

GREENWICH VILLAGE SOCIETY FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION
WEST VILLAGE
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Oral History Interview

RICK KELLY

By Sarah Dzedzic

New York, NY

July 11, 2019

Oral History Interview with Rick Kelly, July 11, 2019

Narrator(s)	Rick Kelly
Address	West Broadway and Prince Street
Birthyear	-
Birthplace	-
Narrator Age	69
Interviewer	Sarah Dziezic
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Rick Kelly, Photo by Sarah Dzedzic

Quotes from Oral History Interview with Rick Kelly

Sound-bite

“This is Rick Kelly, Carmine Street Guitars. We’re at 42 Carmine Street, New York City, and we make hand-made guitars here. We make Leo’s original ideas from the 1950s. I make them out of this New York City wood, which is so old, it just makes an incredible version of that guitar.

The first batch of pine, I got from my friend T., who, the house that he grew up in—which was built by his grandfather down in Virginia—was being torn down by the new owners, and so he went down there and got some wood from it, and gave me some boards that actually were tables from when he was a little kid. And I made a few guitars out of them, and went, ‘Wow, this is really good.’

That changed everything. So I had something. I said, all right, New York City pine, perfect stuff. It’s in every building. How do you get it? Well, I just saw that dumpster full of wood over there—maybe it’s the same stuff? So sure enough, I’m starting to look indoors, outdoors, dumpster—it’s the same wood. These buildings are built with this wood! So then, I got wood from Jim Jarmusch. My friend John Campo, I was making him this big arch-top guitar from some reclaimed wood he had. He had a big table, and he wanted me to make him a guitar out of it. [01:14:55] So he said, ‘Jim is replacing the roof rafters in his loft. Do you want the wood?’ And I said, “Sure,” so Jim agreed, and he had the guy that was doing the work bring all that over. So that was the first batch of wood, was timbers from Jim Jarmusch’s loft. And we made the first batch of guitars, and they just—wow, what a difference in sound.”

Additional Quotes

“There was, I think it was like a little bin, and you could fit a log about this big in there, and, coming out of high school as a pretty wild kid—I was always in trouble and stuff. I think he said, ‘You, you come here.’ He put this log in front of me, he gave me a chisel and a mallet, and said, ‘Start carving in there!’ And I went, ‘Ok.’ [laughter] And then I did things wrong, and he would correct me, and I learned how to carve wood, in high school. And I got hooked immediately. I just loved the feel of it, and making something out of it.” (Kelly p. 4)

“I said, well, this time I’m not just going to move to another place here, I’m going to go back to New York City and see if I can make it in the city. That was 1976, and that’s what I did. I had an old Ford station wagon, filled it up, and moved to Downing Street, right around the corner. That’s the sign up there, from Naked City Guitars. That was 1976. And I guess I had that shop

for about two and a half years. Yeah, about two and a half years, building guitars right around the corner on Downing Street. That was a really neat little shop too. I was living in it, of course, like all my shops; I used to call it sleeping in the wood chips. That was my early days of paying my dues...But it was real narrow and real weird little shop. And, but it was only \$200 a month, so, moved in there, and I had people like John Belushi came in one day, and David Bowie came in. There was all these famous guitarists that were coming into that little weird little shop. I guess because it was off the beaten path.” (Kelly p. 11)

“For a few years while I was out there, that was a good experience, to really get the building skills back down, and to start a semi-production kind of thing, which was my intent at the time, to do a small manufacturing thing with solid body electrics. But then I came here, and it was like, let’s start from the beginning once again! [laughter]

And then this shop was that way, struggling to stay afloat for the first five years, barely making the rent. I had a great landlady, still lives upstairs. Originally, the mom, she was about 93 then, back in 1990, and now her daughter’s inherited the place, and they run the place. Still live upstairs, and we’re pretty good friends. They’ve pretty much enabled me to stay here. This is an expensive building, and I have a really big space, as you can see, for New York City. This would be a successful restaurant, if they wanted it to be, you know, they could make that work.” (Kelly p. 13)

“The money is in making more traditional shapes. Guitars are familiar and comfortable when you play them. And some of the guitars from the big factories have built-in flaws that were never really corrected, or were never really a great design to begin with, but they look cool. A lot of this industry is about looking cool. It really is. Electric guitar playing is all about the look, and it’s all part of it. But there’s also a lot of musicianship in there too, and there’s also high degrees of how good you are as a player. You have to pay attention to all the sonic qualities, and the intonation, and the technical things that go on, and then you can work around that and do some artistic embellishment, if you want, but it’s really about the, in this shop, anyway, it’s about the sound and the playability. It’s about making them work because they’re tools for making music. They’re not just wall hangers.” (Kelly 16–17)

“I think the reclaimed lumber that I use now accidentally turned out to be the most amazing wood that I didn’t even—sometimes you don’t think—it’s like, well, this wood, yeah, it’s been in this building for almost two hundred years, so it’s gotta be really nice and cured and dry. And what is it? Pull it out, it’s white pine, it’s pinus strobus. A giant tree that used to grow here, that were three or four hundred years old before they keeled over and got used for wood. But they had never been cut down, they were free to grow to full maturity. And then they decided to build New York City, and all these buildings are filled with this beautiful old timber from these trees that were the dominant tree of this area, that were huge.

And so now all that wood, which is incredible musical instrument grade wood, basically—except it’s a roof rafter and it’s a floor joice, and a wall board, and it’s full of nails, and cracks

and checks, and it's got knots in it—and it's not really the stuff that you would choose if you were going to take apart a tree, and say, I want a really clean wood, so I want the trunk from here to here. No knots, nice and clean, straight wood; that's high-grade lumber wood you're going to pay a premium for, and they go into the forest and just take wood. That's not what I'm after. If you could make do with the knots and the cracks and the nail holes, and I just said, 'Well, I'll give it a try. Why not? Let's see.'" (Kelly p. 17)

“people were just enamored by it. They just love that look and they want more of it. They call it the character. So I said, well, this is good, this is working out good. Everybody likes the look, and I love the look. That worked out well, just leaving that wood and using this wood, the reclaimed wood. But yeah, it's always been that way with me, doing what you can environmentally, those kind of concerns.” (Kelly p. 18)

“When T. gave me that wood, that whole story about the early Fenders being made of pine, I knew that it was an acceptable wood, that it would sound good. But would it sound better? Would it really be this different thing? I didn't know. It was really just an experiment for me too, trying to make it out of all this same wood, which is pine. Even the neck, which no one had ever done that. They always went to a much harder wood for a neck. Which makes sense when you think about it; it's got a lot of string tension on it, it's pulling it and all.

But I made a neck for a guy about five years earlier than that, and he was an African musician who played a skin-top with a long, round, completely round neck. It had two or three strings on it. It was an African instrument that was based off of something they would make in Africa. It was like a bass, actually. He played it like a bass, and he was getting really famous. He was already pretty famous—I hear him on the radio, still, to this day—but he wanted me to make him a Tele with a round neck because he had been playing this round neck. So that's what we did, and that was a pine neck.

