a lot of buildings for people, things were changing there, people were going from the 30s to the 90s all of a sudden. People wanted better homes and better looking places so I could clear land and stuff and people would actually give you the trees to cut 'em and haul off. So I got a lot of good wood to saw and all the firewood we needed and we sold firewood, still do.

But I have to say most of our real money has come from the pottery because Lula, she would do a craft show almost every weekend somewhere. She would hear about a craft show so many weeks ahead and she would set that up where she'd go and I'd go take her and we'd load up the pickup with a cooler shell, we call it on the back of it, and just load up a load of pottery and go set up a tent on the grounds. Sometimes it would be good, and sometimes you wouldn't sell much at all. We tried to get into the craft show at Foscoe, Blue Ridge Craft Show was a big thing those days and so we'd take some pieces to be judged and they would turn us down. I couldn't understand it because we had good stuff, it wasn't junk, but the people who was in that thing wanted to be the *only* potters in that thing, so we figured all that out after so many years, but they finally came and asked us to join, so I thought, *well* things have turned around, so we did end up joining but by that time things were on the way down and it just ran into the ground, I don't know what happened there, well the leadership just wasn't what it should have been I guess, I can't point my fingers at any group or anybody. There was

something there, they would buy crafts from all these mountain folks, and my daughter did some of that she worked in the office over there in the store as a sales lady and they would go out every week or so, her and another lady and go out and pick up quilts and all that handmade stuff, and they would never let them write a check for that, all these old people out there working their fingers off and finally they just you know they just quit making for them and I don't blame them. But anyway, that kind of thing happened.

But yeah our business, just through people like Willard Watson, would get us into these things. It seemed like almost by accident we got into Eno River Festival and the state fair was that way and we got to go to the World's Fair in 1982 and I performed on the stage there at the folk festival thing there for one week, through just word of mouth.

I have done a number of programs over the years with kids, now I love to entertain kids and get them involved you know. I went to Raleigh to audition for that artist in residence program and schools had called me from all over, from everywhere, so I did that for 15 years or more. All in Caldwell County, mostly, and Alexander County, and some surrounding counties, even went to Ocracoke Island once, stayed down there a week, me and my wife. She did some pottery and I did the music and storytelling. I was a little history, the name of the little program was "Entertainment Before Electric Power" it was about how mountain people we didn't have electric power but we made our own toys and I'd take those early American toys and demonstrate them and let them play with them some, and the songs they would sing along some and I had a washtub bass and a washboard and stuff that they could make music on and keep rhythm, it was a pretty good program. Of course the kids they grewed up now and they got families now and I'll see them around and they'll say "Oh Mr. Bolick!" they remember me



from those days. And we just got the (NC Folklife) Heritage Award we go to Raleigh in May to get to the supper and all that stuff, but there's four other people getting it at the same time we do.

Yeah Willard he got us into the state fair down in Raleigh, he went down there for several years, but he was one of the first ones down there in that Village of Yesteryear thing and I think they got Ms. Mary Cornwell from over near Asheville, they got her, she was something to do with agriculture, they got her to go around and find craftspeople and most of them were from the mountains, the first 15 to 20 people but now they got well over 100 people in that Holshouser building down there. And boy she was strict on all the people, no eating in the booth, and we were scared to death of her. But Willard got us in there, because Walter and Dorothy Almond were in there, they got the award somewhere in the 80s or 90s, Almond Pottery or Seagrove Potter I believe is the way they listed it. They had gotten killed in an automobile wreck over in Seagrove. They were going to get groceries or something and a log truck came around a corner and the straps broke and the logs fell right on top of them.

So they were potters in that village of yesteryear and Ms. Cornwell had asked a question at one of their meetings if anyone knew some good potters that could come to do that Village of Yesteryear, well Willard he went over to her after the meeting and told her he knew somebody, the Bolicks up in the mountains and they're good people and they can sing like a mockingbird - he'd heard us play music before - and she told him to get us to call her and we did and she quizzed me on the phone on what we did and to find out that Lula was from Seagrove, really got her interest, and so we took stuff to a picnic that they have in the summertime for that group and they have a business meeting so she told us to bring a load of

stuff to take a look at it. And she invited us out to the Village of Yesteryear, and they paid a little bit, the state would give you a little money, \$75 I believe it was apiece and Willard had gotten some money from going there to sell his stuff and he would say, "I don't understand how they are gonna pay you go to down there and make \$1,000!" He had this long mustache, and he was always mess with that mustache, when he'd talk he would sling his head and do this (twist his mustache) he was quite a guy and he got us into that.

