

Gretchen Geisinger

Mac Tedder Interview

February 13, 1999

GG- Since wood carving is a lost art, how did you come to do it? Did an older relative teach you?

MT- No, no I just picked it up. Talks about his imagination making atypical creations such as a mechanized wood carving and a Santa Claus out of a cypress knee.

GG- you do shoes and mostly miniatures, why shoes?

MT- "Well, everybody wears shoes and shoes has character. People runs 'em over or they're turned in or they're pigeon toed". Has had requests from festival goers for older styled buckled shoes. Discusses details of shoes, how each pair must be identical and should he find a stress crack the pair must be discarded. Emphasizes the challenge of carving shoes, uses example of spurs on cowboy boots.

He makes shoes strictly as collectibles, styles made in even sets usually less than a dozen at a time. Mentions other woodcarvers with similar styles, meeting others at festivals and exchanging work.

GG- Do you worry about the longevity of wood carving, young people taking it up, have you thought about a tutor?

MT- I try to encourage. He was asked to teach in Tallahassee, but feels that awkward about teaching something he feels is a gift. Stresses the importance of ability and developing natural talent, gives example of beginning carver from Indiana and needing encouragement in every aspect of life. Talks about his own progression from his early works, which he finds crude.

GG- tell me about the miniatures of Jakin

MT- Made Jakin store fronts that are on display in the library as gift to the town. He wanted the community to have something after he was gone and also to have a replica of how things used to be.

GG- What do you think about the renovation when they had the centennial?

MT- "I think it looks nice, a whole lot better than it used to look when you had your brick walls falling down. They did a good job, but I think we need to preserve the way it used to look and if we can preserve it through storefronts and library documents. Discuss process of measuring old pictures to get the miniatures to scale. "It's an ongoing experience for me. When you get to the point where you say, well I know it all well you just in a mess".

GG-walking sticks?

MT- Was walking down a dirt road and there was a sweet gum tree, no chinaberry with no leaves and started working on it. (Took 8 months) talks about carving golf balls on request

GG- do you think that people are interested in it because it reminds them of the past? Talks about quality of Wal-mart merchandise. Compares with the trustworthiness of his sales. Price based on effort and time.

MT- Do you think it's the amount of time that you put into it that, that would deter many younger people from doing it. Many young people say I don't have the patience to do that, but when I was younger I didn't either because I got away from it I got away from it and came back to it after I got older. But I never forgot it. Specially, when you're raising a family you never do get around to it. It's a . . .

GG- calling?

MT- Yes, definitely it's a calling if you have the desire and urge to do it you can expand (mention famous carver) talks about enjoyment and encouragement "Encouragement, it's just like saying ' Sic 'em it gets the adrenalin going it's like somebody's proud of me".

GG- The way things are today it's not encouraged?

MT- talks about desire and being true to calling. God gives us different talents and I thank him for it everyday. I run into people at shows that say Man, I wish I had a gift and I say "Do you love somebody- yes, well the Apostle Paul says that's the greatest gift of all, love. So maybe some of the things I say at shows gets out that's just me the way I do things.

Describes carvings in case. Describes display of snake and mouse.

Tells story of shoe and how he married his high school sweet heart 30 years later.

Mentions gospel quartet.

GG- My grandfather would go to the all night sings. Do you remember them?

MT- I was in quartet years ago and just got back into it. Long distances a factor with age. "The older you get, you want to be home by sundown. We go to a lot of nursing homes, churches too, it's a blessing for me to go. You'd be surprised. They beg us to come back (talks about nursing home ministry) Most representative of the all night sings still going on (in his opinion) is the sing in Bonifay, Fla. which occurs on July 4th. It ends about 4 a.m.

GG- Is it like the ones you remember going to when you were younger?

MT- Yes, but not as many people as used to participate. Says that as with everything things have changed and not always for the better.

GG- do you see younger people coming back?

MT- talks about younger singers on gospel t.v. programs and young adults present in Bonifay. Says that as far as touring the younger groups are able to go further with less comforts or money.