What I did was I used a closet pole, which is Doug fir—works great as a closet pole for many, many years, and it doesn't really warp too much as a closet pole. You get a little bow in it, maybe. So I said, 'Well, it must be really stiff and stable, and if you were to twist it so it's on the quarter, it's going to be really stiff!' So that's what I decided to do with the necks, to put the wood on the quarter like that, have all the straight lines going up and down, make it really stiff vertically, and it would have that acoustic sound quality as an acoustic guitar top, or a violin top, or a cello top—all spruce, all pine. Same woods. So that's what I did, and it just changed the whole sound of the instrument by having that big pine neck on there. That was the big difference.” (Kelly p. 28)

Summary of Oral History Interview with Rick Kelly

Rick Kelly grew up on Long Island by the Great South Bay, near Fire Island. In high school, he took classes in sculpture, painting, and woodworking, and made his first musical instrument, a cigar box ukulele. He attended the Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore, where he began making Appalachian dulcimers as a way to earn money towards his tuition, and briefly taught dulcimer making at the Smithsonian.

After spending some time homesteading in Columbia, California, Kelly returned to Maryland to establish his first shop in an outbuilding on a farm. He built dulcimers for juried craft fairs, and describes the craft fair scene of the early 1970s, which he participated in until moving to New York City in 1976 to open a guitar shop in the Village. He settled on Downing Street in an area that was popular for guitar shops until a run-in with organized crime a few years later forced him to relocate. For a year he ran Monterey Guitars in Carmel Valley, CA, and then returned to Long Island where he focused on production and manufacturing of small body electric guitars.

He returned to New York City and opened his current shop, Carmine Street Guitars, in 1990, in a commercial space that has previously been occupied by a Walt Disney set designer, a cabinet maker, and a speakeasy during Prohibition. He describes the nuances of running a retail guitar shop—building his reputation with customers, dealerships, and the other guitar shops in the vicinity—as well as following the market to see what styles and sounds are in demand. He also acknowledges the high property value in the neighborhood, and gives credit to his landlady for not charging market rate rent, which enables him to stay in his current location.

While Kelly experimented with using reclaimed wood for guitars in the 1970s, it wasn't until the mid-1990s that he discovered the suitability of New York City wood for his guitars. He explains how the white pine used in nineteenth century building construction creates a unique guitar sound, and is ideal from an ecological/reuse standpoint. As buildings in the city undergo major renovations, he seeks out the wood that would otherwise end up in a dumpster and collects it for the construction of his guitars. He also builds custom guitars with wood that people bring to him from meaningful places, as well as wood from famous sites such as Chumley's and the Chelsea Hotel.

General Interview Notes

This is a transcription of an Oral History that was conducted by the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation.

The GVSHP Oral History Project includes a collection of interviews with individuals involved in local businesses, culture, and preservation, to gather stories, observations, and insights concerning the changing Greenwich Village. These interviews elucidate the personal resonances of the neighborhood within the biographies of key individuals, and illustrate the evolving neighborhood.

Oral history is a method of collecting memories and histories through recorded interviews between a narrator with firsthand knowledge of historically significant events and a well-informed interviewer, with the goal of adding to the historical record.

The recording is transcribed, lightly edited for continuity and clarity, and reviewed by the interviewee. Oral history is not intended to present the absolute or complete narrative of events. Oral history is a spoken account by the interviewee in response to questioning. Whenever possible, we encourage readers to listen to the audio recordings to get a greater sense of this meaningful exchange.

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THANK YOU

Oral History Interview Transcript

Dziedzic: Today is July 11, 2019, and this is Sarah Dziedzic interviewing Rick Kelly for the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation Oral History Project. So, can you start just by saying your name, and giving yourself a brief introduction? And then we'll go into the interview.

Kelly: Hello, this is Rick Kelly, Carmine Street Guitars. We're at 42 Carmine Street, New York City, and we make hand-made guitars here.

Dziedzic: Can you tell me a little bit about where you grew up, the place where you grew up, and some of your early memories?

Kelly: Yeah. Well, I was born in Queens, but that was very short-lived. We were only there for, I was still an infant, I guess, when we moved out to Long Island. My mom wanted to raise us on Long Island. And we lived in Hempstead till I guess I was about five, and then we wound up in Brightwaters, a little town by the Great South Bay, out near Bayshore, where I went to high school, at Bayshore High School. It's a real nice little seaside town. It's on the bay side, it's not on the ocean, but it offered me an opportunity to have work immediately digging clams. I was a shellfisher. I was a clam digger for [laughs] probably most of my younger days, until I left for college in 1969. So those years were, they were a lot of fun, growing up on the Great South Bay with the ocean ten minutes away across the bay. We'd go over there at night and do a little surfing, and during the day we'd dig clams for a living.

Dziedzic: You said "we." Who were you with?

Kelly: Oh, there's always a group of people you grow up with. I say we because there was probably 10 to 14 of us that all went to high school together, grammar school, you know, we're all just friends. I still am friends with a lot of them from there.

Dziedzic: So you grew up on Long Island in the '50s and early '60s—

Kelly: Yeah.

Dziedzic: —so I think there's an image of that as suburbia—

Kelly: Most definitely suburbia, yeah.

Dziedzic: You're saying your experience was digging clams and surfing—

Kelly: Yeah, it sounds more like a seaside town, which it is, but it's still suburbia. I mean, all the houses in our little area were different, and mostly they were a lot of bungalows that were built in the 1920s from people who would go out there to vacation. That was always—because the ferries leave from that town to go over to Fire Island, so there's always been that service there. And a little further out east, there's another ferry service that brings people over, so it's very crowded in the summertime in that little town with cars, just going to Fire Island [laughs] and back. We actually used to park cars in a parking lot for a lot of celebrities, back in the 1960s that were going on the ferries and heading to Fire Island, they probably had property over there. And there's no cars allowed on Fire Island, so you have to take the ferry there.

Dziedzic: Wow. Never it made out there myself.

Kelly: Oh, you gotta go to Fire Island. I mean, we're not that far away, and it's a real paradise, right on the barrier reef there that connects Jones Beach all the way out almost to Montauk, the Shinnecock Inlet there. But, it's a great little stretch of beach.

Dziedzic: What was your awareness of the city when you were growing up?

Kelly: Well, I always came into the city quite often, because my mother worked here, and she commuted out there every day, and also, my grandfather and grandmother used to bring us in to a lot of the museums, and we got exposed to a lot of culture because the city is so close. You can just get on a train and be here in an hour. So, I would come in in the late '60s just to see music groups, too, so I got into music. I was already into music, before I even left for college, when I was 18. All through, like, 15, 16, 17, and 18. We were going in here and seeing Jimi Hendrix, and the Chambers Brothers, and lots of bands at that time that were popular. Right here in Greenwich Village. Yeah, so, I always knew about Greenwich Village, because I'd walked the streets since I was 15 years old [laughing], you know?

Dziedzic: Yeah. Do you remember what your first concert was?

Kelly: The ones I remember—well, I know there were a lot of little ones that I don't remember, but I know that the ones that really stuck with me were seeing Jimi Hendrix here, and seeing the Mothers of Invention, all clubs on these next two blocks, within this little area right here.