And after getting us into that thing in 1976 at Eno River, that was the first thing we had ever done. I had never played any music out in public much at all, outside of church, and we was up there on the 4th of July and it was hot and we got there and they didn't have a table for us so they set us up on this mountain, they had 3 stages a coastal stage, a piedmont stage, and a mountain stage and they set us up here on this mountain. And Willard was there with his still set up, he was boiling water what he was doing, and somebody was supposed to come appear on that stage and play music and sing and they didn't show up and this guy this announcer was on the stage and was saying so and so didn't show up there and we were going to have to wait for someone else to go up there and sing. Well Willard heard him and he ran over there and told 'em, "Get those Bolicks over there," (laughs) and Lula was selling pottery like we'd never sold it before. And she said, "I ain't leaving here I'm selling!" And they put me up on that stage and just as I was going up, Doc Watson was getting through on the main stage down there and it frightened me to death, I had never heard people, well I had never been much of anywhere, but they were screaming and carrying on and clapping on and on and on after he got done and it frightened me, I didn't know what was going on, I really didn't, and finally I got up there on that stage and lord I didn't know what I was going to do!

AW - Tough act to follow

GB - People were walking up the trail to the stage and I got up there and I said Well, I heard everybody cheering for Doc Watson down on the mainstage a little earlier here while I was getting on the stage here and I guess I might as well start with a Doc Watson tune I learned off of his album, and they went to screaming and hollering and I hadn't even played yet!

I thought man, this ain't gonna be bad, so I played the harmonica and the guitar and sung that *Little Stream of Whiskey* that he did, I learned that from his album, of course I changed it to little stream of Kool-Aid now, cause I do that song a lot for the kids. But anyway that was one of the stories, but Willard did help us get into a lot of different things.

So I did alright on the stage, I got a good applause and everyone was really nice about that. I had never done anything in public much other than at the school, I had done some storytelling at the schools and talent shows and that kind of thing at school, but after becoming an adult I had not performed anywhere until that day.

#### **Q4 – Do you all still do the village of yesteryear?**

My daughter and son in law still do the Village of Yesteryear, we quit going a few years ago. Lula went 25 years, I only went 15 or so, it became too much for me. I felt like an animal in a cage you know I couldn't stay in that booth.

And Joe Wilson, does the name Joe Wilson sound familiar to you? He's the one that built that amphitheater out on the parkway, he's from Mountain City, Tennessee, and he had stopped at Owen's Pottery in 1982 to buy pottery to take to the World's Fair to sell at a gift shop there. Lula happened to be there at Owen's pottery on a Sunday when he came to pick up

pottery and she told him about my song I had written about the Sawmill. And I had met him at the Eno River Festival. But anyway, in 1982 he asked her, "You reckon he'd like to go to the World's Fair and perform?" And she came home and she had called me before, and she said she had run into Joe Wilson and he said to give him a call. So I called him and yeah he wanted me to come, and he told me what week to come in October, there fair was almost over by that point, but anyway, I got to go up to the World's Fair and perform on the same stage as Reno & Smiley and Lester Flatt and all those guys, I felt about that big on the main stage and I told some of the people there that put you on and off the stage, that I felt mighty small going on that stage there after following all those people that was up there. They said, "Oh no, Mr. Bolick," he said, "People come from all over the world just to see what people from your part of the word does for entertainment." And I had crazy ol' songs and stories to tell and stuff but people loved it, I don't know, it was a real treat for me to get to do something like that.

**Q5 – How long have y'all had your shop over on main street?**

Actually we started, when they started building this road down the mountain, to four lane this 321, we knew that people were not going to drive off the road to come to Bolick pottery half a mile off the main drag. We just had a little sign up on the highway, which is illegal, we get a letter from Raleigh every so often to take it down or they will take it down at our expense. And we do, we take it down for a months or two and then put it back up and it takes them three more years before they notice it. We knew that was going to hurt our business, because we had had right good business here once we got this music thing started.