GG- Were the sings in your youth more like a community or social gathering?

MT- describes church homecomings and dinner on the grounds. Now he says that churches have nicer embellishments (fellowship halls) but less people.

“God’s not changed, but people have changed.” Admits that change is good to a certain degree. See conflict in the gospel community between southern gospel and contemporary gospel and the inability of some of both camps to accept the styles of the other. Says he listens to the words not the notes.

Talks about how he doesn’t visit with his neighbors like people used to do, but cites pressures to succeed and emphasis on career that were not present or not felt as heavily as when he was younger. Says that communities have changed because of the individuals in those communities. Blames television for the lack of fellowship with neighbors. “It used to be nothing to borrow a cup of sugar, flour now there’s some that never brought it back, but then there’s some brought it back two fold. But you didn’t throw brick bats at ‘em ‘cause they didn’t. You had a community that cared.” Mentions current social problems, road rage, safety in traveling.

GG- with the renovation of Jakin and programs like the music on the square in Blakely, do you think that people are trying to get away from television?

MT- “I believe that’s a good effort. So many people are hunting things, they’re hunting God, but they’re hunting him in so many ways. The only way to find God is to go back to the old ways, on their knees.” talks about current governmental problems and forgiveness

For him gospel is a 3 minute sermon that some may hear who would not ordinarily be in church. Gives example of “Chain gang Johnny” who turned his life around and now sings. Says you never know who you will influence. Talks about wanting his kids in church, but also admits in his younger days he disappointed his father. But his father’s death brought about his transformation.

GG- Do you feel that carving and quartet is an extension of that feeling?

MT- Yes, well there’s a lot of people who don’t have a purpose,” mentions people he works with who won’t retire and how he can’t wait to “Sop it all up”

“What it is for me is to walk through the woods and think I can do something with that... I just like the stuff of old. Those shoes are a challenge to me, but a blessing to me. It’s a blessing to go to shows and talk to people. I may say one thing that may be a blessing in their life. If I did it’d be worth it all. A pastor may be before 150 on Sunday, but on Saturday I may have had 100,000 come by and now they didn’t all stop, but those who did, did I make a difference in their lives? It’s good to be able to do it. It’s good that God let’s me do it.”

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Mac Tedder
Route 1
Jakin, Ga. 31761

Met with Mr. Mac at his home in Jakin which is filled with crafts done either by himself or his wife Olerita (not present). He has awards pinned to the wall, numerous pictures and some newspaper articles about his carving. He keeps his shoe in a display case. He mentions these items, and others in the room which I either took photographs of or tried to describe while we were talking.

Mr. Mac needed little prompting, being eager to discuss his work and personal philosophies. He is very religious and it would seem that no boundary exists between art, life and religion. If I had to theme this interview it would be about ministering for God. Mr. Mac feels that his carving is a calling, a God given gift that he enjoys but must use to spread the love of God. At festivals he mentions have the opportunity to share his faith. However, Mac Tedder isn't "preachy" he simply refers to art as an extension of his faith. He attempts to live as he believes.

He sees part of society's ills as a break from tradition, that tradition being God. He says that in singing as in communities, people get caught up in individual preferences rather than focusing on the whole. He is not anti change, but admits that he experienced more togetherness in the community of his childhood rather than that of today. To explain this fragmentation, he cites job and family pressures that he didn't feel existed in his youth. He thinks attempts to continue the positive aspects of tradition, renovating the town, or reviving gospel sings, are good efforts but just don't measure up to the original.

During the tape the door was cracked and at times the porch wind chime can be heard or the wind blowing outside as it was a cold, windy day. On the second tape the tape came out of the spool so the beginning is kind of muddled. We got it fixed quickly enough and probably only a few words were affected.

Since meeting with Mac Tedder, he has expressed interest in getting copies of the numerous photographs that I took. He likes to keep copies of all of his work on file. The roll of film with those exposures on it has not yet been developed.