[00:05:08] That was the ones that really stuck in my head. We'd go to the Electric Circus on Saint Mark's Place, when it was there—it's no longer there. The Bitter End was there. We'd see folk singers, too, sometimes in the clubs, the coffee houses. But it was the real Greenwich Village, I think, that people reminisce about, was in those days, '50s and '60s.

Dziedzic: You said you went away to college when you were eighteen.

Kelly: Yeah, I went to art school down in Baltimore City. It's Maryland Institute College of Art, they call it MICA, but I went there for like three years and kind of ran out of money, and just decided to go to California. Things changed, but I had three great years in that college. I loved that school, and I loved being in art school. And in fact, I was there most nights. We barely slept. We just worked, worked, worked, and they would put us on night guard assignment, so we could work all night if we wanted to. They were a very liberal college, you know, it's an art school. And they didn't have grades and all. You attend classes that you're really interested in. But it wasn't the cheapest school, it's still a private school. I had a small scholarship for the first year, but it got expensive. And I started working on the military trucks that they had in the school, just to pay my tuition. But that's when—

Dziedzic: Like mechanic work?

Kelly: Yeah, mechanic work. I was wrenching since I was a little kid on cars in Long Island. It was—I took apart the engine of the air force military—they'd get all their trucks and equipment from an army surplus, because they were a non-profit school. So they would haul us all up there, if it had anything to do with art, I mean, we'd be coming back with bell bottoms, and air force jackets and stuff. I have still so much stuff that came from that place, and many fond memories. It was a great school. But we learned a lot, and did a lot of sculpture. I did a lot of woodworking there, kind of related, and started my first musical instruments. Actually, in, this little instrument right here, it's a little ukulele that I still have from 1968, in high school.

Dziedzic: Wow.

Kelly: That was the first one. But when I was in college is where I started making Appalachian dulcimers.

Dziedzic: Before we get into that, I want to ask, how did you find out about MICA? What drew you to Baltimore?

Kelly: Well, in high school, you have guidance counsellors and all, and they would show you different schools, and you would apply. I didn't get accepted into Pratt, I tried, but I didn't have the academics. My academics were weak. But Maryland Institute was more interested in your portfolio, and what you had to offer as art. So, they immediately picked me. I was in on that, because I had that side of it done. I did nothing but work, even in high school, making big paintings, and sculpture. So that was easy, to get into that school.

Dziedzic: Can you tell me a little more about what was in your portfolio at the time?

Kelly: In high school, we had two additions added onto Bayshore High in 1967, I think it was, '66 maybe. They added two wings out on the back of the building, and they were both art rooms. One was for architecture and the other was fine arts. They just happened to finish the year I was still in school, and two great art teachers were brought in, and I immediately started taking as many of those classes as I could. In fact, my one teacher would sign me out of all the gym stuff—I didn't have to go to the gym, or play sports, or anything—I could just go in there and work, and that's what I did, basically. I was doing a lot of wood carving in there, and doing these big old paintings.

Dziedzic: And sculpture, too, you mentioned? What kind of sculpture?

Kelly: Yeah, they were pretty well-equipped, actually. There was, I think it was like a little bin, and you could fit a log about this big in there, and, coming out of high school as a pretty wild kid—I was always in trouble and stuff. I think he said, "You, you come here." He put this log in front of me, he gave me a chisel and a mallet, and said, "Start carving in there!" And I went, "Ok." [laughter] And then I did things wrong, and he would correct me, and I learned how to carve wood, in high school. And I got hooked immediately. I just loved the feel of it, and making something out of it. I don't know where those are, I think my mom has those somewhere out in the Bayshore house. [00:09:59]

Dziedzic: And what about making instruments? You mentioned the ukulele—

Kelly: Yeah, when that triggered that side of it was when I made a cigar box ukulele, and it was just a project in art class, one of those art classes in high school. And as soon as I got into college, the first year was basically just trying to be able to stay there, and make up a lot of academics, and stay in the studios as much as I could. And that's what I did there, I worked pretty hard in college, in those classes. But to help pay the tuition towards the end of that second year, I started making these Appalachian dulcimers. Then I would do juried craft fairs, and that just mushroomed into bigger and bigger things. I got a job teaching at the Smithsonian, instrument-making and marketry [laughs] so things were really taking off in my early 20s, when I left college.

Dziedzic: Did you have a connection to Appalachian music?

Kelly: Well, being down there, you know, Baltimore's not that far south, but it still has that feel of the Appalachian region, and those instruments that come from there—banjos and dulcimers—which, when I brought them back to New York, I had made a few, trying to get them into some stores in New York. Nobody knew what they even were. But down there, people will have them hanging over their fireplace. Everyone knows what an Appalachian dulcimer is, it's a very common instrument. It's an easy instrument to build, as well, and it's an easy instrument to play, it's just a diatonic scale. But they're not that easy to sell, you know? [laughter]

Dziedzic: What kind of wood were you using for the dulcimers?

Kelly: Trying to keep it domestic wood, being that they're made down in Kentucky, and Tennessee, that's where they originate from. Actually, the Smithsonian has a really great collection of original ones from the early 1800s that are just beautiful. But yeah, so if you use a cherry, and chestnut—we try to keep the woods domestic—I used a lot of American cherry, and tried to use the spruce in the tops, soundboard wood. Sometimes I'd make them all out of cherry.

Dziedzic: What was it like teaching at the Smithsonian?

Kelly: That was a real opportunity that I should have pursued further, but being as young as I was, it was probably too early in my life to have that kind of responsibility. I would spend all week preparing for the two classes I had. They were in the evening, and I'd get all the students

working on instruments, and then I'd get to go wander around the arts and industries building, you know, because it would be after hours, and all the lights would be dimmed. But they had a giant grizzly bear, and a giant polar bear, completely stuffed, staring down at you, with elephant tusks. And over here there'd be these trains, like locomotives from the 1800s. [laughs] It was a great museum. It had a little bit of everything, and it was in a big carousel, round building. But yeah, we'd start the classes, and I'd get everybody building. But it took me all week to prepare for those classes, so I decided, well, I'm going to be missing out on building guitars if I keep doing this forever. But that was an opportunity that could have went either way.

Dziedzic: Who was taking the classes?

Kelly: Adult education. They were mostly, you know, all, all different ages, yes.

PAUSE IN RECORDING

Dziedzic: All right, so you said that after a few years of art school you had to give it up. Can you tell me about the circumstances of that?

Kelly: Yeah, well I was just finishing up the two trucks that I was rebuilding the engines on, and I had a '65 Chevy van—that was my car at the time, I remember that—and I was going out to this commune and kinda helping the people that lived on this commune in Maryland. It was called Heathcote School of Living. It's still there, actually, and it still kind of is a commune. You never would have known that there's even a commune. It's on the Pennsylvania-Maryland line. In fact, there's a town right there called Maryland Line, and I think they're in New Freedom¹. But anyway, I was just going out there on weekends and bringing them firewood, and then I wound up going out to California with a couple of them. But that's what happened at the end of my stint in college, where I kinda ran out of that money. I had an opportunity to go to this property in California that was kinda open for homesteading. [00:15:09] [laughs] Which I thought I was going to do, I was going to be a homesteader in California. So I did that for six, seven months, and then I wound up coming back.