And at first I built some fish ponds out here, trout ponds, just so people would know where we are, everyone knows where the trout ponds are. We kept those open for three or four years and we never made any money off of it and eventually I just filled them in with dirt. Right where we are used to be a pond, but anyway I filled this in with dirt and the music brought a lot of people here and just special events like our Heritage Day and our Thanksgiving Wood Kiln Opening. We had customers and a lot of our pottery was sold right here, but besides the shows that we were doing here and yonder.

We knew that this road business was going to hurt our business. So we rented a shop in town it was on the other side of the street from where it is now at first. My daughter and wife went in together to rent that building and then we got a chance to go on the busy side of town, to the other side of the street where all the shops are. It's been about seven or eight years since they did that, but had it not been for them doing that we would be sitting here right now with nothing. We don't get one tenth of the people we do now that we used to in them days. We advertised a little bit in the Mountain Times and the paper would run a story about us and these events and people would call us and they would come down and bus tours would come, things like that.

**Q6 – Other than the dramatic shift with the road construction, how else would you say that work has changed since you started making pottery?**

Yeah, our daughter, see Lula and I, either one, don't do any kind of electronic stuff, we don't have a computer or anything like that. My daughter, when she got her job with Blue Ridge Fireside Crafts, she was just a teenager, but the people that she worked under were very strict

on how she did her business, she learned the business there. After that she opened the store downtown Boone over there for the big craft place there on the backside of town, big big place where they had booths and people would put their pottery and stuff in that store and they hired Janet to open that and run it for them, she was the manager of that thing and that was a good experience for her, she knew how to do the business part, but if it wasn't for her we'd be sitting her with nothing, I guess we just don't know who to do that stuff.

But the business, the little store in town there, it really does well. She has three or four different potteries in there, Bolick Pottery and her pottery Traditions Potter, and Lula's brother from Seagrove has pottery in there and she sells it on a percentage basis. He has this bright red pottery you've seen the Ben Owen thing on TV? Well this Ben Owen III is Lula's cousin so it's in her family through that. The Ben Owen Red it's called, but Boyd Owen is her brother and he makes that bright red pottery that nobody else does. He bought up a ton of that stuff several years ago because he knew they was gonna stop making it, he bought a trainload so he could keep having that red pottery you don't see hardly anybody has it except in that store there and he'll have a vase this tall, and he'll get \$500 or \$600 for one vase.

**Q7 – So that red stuff is it a specialty glaze?**

Yeah. No, you can't get it anymore, it's a lead glaze so they don't make anything you'd eat out of just vases and stuff like that and its beautiful stuff.

### **Q8 – How do you get your colors?**

Well we mix our own glazes, you can buy through companies you can buy glazes that are already mixed, but we have been mixing our own glazes for years, we had to change from lead glazes to non-lead glaze in 1983, see we had lead glazes here until 1983, and I think it was probably 1984 or 85 when we first went to the state fair, and we could not have taken lead glaze there. It just happened that way I couldn't have planned it that way. But after we stopped using lead it was just a couple years until we got invited to the state fair. So we don't use any lead in it, but we had to learn how to make those glazes, because we buy cobalt to make the blue with and it is very expensive, it got up to \$75 a pound at one time. But you know a tablespoon of it would stain a pretty good sized tub of glaze, we bought up some of that cobalt because it's getting to where it's gonna be hard to find.

We make a color we call oatmeal glaze and it's kinda came on, we was trying to get a clear glaze and it came out milky lookin' so we doctored it on that until we got an oatmeal color nobody else has, we added some brown, brownish tint to it. Greens, we use cobalt in the green too, but not as much.

Anyway, we make the blue out of a slip like stuff, it used to be Albany Slip it came out of the Albany River, the silt and you make glaze out of it. But now they quit mining that and we get that from Alberta Canada and we called it Alberta Slip, and you can make a blue or a green out of that pretty good. Things like that you are stuck with the same colors and we never done any artwork much on our pottery, potters now are painting all kinds of stuff on it. It takes ten times the time to make a plate with a design in it that it does to make a plate without a design, you got way way more time in a piece like that and they don't charge that much more for it, it's

just one of those things - but these crafts people, my lord, they are just going wild with this stuff, I couldn't imagine doing the stuff they do with the pottery wheel and the clay and stuff.