Dziedzic: Where in California?

¹ The Heathcote Community is located in Freeland, MD.

Kelly: At that time, that was in a town called Columbia. It was just east of San Francisco in the foothills of the Sierra Mountains. It was right near Sonora, which is another really cool town there. That was another mining town too. It was the heart of the mother lode during the 1800s, the Gold Rush. And there were mineshafts all over the property, but they were just holes in the ground that went kinda down at a steep angle, and they would go down further than [laughing] you'd ever want to venture. I guess they were dug by the Chinese in those days, and the Chinese came here, you know, searching for gold just like we were doing, going west. They had heard about it, and they came over in hoards just to score gold, but they wound up doing most of the work! And they built this crazy ditch that would run from up in the Sierras, all the way down through the property that I was staying in. It was just called the miner's ditch, and it went from like a pipe, onto the ground, into a cement trough, and it just kept continuing in different ways. But they actually have somebody who walks the ditch, called a ditch walker, and they have little meters on people's property, which they try to charge for the water use.

It was a real neat town—they actually, in Columbia, they still dressed in original garb. The town was set up as historic. They ran stagecoaches for tourists, you know, and they could come in there. So the people I actually went out there with—I had a friend and his girlfriend—and I was by myself, and I had this little puppy dog. We drove across 66 in my '65 Chevy van with a tepee that they were going to live in, and I was going to just stay in the truck. Because this property had nothing on it, so when we got to the property, that's what pretty much happened. But he was a really good street musician and just happened to look like an 1850s miner, with a long black beard. So he would go into town with his banjos and sing for money, and play for money, and make money, and then we [laughing] all survived on his money for, I guess that six months. And then I just called it quits and came back east.

Dziedzic: Did you make any progress on the property?

Kelly: Yeah, we actually did, we had a garden in, but it was too—we left too late, we left in July, or June, and by the time we got there, it was too hot to plant anything. Plus, you had to go all the way down to the river to get water. I mean, it was a beautiful piece of property. It was incredible. But you had to put up water tanks—you had to have money to live in that place. And all the people in the surrounding area, they all had ranches, and they'd been there for generations, and they were well-established. But you don't just go to this place and think you're going to live, you

know. So we struggled for about that six months, and I just said, “Nah, this isn’t working. This is going to take way too much. And Tim can’t provide for all of us.” I think they wound up staying there another year, him and his girlfriend, but I came back east. Plus I had a girlfriend back there, too, waiting for me [laughing] to get back, so that was more reason to come home too.

Dziedzic: She wasn’t interested in the homestead experiment?

Kelly: No, she had an apartment, yeah.

Dziedzic: So tell me about coming back east.

Kelly: Well, I came back and I got one of my first shops down in Maryland. We had a little farm house that we rented, me and Judy, and it was great property all around it. You rented the house, the farm house, and all the land was rented by another farmer, who lived about three, four miles down the road. He rented all the land, and so it was cows all over the place, and you had this really cool farmhouse from the 1800s. So I was there for almost 10 years, living on that farm with her. And we just had a really big garden, and I was building Appalachian dulcimers, and doing juried crafts fairs, mostly in Rhinebeck, up in New York. They used to have this incredible craft fair and all that. Back in those days, in the ‘70s, there were a lot of crafts stores in upstate New York, and places like that, like upper middleclass rural areas all around the United States. And these craft fair people would go to this show to buy goods from artisans that were selected; it was juried, which means it would be like five thousand applicants and five hundred would be chosen. [00:20:00] And I used to get in all the time because I had these carvings on these Appalachian dulcimers. I made them really, you know, fancy. And then I would bring all the workhorse ones that were real plain, that I could make the money on, but those fancy ones were how I got into the shows. Those were great shows, especially because we would do a lot of bartering, and I still have some incredible ceramic work and stuff that I bartered for when—

Dziedzic: With the other artisans?

Kelly: Yeah, with the other artisans.

Dziedzic: Oh wow.

Kelly: Yeah, it was a great show.

Dziedzic: What were some of the other things that were part of these craft shows at the time?

Kelly: It was a beautiful show. It was really well put on, and they really had a diverse group of artisans. There were some really nice jewellers, a lot of ceramics. There were only a couple of us instrument guys. It was me and maybe two others. One of the guys was actually William Cumpiano—I think he's still around. He's got a book on guitar-making now. I believe he's still alive. But there were all kinds of beautiful furniture, guys that did amazing woodworking and furniture.

In fact, and a lot of us got to friendly after all the years, and after the big show, we'd all go to Brooklyn together to buy lumber, because if you bought it together, you get a big discount, the more guys you had with you. And they knew that we were coming, and we were going to spend a lot of money. So we used to go to this place called Marshall Lumber in Brooklyn. It was right on one of the canals, and the back of it was just full of ebony logs from Africa, and lignum vitae from Haiti. There was just so many exotic woods there. And all those guys were building beautiful stuff and out of exotic woods as well. So we'd all chip in together, and get a lot of exotic wood, and take off. But that was a pretty long haul for me, to go upstate to do that show when I was down in Maryland. And I had a '53 and a 1948 pick-up truck. And a flat bed. So I'd go all the way up in my pick-up truck [laughing]. But I did that for maybe six years or so, did that show.

Dziedzic: Do you play the dulcimer too?

Kelly: Yeah, I can play it. I mean, I'm not great at it, I'm definitely not that good at it, but I can knock out a couple of tunes on it. [laughter] I used to build for this one guy called Kevin Roth—I don't know why I haven't really looked him up. I should go on the computer one day and try to find him. I built him a really fancy dulcimer. There's a photo of them out there. And he had a couple of records out on Folkways, he was a really good player. He would play with all his fingers making all chords, and finger pick it, so it was a completely unique style. Traditionally, down in Appalachia, they all play with a crow quill, a feather from a bird as a strummer, and then they would use just a little piece of wood, like a little pencil or a dowel, as what they called a noter, and you would just go ding-ding-ga-ling, ding-ga-ling, you know, from one note to the other. So it's a weird way of playing it, this instrument, too. It's so primitive. But that's what's

so beautiful about it. It's set up on a diatonic scale, so it's real easy to figure it out, and it's an interesting little instrument.

Dziedzic: Yeah, I'm a fan.

Kelly: The dulcimers? Yeah, Joni Mitchell made them famous, and Mimi and Richard Farina, at that time, too, in the '60s, they had records with dulcimers on them. You could hear them a lot more. But when I brought them here, I went to a couple of craft stores, and I don't remember where they were, if they were in Long Island, but they had never even seen one. They didn't want to get involved with them [laughing].

Dziedzic: Mmhhh. They like folk music, but not that folky. [laughs]

Kelly: Yeah. They're a lot more popular now than they used to be then. I remember this one guy was also doing the shows with me, Lucky Diamond I think was his name—Diamond Dulcimers. And I think he actually went on to become like a millionaire, making dulcimers. I just got all diverted in all these directions, but he stayed with it and just did that. And wound up a millionaire. [laughs] I always went, that's cool! I'm sure he was a good businessman, too. [laughter]

Dziedzic: Well, so I want to ask, how did you end up back in New York City, and also how did you end up transitioning to guitars?