**47:20 – I noticed in your shop a few pieces that were purple**

That's the wood fired kiln, that's when we take the wood fired stuff, now that if you fired that in an electric kiln it would be kinda green, but when you put it in the wood kiln and fire it comes out purple and that's the only way you can get color is through the wood firing.

**Q9 – Are those the only pieces that you use in a wood kiln instead of the electric or is that the only color that seems to react that way with the wood?**

That's the only color that does that, makes that purple. If you put our blue in the wood kiln it will come out almost black, the same glaze, the same piece, yeah that's the only one.

See that green pitcher up there? That is a lead glaze that my wife's dad made that way years ago, before 1983, but that was one of his colors. That is a lead glaze he called it a matte green and man he sold millions of those things, that matte green and matte brown he had, those two colors were his main colors and people still collect them, they'll see them in antique stores. Lula has about a dozen of his teapots, he was an excellent tea pot maker, and the spout was just, well nobody does it like that. Lula does come very close to his teapot spouts, but not a lot of people can make a teapot. I see them, but it don't have the proportion you know, proportion is what its all about. You see a pitcher with a big belly and a little bitty top, it just don't look right. The proportion, it should be the same size at the bottom as when you bring it up here, it's just one of those things.



**Q10 – Was there a moment when you decided you wanted to make pottery as a way to make a living or did it just kinda happen?**

Well, we lived down there ten years and worked with him and he didn't only make pottery, he did all kinds of things, like I do, he'd snake logs for people too, he was in my opinion *the* potter in that area at that time, he was very well known, and well he taught me a lot of things. We built kilns like the wood kilns, when we first married he had three of those wood kilns side by side and he'd fire one just about every day.

The first two or three years I worked for him, I didn't make much pottery, I cut wood for him and stacked the kilns. At that point he was in the process of building a gas kiln that you could walk in and had burners on each side, he and Charlie Cole with Cole's Pottery were doing the same thing, they were building a bigger kiln that they could put more pottery in, and they both had the business, these candle businesses were buying every piece of pottery they could get from them.

So I learned how to build kilns and how to fire 'em, how to fire those wood kilns, and how to fire the gas kilns. So a couple of years before we ever decided to move to mountains - well before I bought the place I should say, I wanted to move back the whole time - I built a small kiln down there that had an eye in the top that I could move, that way when I come to the mountains I wanted to have a kiln I could fire, so I built a steel frame with insulated brick and stuff and I had it down at my place, on his property but in our little house down there and we made pottery on our own right there beside him for a short while, just to let ourselves know we could do it.

So when I finally got this place and we moved up here I just brought that kiln up and just set it down, and hooked up the oil fired kiln, it just had one burner and we used that thing three or four years before I got an electric kiln, we use electric kilns mostly. Then I built a gas fired kiln in there, but I'm kinda afraid of it because you had to go through all these regulations before they hook you up to a gas kiln, it had to have all these automatic shutoffs and even with that that thing would go out, if one burner, it has six burners, and if one of those went out I don't know what caused it a piece of trash or something, but the kiln would almost be red hot and you'd just walk by that one that had gone out and just the breeze off your britches leg would cause that thing to light back it wasn't supposed to do that, and you'd think it was gonna blow the top off of that thing. And I had heard around in the state here that half a dozen pottery people had got burnt out after they started using a gas kiln down in that area. So I just unhooked it and stopped using it, there's a lot of money in that thing, insulated brick is really expensive on the inside, light as a feather, and regular brick on the outside. The oil kiln was different, you had the same kind of burner but that oil kiln wouldn't do that, diesel fuel you know, it won't puff out like that. But they frighten me I just didn't want to deal with it.

**Q11 – So do you primarily use oil and wood?**

We use the oil one mostly, we fire the wood kiln five or six times a year just for keeping practice. (laughs)

**Q12 – When do you work? Is there a seasonality to it? Are there certain times of the day or the week that you work?**

Well we usually plan on working, five days a week you know and she wants to keep her shop open seven days a week, we go to church, but we open the shop Sunday evenings 1 (p.m.) to 5 (p.m.), the shop is open but we not over there most of the time we are over at the house and people drive up and we might lose a couple customers if we don't see them right away, but my daughter and son-in-law they's working down there every day, we send them over to their shop and they send 'em over to our shop. But people don't come down here much anymore, it is just dying down here, you have to be in town I guess.

**Q13 – Can you describe a typical work day?**

Oh you never know what your gonna have to do in a work day at my house. We both got bad backs and arthritis is getting us you know; we are getting to the point where it is hard for us to work sometimes. Lula she has customers, she sells some stuff wholesale, people will want a certain mug, you know I'm talking about 50 of them, a certain shape, and she'll have that on her mind and she can come over her and make 50 to 100 pieces before noon, but then she's done for the day. Used to, up to the last few years, she would go in there and work six or eight hours every day and just make piece after piece, and then the next day she will have to put handles on them, then a couple of days someone had to scrape them and sand them and then put them in the kiln and then the next day she would have the glaze ready. So you don't turn pottery every day, say if you turned the first two days of the week and that would give you

enough work for the rest of the week with sanding, scraping, glazing and drying, and stacking the kiln so we don't work, don't make pottery every day, but do something every day.

**Q14 – So how long does it take for one piece start to finish?**

Well, probably, usually seven to ten days, but if you ordered 100 pieces, 100 mugs, we would ask you ten days at least, probably have it for you in ten days, but three weeks would be better (laughs). But along with the other stuff, you wouldn't stop everything else just to make those 100 pieces, you might make them one day but you'll be making the other stuff so you'll have something for your shop.

**Q15 – Earlier you were talking about being on a production style schedule early on for Lula's dad, do you think that has affected how you approach your work?**

Well yeah, we would probably have been better potters if we hadn't had to work on production, we take more time now, like that piece I made for y'all, if I was on production I'd be slinging those things fast. But I made a 1,000 and 50 pieces in one day, me and her brother was racing to see who could make the most, of those little cups.

I made a 1,000 and 50 pieces, we both made a 1,000 at quitting time and he went out to the ball field to play ball and I went back after supper time to make 50 more so I could beat him. But at three cents apiece, that was \$30 dollars a day if you could make 1,000, we usually would make 500. But in the furniture factory at the same time \$30 was a week, I worked in a furniture factory some before I left home and my paycheck would be \$30-35 for two weeks! They paid you over two weeks, they was only paying like 90 cents an hour then they took out a

lot for income tax and stuff. First paycheck I got at the rock crusher was for two weeks was \$62, that was the most money I'd ever had in my hand at one time up to that point at 18 years old, \$62 for two weeks. That was for one week's work, but I got paid every two weeks.

We fix our own clay, we go to South Carolina and buy bulk clay by the dump truck load, then we dump it over there in the shed and let it air dry, then we run it through a hammer mill to pulverize it, make it like flour, then we take it by barrel, 55-gallon barrel and take it up to the pump mill and we shovel into this big box, pour water in there and shovel it back and forth and then we move it into that pump mill, see that's the way my father-in-law did it so we didn't change it. A lot, I would say ninety-five percent of potters today buy their clay in plastic bags. We still do it the old-time way, I don't know if we are saving any money or not because we do buy a lot of bag clay to mix with our raw clay and we can buy moist clay to mix with it too. It has changed some, we got clay, like every two weeks we grind 1,000 pounds of clay, if people happen come when we grind clay they'll take pictures and sit and watch that thing run all day. Just run it with a little farm tractor and a flat belt on it. When Lula and I first married we ground clay with a mule and a sweep pole, it had a barrel with fingers in it. As the mule walked around fingers tour through the clay. That was a treat to see that.

**Q16 – What type of people do you work with?**

Well it's just Lula and I here, my daughter and son-in-law with their shop they have a guy that works for them, doing the pottery and he is doing really well. But we've never had anybody that's worked with us in the clay. My son helps us grind clay, and he helps me with lumber, and the trees, and the tractors and all that, but we never worked with anybody since we moved

here, we haven't had any helpers, never taught any classes, other than in the schools when I used to go, but we just work when we want to now.

The businesses that buy, we don't sell a lot of wholesale anymore, we used to kinda depend on it, we sold a lot of wholesale orders. But now it's just Stick Boy Bakery in town that buys our stuff. She buys quite a few mugs, and she comes every few months and gets \$200 or \$300 worth of stuff and she sells quite a few.