Kelly: Well, the transition to guitars happened even while I was still in Maryland. I built a couple, my first ones in my early shops. I went from a shop on the farm, and then I was in one of the garages on the outbuildings on the farm, that was my first shop. [00:25:07] And these giant wood-boring bees started attacking me, because I was plugging up their holes because I heard them in the timbers—they were living inside the timbers. And I had moved all of my stuff in there, and I had set up, I was starting to work, and I hear these bees. Thinking that I could maybe just get rid of them by annoying them, they did the opposite and just attacked me, and I couldn't stay in there anymore, so I had to move into the house. So then I had the second shop was in the house, and then I started numbering all the shops after that, because almost every year I moved to a different shop.

But coming here, to the city, was 1976. I decided it was time to come back to New York. I had been in downtown Frederick, that was my last shop. That was a nice shop. I had a really beautiful building. It was an old 1800s Victorian brick house, and the owner was renovating the whole house, and kinda let me stay there, and manage the whole place, the property, while he was doing his other—he was a multi-millionaire, really nice guy, though. And so, all these Italian masons would come in and start doing crazy brick work, in the early mornings, and I was still living in there, and had my shop there. And then I guess when that whole thing finished, he sold the building, and this crazy woman bought the building. I just said, “Well, it’s time to get out of here!” So it was time to move again!

I said, well, this time I’m not just going to move to another place here, I’m going to go back to New York City and see if I can make it in the city. That was 1976, and that’s what I did. I had an old Ford station wagon, filled it up, and moved to Downing Street, right around the corner. That’s the sign up there, from Naked City Guitars. That was 1976. And I guess I had that shop for about two and a half years. Yeah, about two and a half years, building guitars right around the corner on Downing Street. That was a really neat little shop too. I was living in it, of course, like all my shops; I used to call it sleeping in the wood chips. That was my early days of paying my dues.

That was another case of living in the shop, and it was this tiny little—actually, it was the mud room for the building back in the 1900s, when the women would leave and put their carriages in there. All the old ladies on the block would tell me, “This is where we used to put the carriages! And we’d take our boots off and go upstairs.” Because there was a backdoor in the shop that went upstairs. But it was real narrow and real weird little shop. And, but it was only \$200 a month, so, moved in there, and I had people like John Belushi came in one day, and David Bowie came in. There was all these famous guitarists that were coming into that little weird little shop. I guess because it was off the beaten path.

There was another guitar shop on Bleecker Street, Matt Umanov’s, and he got all the play, you know, so I was just this little outer wing of it. But being in a similar area was part of what New York does—you have the diamond district, where all the diamond guys are together. You have the music district that used to be up there on 48th Street, and they were all together. Now you have food that way, the Koreans are in the 30s, and this and that.

This area was to become a little bit even more music—this block actually—I didn't know it at the time, but it had six, seven different guitar makers on Carmine Street over the years. It started, I guess, with Jose Rubio in the late '50s, into the early '60s, and then Lucien Barnes set up shop down there, and then he turned it over to Michael Gurian, and then Tom Hom and Tom Humphrey were also guitar builders on this block! Which is so weird, because no other block around here had any guitar builders. [laughs] Except way back in the 1800s, Martin Guitars were actually about five blocks from here, over on Hudson Street. And they got kicked out and had to move to Pennsylvania, because the carpenters' unions at the time were very aggressive, and they didn't consider musical instrument-making to be carpentry. So they kinda said, well, we're outta here—they were all Germans, from Germany. And they moved up to Nazareth, where there was a big German population.

That's kind of the story of the New York City—it was Naked City Guitars about two and a half years, and then I got in some trouble with some ex-mafia guys. [laughs] They were just stealing stuff, and wound up having to leave the city. We had a choice—it was either me go back to Long Island for a while, because these guys, they were running the city still. It was the late '70s. The city was still pretty much mob-run. [00:30:25] It was in its lowest point. It was bankrupt. You wouldn't go into Central Park in 1976, '77, you'd get mugged for sure, you know? It was a gritty time to be here. CBGB's was at full force over there on the Bowery. But you wouldn't walk down the Bowery after certain hours, either. And it was a tough, tough place at that time. And I guess after about two years, I wound up getting in trouble with the mafia guys, and I had to leave. So I went back to Long Island, and stayed out there for a while.

First I went to California, actually. [laughs] Went back to California, this time it was in Monterey peninsula, and I opened up in a town called Carmel Valley. And I had my shop, and it was called Monterey Guitars. I have my business cards and everything here still. And Monterey Guitars lasted about a year—1980, that was. Then I came to this shop after a stint out on, back on Long Island. But between California and Long Island, back to New York City. I came here in 1990, in this shop. So from 1970s when I was on Downing Street, there was a bouncing around time, and then I came back here in 1990.

Dziedzic: And what kind of guitars were you making in those first four years, four or five years?

Kelly: It was mostly solid body electrics. All through the '80s, I did nothing but solid body electrics. And because my shop at that time was a workshop, and not really a retail store—even though it had a retail space in the front, I just moved the wall way up, and so there was like five feet of retail space—but it never really got used. I used it for storage. Everything was in the back, but I had this really neat back door that would open up onto a canal that went out into the Great South Bay, so it was like I was back home again. I loved that shop. It was a really neat shop, in downtown Bay Shore. And every weekend the town would fill up with cars getting ready to go to Fire Island. And it was just a neat little spot with the bay in the back, and I had my spray booth back there. But I was mostly just building electric solid bodies, and kinda accumulated a lot of my bigger tools that I use now.

Then, I guess in 1990, I decided I wanted to come here because I wasn't really making a living out there. It was a struggle. It was cheap rent. It was like \$200, \$300 a month, so I didn't have to worry about anything but that. I was living at my mom's house again. So for a few years while I was out there, that was a good experience, to really get the building skills back down, and to start a semi-production kind of thing, which was my intent at the time, to do a small manufacturing thing with solid body electrics. But then I came here, and it was like, let's start from the beginning once again! [laughter]

And then this shop was that way, struggling to stay afloat for the first five years, barely making the rent. I had a great landlady, still lives upstairs. Originally, the mom, she was about 93 then, back in 1990, and now her daughter's inherited the place, and they run the place. Still live upstairs, and we're pretty good friends. They've pretty much enabled me to stay here. This is an expensive building, and I have a really big space, as you can see, for New York City. This would be a successful restaurant, if they wanted it to be, you know, they could make that work.

Although, it's weird being in the middle of the blocks here in the Village. When you're in the middle of the blocks, you're going to struggle a lot more than you would on the ends. The corner stores are always the big dollar. But you know, it was funny, back in the '70s, nobody paid much attention to that. There would be really weird, crazy, how-do-they-survive? kind of stores on the corners! But now, that's not going to happen, you gotta be high-end if you're on the corner and want to occupy that space. But here in the middle, as you can see, the store next door is back for rent, and it's been for rent, and empty, for I don't know how many months now. But this building just sold, on this side. [00:34:56] That was up for sale. They did a movie about us

just recently, and that was part of the scene in the movie, where that building was for sale, and they had the realtor come in, and started looking at this place with, [laughing] you know, curiosity—made me very nervous. But that could happen at anytime. You're in these buildings that are worth millions of dollars. And the owner still lives upstairs—does she wanna be a millionaire, and just go travel the country?

Dziedzic: Right.

Kelly: She's definitely thinking that way, so it could be a temporary, you never know. But it's been, it's been good so far, we've had a good stretch.

Dziedzic: Mmhm. How did you learn about—transition from the manufacturing in the workshop setting to the retail? Marketing, and thinking about it as a business, and what it needed to sustain itself?

Kelly: Well, in 1990, and after the years of just having the shop in the back, I figured I'd try a retail thing again, which I did a little bit in Maryland. When I was in downtown Frederick, that was a retail store too, but it was a weird experience because I had a pawn shop right next to me, and my store, I was so poor at the time, my store looked like a pawn shop too. In fact, I would go over there and get stuff to put in my store [laughing] a lot, on Wednesdays, when the things would come out and they were cheap. But people would come into my store and put a gun on the counter and say, "How much you give me?" And I'd say, "Oh, no, that's next door, that's the pawn shop." So, it was a transition from going—being here, having a retail again. It was something I just wanted to give a try in 1990, I guess it was.

I had a lot of empty showcases up there. They weren't really selling much, and it took a long time. It's a struggle—you know, I always see so many new businesses coming into town, but you never know, do they have enough money for about five months rent? Because that's what you need. You gotta have almost a years' worth of money, just to—because people will ignore you for a while. They wanna see if you're any good, or if you're worth being here. You're going to definitely pay your dues in New York City building space. It's not like other parts of the country, or different routes you could go. In my case, when I was out in Bay Shore, I could have easily went into more manufacturing, because that's what I was thinking at the time. And that means you're in one of those industrial parks, and every building's exactly the same—it's low,

it's cement, it's just white, and it's all clean and neat. But they manufacture. And they're very toxic places, one after another, it's mostly military project stuff that goes on out there. So I was very close to moving to that step, going into the industrial side of it, and getting backing money. I had people who were interested, but I decided I just really didn't want that. I was afraid of it; I saw too many things going down that weren't going to last.

I really wanted to be able to do a mom and pop thing that, you really wouldn't have much to lose, if you lost. You at least could survive and get through those first five years with just hard work, and if you did that, you may have a good chance of surviving. So I chose that, and it was all right. I started getting enough so I could get a dealership here and there, and they were pretty lenient, at some points. I was a Gibson dealer for a while. I was a Fender dealer for a while. But then they get aggressive, and they want you to carry the full line. They want you to push the product, you're not selling enough, you gotta buy all these instruments. And you buy them, they don't just give them to you to sell and then pay them later. You have to buy them first, and then you have to decide, and then they're trying to push certain models on you. So, that side of it—I'm not a great salesman. I'm more of the artist side. I try to stay away and not overcomplicate myself with—but there's some companies that realize that, and they're really good too. Like G&L Guitars, I've been dealing with forever, and I can buy one guitar and not buy for six years, and buy another, and they're still fine, they still give me the dealer discount, but the other companies are not so much that way.

And then you're always—like I do a lot of guitars that are very similar and very on the edge of being illegal to make. They're actually designs that were made in the 1950s by Leo Fender, and the Fender company is very aggressive, still in progress, and they don't want anybody making their headstock shape with somebody else's logo, or no logo. They try to make sure that you don't make forgeries, for one thing, which is totally what they should be doing, and they still take people to court if it's even too close-looking. [00:39:59] So I've had to actually make designs, send them to them, to their lawyers to oversee and approve. So I can use this headstock.

Their bodies, fortunately for us, were never protected. And they went through too many years unprotected, and everybody started making them. So now, they're in a situation where they're trying to get that protection back, but the judges say no. So I don't know, it probably costs a lot of money to go to court again, and to lose again. You're going to lose all that. So they

don't really keep going after that. And hopefully it's settled because that's mostly what we do. We make Leo's original ideas from the 1950s. I make them out of this New York City wood, which is so old, it just makes an incredible version of that guitar. But it's not a brand new design, —I do have those too, which I do—but most of my designs are really from that era of the early 1950s. There's only two or three designs that I can do. You can't copy certain guitars, either. Like, Gibsons, you can't copy that shape. They have protection on the body, too, because they did it way back when. But, you know, so you can get away with certain things.

Coming up with your own designs, that was fun, and I did that all through the '80s, and I did a lot of designs that were totally my own, or slight—or pretty modified—versions of other guitars. I got into that whole thing. But it always seemed to me that the real money would be to make a much more familiar guitar, that people would really recognize, and so I did. I always seemed to aim back in that direction, where I try to keep a guitar that is very familiar. If you've paid attention to music for all this time, you know what guitarists are playing, which instruments that they use, and for what reasons.

The studio musicians are, to me, those are the real musicians. Those guys go to work every day, and their tool is a guitar. And they have certain sounds that they know—they can make any sound that is asked of them. You know, can you make it sound like a train, I want you to sound like an old country song, I want you to sound like Motown. They can pull that out of, maybe, three different shapes of guitars. So that's what I try to do, is emulate those shapes. But as you can see in here, there's some crazy, weird versions that don't even look like guitars, and sometimes aren't, they're just sculpture. So I've taken it to all different places as well. That's where the fun stuff is.

But the money is in making more traditional shapes. Guitars are familiar and comfortable when you play them. And some of the guitars from the big factories have built-in flaws that were never really corrected, or were never really a great design to begin with, but they look cool. A lot of this industry is about looking cool. It really is. Electric guitar playing is all about the look, and it's all part of it. But there's also a lot of musicianship in there too, and there's also high degrees of how good you are as a player. You have to pay attention to all the sonic qualities, and the intonation, and the technical things that go on, and then you can work around that and do some artistic embellishment, if you want, but it's really about the, in this shop, anyway, it's about the

sound and the playability. It's about making them work because they're tools for making music. They're not just wall hangers.

Dziedzic: What was the evolution of the kind of wood that you were using for the guitars?

Kelly: I always liked the domestic woods, and always wanted support—I'm a real big USA patriot kind of guy, I guess. I really like being patriotic to where I come from, but I do it in different ways. I try to do it with environmental concerns, trying to re-use, reclaimed lumber. And so a lot of the woods that I used to use when we'd all go together to Marshall's and buy exotic lumber, I definitely stay away from now. Because that is depleting the rainforests, which are the lungs of the planet, which we're already hurting bad, so it's important to try to do what you can with your carbon footprint.