**Q17 – What do you do with downtime at work?**

Well, we like to play music. We stay at home most of the time, we don't go many places much more. Well I used to go, see I've always loved music, and made several CD's over the years and I'd go to bluegrass festivals and stuff. The last one I went to was the Bill Monroe Festival in Rosine, Kentucky, but they had it every year in October. I told my wife I was gonna drive over there and check it out I may like to perform there. So I went by myself and slept in my camper. And just fell in love with the people, the most laid back and friendliest people I'd ever met. And they'd redone the Bill Monroe cabin that he grew up in, and they had some old buggies like he woulda rode in when he was young and they restored them, and a cane mill and things like that and they were redoing the buildings that had fallen down like the corn crib and things like that, they were re-doing them, they had a seven or eight-acre place there that the whole area didn't belong to them, the foundation had done that.

And I just love those people so good and I asked them if they might like to have an antique sawmill there on the grounds because they told the story of how Bill used to work on the sawmill. So I brung them a CD and told them that if I brought that sawmill up I'd like to sing

my song on the stage. So they made a deal with me that would work out. So Lu and I we got that sawmill out and I fixed it up, painted it up, and put it on a trailer and took it up to them, we stayed couple days and got the sawmill set up, I had some helpers come and man they loved that thing it was an old-timey hand operated sawmill like I used.

Well anyway I got to do that program in October, and they gave her a space to set up a pottery booth, a tent and I went on the stage, every morning for three or four days there and it worked out really good, I sold some pottery, sold some CD's stuff like that. And let's see I guess we went back up there seven or eight years in a row. But I don't like to drive in big traffic and the last time we was up there we was coming back through Knoxville, Tennessee and orange barrels up and down there for miles, traffic flying by you like crazy, I was squeezing that steering wheel (laughs), I thought if this is what it takes to travel this far and have fun and play some music, then I'm giving up music. It just got to the time where traffic frightened me. I never drove in big cities. But I had a lot of fun, I went a lot of times it was just a wonderful place to go. They filmed me and it was on national TV all those programs, and I got to see myself on the Cumberland Highlander show a few times, that was pretty neat. We is really slowing down, I just don't plan on doing much of that any more.

**Q18 – Does your occupation have any special sayings?**

Throwing, that's one, we call it turning on the wheel. That was a word I had never heard for a long time, and people would come to Lula's Dad's shop and say "is anyone throwing today?" I would like at them like, what's that?

**Q19 – What type of special skills or abilities are needed for your work?**

Well I guess, I noticed down through the years that most potters I know are very talented in other things. Music, every potter I've ever known could play the guitar, I guess I'm one of the dumb ones because I never learned to do any of the computer work or anything.

But potters are special people because they can do so many different things, my father-in-law used to say, "Oh well a potter has to be an electrician and a plumber," you always had to work on something your wheel would tear up.

**Q20 – What were originally the most difficult aspects of being a potter?**

When I started turning, my father-in-law just had an old kick wheel, and that's what I learned on, they thought I learned real fast, but I thought it took forever, making them little cups, that's what I started on, making them little candle cups. And the thing was the candle company put them in a little pasteboard box thing with cellophane over them, and they poured wax into them, they had to fit in that little pasteboard so if it was too wide you couldn't use it and if it was too small, they didn't want it.

So they pretty much had to be just right, and you would make a board of them, back then we had six foot boards, and there like six or eight racks and the boards are 6-foot-long so you would fill up a board and then get another board and Mr. Owens would come by and he'd get that board out, he'd look at them and go down through the and squash them down if they were too big and wouldn't fit in that box. So I thought, man, I'm never gonna get them the right size, there goes your three cents every time he pulls one off there and of course you use the clay over it gets ground back in. And I never ever thought, still don't, that I'm a super potter. I



like to do it at times, but I don't like to do it *all the time*. I want to cut trees, I'm an outside worker mostly.

But Lula she's had some terrible back problems and as you get older, you get lazy, your body gets lazy and her stuff is getting thicker than it's ever been before, you just get to where you can't get down there. Her dad was the same way, and he was a master potter. I'm doing more of the same, I get them thicker than I want to now, because it takes too long to stand down there, so that's the reason I don't turn six hours a day, I just turn a few hours at a time. I can't really cut timber anymore like I want to. My knees is worn out I can't stand on the side of a hill; but I dearly love to cut trees. Pottery is just fine, most of our money and income has come from pottery.