I think the reclaimed lumber that I use now accidentally turned out to be the most amazing wood that I didn't even—sometimes you don't think—it's like, well, this wood, yeah, it's been in this building for almost two hundred years, so it's gotta be really nice and cured and dry. And what is it? Pull it out, it's white pine, it's *pinus strobus*. A giant tree that used to grow here, that were three or four hundred years old before they keeled over and got used for wood. But they had never been cut down, they were free to grow to full maturity. And then they decided to build New York City, and all these buildings are filled with this beautiful old timber from these trees that were the dominant tree of this area, that were huge. [00:45:10]

And so now all that wood, which is incredible musical instrument grade wood, basically—except it's a roof rafter and it's a floor joice, and a wall board, and it's full of nails, and cracks and checks, and it's got knots in it—and it's not really the stuff that you would choose if you were going to take apart a tree, and say, I want a really clean wood, so I want the trunk from here to here. No knots, nice and clean, straight wood; that's high-grade lumber wood you're going to pay a premium for, and they go into the forest and just take wood. That's not what I'm after. If you could make do with the knots and the cracks and the nail holes, and I just said, “Well, I'll give it a try. Why not? Let's see.”

Right now there's a craze in the guitar-making world where they make guitars to just look exactly like a famous guitarist, who now is older, but when he was at his peak, he played this guitar and he put all this wear into it. And it was amazing to me how many young kids want that same guitar. They never are going to get his, but they want an exact replica of it. So the

companies go into all extents to put the same wear into it, the scratches in exactly the same place, and charge a ton of money. And these kids—it's like sneakers—they'll spend \$2,000, \$3,000, just to own one of those. The companies know that, and they put all this time into making them. That's a trend that was going on that—they call relicking—and in order to identify them as not being forgeries of old guitars, they would put stamped-in R's and V's, saying that this is a relic, it's not an original. Because they look exactly like originals.

I knew that trend was kind of being accepted, and so I said, well, maybe they'll go for the knots and the nail holes and the cracks, and it gives it an old look. And people were just enamored by it. They just love that look and they want more of it. They call it the character. So I said, well, this is good, this is working out good. Everybody likes the look, and I love the look. That worked out well, just leaving that wood and using this wood, the reclaimed wood. But yeah, it's always been that way with me, doing what you can environmentally, those kind of concerns.

Dziedzic: I read that you'd gotten wood from farm auctions, and state parks.

Kelly: Yeah! Well, back in the '70s, I was doing the same thing, when I had those shops in Maryland. I would go to farm auctions. I had an old flatbed truck, a '53 Chevy flatbed, and an old pick-up, '48—those were my vehicles—and because you're living on a farm, in farm country, you have to have a vehicle. That's all part of living in the country, you have vehicles. So I would go to—unfortunately, at that time, all the farms were going out of business, and the United States was getting its food from California and elsewhere around the world, and our farms were going down, and it was really sad. But every weekend, in the Maryland newspapers, there would be, like, twenty farms going under.

I'd go with my truck, and they would sell everything. It was really an awful scene. The family'd be there, and crying, and there goes the kitchen table, and this and that. But nobody would bid on the old wood. It'd be possibly great-granddaddy's wood that was in an outbuilding that was coming up for sale. And nobody bid on that. They didn't want that. They want farm equipment, things that they can use. So I would get this old wood and build instruments out of it. Even if it was a few pieces. You don't need a lot of wood to make instruments. Solid body electrics use up a good chunk, but in those days, those dulcimers would use slices an 1/8" thick. You could make a lot of instruments out of a small amount of wood. Using that wood was a big transition, I guess.

Dziedzic: Were you encountering the knots and the nails with the dulcimers that you were making?

Kelly: No, most of the wood I would get as cherry, 1/8", and I would just buy from a saw mill. I would get this wood and farm auction wood, which, 90% of it was farm auction wood, but if I ever went to a mill to get a certain kind of wood I would get an old timber that would be laying there for many, many years. Because you always want the old stuff, and anything new, you're going to have moisture problems.

You can go to a wood store and buy wood that's KD, what they call kiln-dried, and if it's kiln-dried, it's usable, but it still has resins in the wood. People don't realize that it takes years for that resin to dry out, crystallize, and leave the pores of the wood. That's where the vibrations of the instrument happen, there in those pores. [00:50:03] If they're full of sap and resin, they don't sound as good. They sound kinda dead, and a lot of guitars today do. Not only is the wood still green, but then they put on a really thick polyester finish. For them, it's really quick—boom boom, two coats—we're done, next, so it's a real production finish. But it's meant for metal. It's meant for industry. It's meant for military things and cars and whatnot. It's not really meant for wood. So it's not the old wood finish that an old furniture maker would use, or an old violinmaker. The finishes just clog the pores even more, and keep the whole instrument from vibrating.

So they open up a big doorway for guys like me that are thinking more sonically, how can I make it sound better? Whereas they're thinking—CEO's are thinking—have no idea about woodworkers on the floor. I can see that all the time in the craftsmanship. But besides that, they're thinking: shiny, sell in-store, people will buy, numbers, you know, they want numbers. So they make them high gloss, and thick finish. You don't even know it's wood unless you can see the see-through ones, which have the wood grain behind there. But sometimes that's a fake-out too, a veneer over multi little pieces that they can get from a cutting board factory. [laughing] There's a lot of doorways that are opened in this industry if you're willing to work hard at it.

Dziedzic: I want to go back to your choice about here, being here on Carmine Street, when you came back.

Kelly: Oh yeah, that was an interesting day. I was just looking for a space. I had come up here—I still had all my stuff down in Maryland—I had my old station wagon, I was ready to go. But I needed a place, so I came up here and I started hunting around, and walked through the Village. I would come in every day. I stayed at my mom's house, and come in here. Actually, by the way, my mom commuted into New York City the whole time we were growing up on Long Island. An hour each way, back and forth. She did it for our whole lives growing up. And now she does it because she's living here [laughing] too, you know—she's 94 and still doing that. I don't know how the hell she does it.

Dziedzic: What kind of work did she do?

Kelly: She was an executive secretary, real important positions in big corporations near Central Park area there. She was always the real breadwinner in my house. My dad was a hard worker, and he worked several jobs, but he never got paid like she got paid. She really worked herself up there. Then, you get to a point in life where you don't want to stop working—you want to keep working, but they don't want you to work there anymore, so, she wound up here, now I guess almost about ten years. She's been working here every day. But she had a real career up there, and did really well. I forget what we were talking about, with the—

Dziedzic: Just—

Kelly: What were the reasons for coming to Carmine Street?

Dziedzic: Yeah.

Kelly: I had a couple of different stores. There was one on the Lower East Side that I was looking at. It was for rent. And then in 1990, the rents were really high. You had to really pick and choose, you know? So, again, this store, being in the middle of the block—okay, they're never going to get what the corner stores are going to get—I'm always going to be in the middle of the block, no matter where I would be in the city. I was on Downing Street, and now I'm here, in the middle of the block.

But it's a great space, and I just love the lady who owned the building, Mrs. De Angelis [phonetic], five generations in this little house. She was the coolest old lady. I didn't know the daughters much, but I know she had two daughters at the time, one of which now is my landlady,

Lily. And that wall there is kind of where the house ends, and this was the backyard of the house. So it's a big room that was actually their backyard, and in the 1900s they built the walls up, and it was a dancehall, and then a speakeasy during Prohibition. There was only one tenant—there was a few, there was Papperalli [phonetic], the guy who was a cabinetmaker in here. I kinda almost remember him. When I came to the Village in the '60s, I remember looking in the window of this place, and there was a big boat up in the front being built. I do remember that, it was so weird. And then recently, his son has been sending me photos of his dad when he was here in this store, out in front and stuff, so now I have all of that side of it.