**Q21 – Most satisfying part of your job?**

Well, I guess it's taking out a kiln of pottery after you've done all the work, Lula likes to, if the kiln gets too hot, 100 degrees too hot it will change the color and the quality of it. We really gotta watch the temperature, I don't have any push button kilns you know like you set a time for it to come on and time for it to go off and automatic setters and stuff like that. We eyeball it, so you don't want to under fire it and you don't want to over fire it, so you got to be there at the right time and that kiln will last a couple hours at least and make sure it don't over fire, there is a temperature cone that we watch and once that thing goes down you gotta pull it because you don't want to over fire, we cut it off when it gets like that.

**Q23 - What is a temperature cone?**

It is a little porcelain cone that you set in there like that and it melts down at 2,300 degrees, you can't see it move but it will go down. Now I got one thing over there, it's a temperature thing that's got a needle on it, I never use it but I could.

**Q24 - Can you tell by feel?**

Un-uh you gotta look at that cone, of course when Lu and I first married, Mr. Owens had those wood kilns like that, he didn't have the temperature cones, so you had to eye ball it. Of course it was a lead glaze so it would melt at 900 to 850 degrees and he could look down that whole and tell, he knew if it was hot or not.

Well we fire this wood kiln I always try to get two times the wood we think we will need, sometimes the wood doesn't give off the BTU's you think. Oak is good, but if it is green oak it is not good. The best wood, I guess that we ever fired this thing with is Locust, but you can't find much locust anymore, and pine slabs down east that is what they finished with, but you wanted big pieces you didn't want kindling because it would shwoop and its gone, but they want a big heavy piece of pine that would hold the heat longer, but we just kinda mix it up now we watch the cones. It's not like making liquor, you can scorch that stuff, you don't want a big flame but you wanted it to keep coming up, and if it got too hot they did what was called, "pulling the coals" where they rake out the hot coals and that would let it cool down a little, but they didn't want it too cool down too much because you wanted to keep it flowing. One time around here somebody asked if I ever had to pull the coals. (laughs) I knew exactly what he was talking about cuz I've seen that done before.

**Q25 – What advice would you give someone who wants to become a potter?**

I don't know, I'd probably tell them to go get a real job, I know a lot of people are interested in pottery and it is a unique thing, I just never loved it like I did the outside work.

**Q26 – Can you describe a memorable moment from your work?**

We had a lot of them over time. I wanted to get back to the mountains so bad so I moved my trailer, we was living in a trailer down at Seagrove, and one summer I moved it up here and stayed one winter, I think it was, probably, in that little trailer I kept it at my moms, and Lula made pots, we kept making those little candle things and we would bring the clay up here and make it in a little building that momma had, and she made a whole bunch of them and they froze one night and destroyed them. So that was no good. We didn't have any heat in that building. Things like that, you had some bad days.

After Mr. Owens built the fuel fired kiln, I stacked the kiln for him you had to start it from the back and build the shelves as you come out and then close the door and build it over and seal it up in there and then fire those burners. We made these three-legged pots, like a wash pot, just a small little pot and put three legs on them and glazed them black, it was the black matte glaze, looked just like an old iron wash pot. And we had stacked that kiln from front to back, they was probably 2,000 pieces in there and one of the shelves had broke while that thing was firing. And it tumbled and tumbled against another one as they fell down. And when we opened that thing up there was all these little black pots stuck together, you'd go to take them out and there'd be a whole board of them stuck to the fire slab in there.

Things like that, another time we was firing a wood kiln, and it's always on a hill cuz you want to dig out of the ground, but I guess a toad frog had made him a home in that fire box but I guess a snake got to chasing after him because we got that fire rolling and here comes a toad frog hop right down the hill and jumped right in that fire. He'd gotten scared or something he was coming home and hopped right in that fire.

Another we had the blaze going, it will run out the chimney 10 or 12 foot and finish the kiln and a bird flew just above the blaze and it was so hot, I guess it thought it was high enough above it, but it just about roasted it going over top you know flames.

We had this kiln over here and one summer, I had two hound dogs and they had something bayed in that kiln and they were just rearing and barking and biting and I went over to that kiln and back in under that fire block popping their teeth together and growling and making all kind of noise and I finally had to tie the dogs back to get in there and it was a groundhog! In the groundhog kiln! So things like that, you remember that.