The guy who was here before me was actually a set designer for Walt Disney. And he had this whole back room to make sets for the scenes in Disney. [00:55:01] The whole front was sewing machines. They would sew costumes or something, or repair them. I don't know how he was involved with them, but he came in one time in the later years that I was here and just introduced himself. But that's when it was—he had just a hole punched in that wall, a little round hole, and there was no window here, and he would crawl in back here because this used to be the speakeasy, and the way in was through the hallway of the house. So out on the street, on the sidewalk, you'd knock on the door of the house. They'd let you in, and then there would be that “Joe sent me,” you know, sliding door, they'd let them back here. And I found that door when we took the wall down over here. I still have it down in the basement. I want to make the bathroom door out of it. [laughter] But, yeah, we built that little box there for the bathroom. There wasn't even a bathroom back here. I don't what they had originally, but there was one little toilet sitting there.

This room was all studded and had sheetrock on the walls, and we took all that down, and didn't realize that those studs that were all the way around us were actually holding the roof up. I don't know how it happened, but all of a sudden we couldn't come in for months because they had to bring in a shoring company, which comes in, puts millions of poles up, to hold the roof up. They said that the roof was being held up by the tar paper. They said we almost killed ourselves back here, trying to renovate, and not knowing that timbers were all rotten where they hit the brick. The roof rafters. So they had to sister in all those pieces before we could get back in here.

Dziedzic: Where are they? They're going crosswise in the ceiling?

Kelly: Yeah, they go this way. Across.

Dziedzic: I see.

Kelly: And when they hit the brick, if the roof starts leaking or something, which, a skylighted roof has a tendency to leak—this one leaks, that one used to leak, that one's never leaked, knock on wood. [laughter]

Dziedzic: Plenty of wood around!

Kelly: I got so many leaks in this place. That wall leaks. But that's what's nice about having my landlady, because she's not that interested in spending money on the place, and if you don't complain, you have a better chance of being able to stay here. [laughs]

Dziedzic: That's always how it works, right? [laughter]

Kelly: So I just put buckets around when it's leaking, you know? We got one over there. That pipe had to be replaced—that was a torrential leak, a couple of times since I've been here. That's the drain for the whole roof—drains down that one pipe, and it's on the inside of the building, which is a bad design, because it was a backyard. It wasn't supposed to have a room here.

Dziedzic: Wow, that's pretty interesting. I see, now I'm understanding that this was the backyard, and this was the roof over it.

Kelly: Yeah, the skylights. And it's weird because it's high back there, and low up here, instead of flowing the other direction, or being level. All the water runs to this wall, so that also when we came in here and found out the roof was falling in, that whole wall needed to be replaced because the water had been running down it and there was no mortar left. They said, "No, this is not going to be legal." So, that's why there's a window and a door in it, because the whole wall is new, all that's new brick. That was another huge job that happened during the shoring up of the building.

Dziedzic: So when you came back in 1990 and were looking for a place, how had the neighborhood changed since you'd been here before?

Kelly: Quite a bit actually. There was a lot of renovation going on. But in a lot of ways it was still more like it was in the '70s. It was like the '70s, but in a good way, the rent, the gentrification and stuff had some pretty neat stores still. Every store was filled. There were a lot of record stores on this block. It became like the music block. That's another reason why I really liked this space when it was available. There was a record store across the street. There was another record store over here, and then Charlie had a couple of big ones right on the corner.

Carmine Street had become a music street, in a way—but records—so I said, “Well, I'll fit in.” Umanov was right around the corner, that was the other reason. I have another guitar store that can feed me, or I can feed off it when they don't have something, or if they don't want to do a job. Which is exactly what happened. For years I got all the work they didn't want to do. They were more high end, more established, had all the big dealerships—“We're not going to do that; go over to Carmine Street.” So I would do all this crap work, but it was good. It was money, it was fast; they were stupid [laughs] not to do that too, but that's okay. We got along for years, and Matty was always, “Oh, you don't charge enough for this, and you don't charge enough for that.” Getting on my case about the way I did business. But he was a character.

He recently sold—well, he didn't sell, he owns the building. When I was here in 1990, he was in the process of buying that building. [01:00:05] And I knew the guy who was buying it for him, and he was going to pay back. That was a real smart move on his part. He's a very smart business kid. He had a store here on Bedford Street in the '60s, so he'd been around a long time. Got the dealerships for Gibson and Fender, all the big dealerships. And then bought that building. They had a really good run for a long time, all through the '80s and '90s. But I guess he figured the way the rents are now, he could probably make way more money renting, and just not using the shop anymore, so that's what he decided to do. He just, one day—boom—they were going out. And I went, “What?!” So that a big shock for me, to lose them as a business. But it turned out I'm probably making more off the people who just used to go there and now are coming here. They're still doing repairs upstairs, but he's trying to rent the store for big money. It's a huge space. It's bigger than this space, the whole space, it's wider. But it's still for rent. It's months and months now, it's been still for rent.

Dziedzic: So it sounds like having a lot of—

Kelly: See, this is another real big problem in Greenwich Village, and all over the city right now, is their deal that's going down with banks. And if you have a store, and you can get rid of your tenant by upping his rent to, say, \$20,000, if he's only paying \$7,000 or \$8,000—which is like where I am—so you up to it \$20,000, ok, you can't pay it, you're gone. Now they can get a loan from the bank for a million dollars, low interest loan, which they can re-invest any way they want to. And they use that to just make more money, and get another loan, and keep doing it, and leave the store empty. As long as that store stays empty. So the whole city now is winding up with empty stores because there's a scam going down where this is somehow legal! That they can just do this, and leave the stores empty—

Dziedzic: So you don't have to use the loan to improve that space.

Kelly: No! You don't have to try to rent it either. There's no way to. No incentive for them to because they'll get another loan in another year, or two years. I don't know what the amount is that they have to wait until they can get another one, if they pay like half back or something. But they can, meanwhile, within six, seven months, they can re-invest that million dollars, so they can make another million off it. It's just like a crazy scam that just makes the rich richer and richer, and we're winding up with no neighbors, nobody to bring people down here for other reasons, you know? You don't want empty stores around you, and we got two now. I mean, this place next to us here, they're never there, they just use it as like a showroom.

Dziedzic: This heirloom wood—

Kelly: The flooring, the wood place, yeah. They do wood flooring. I think it's like the worst kind of wood flooring. It's a little thin veneer over garbage underneath, and they warp and they crack, and it's just not like real wood floors, like this. But I don't say anything. They're quiet anyway. But they had some really neat neighbors in that place. We had one guy that sold beautiful, high end Chinese furniture. And he was a really nice guy. I got to meet all these celebrities because they were going in there to look at this guy's furniture. I think Michelle Pfeiffer was in one time. Not Kevin Bacon—one of those famous guys were in there and came over here. They were a guitar collector, so we've had a lot of celebrities in this store over the years too. Tons of them.

Dziedzic: It sounds like having shops that sell similar things isn't competition, it's more like a referral service.

Kelly: Absolutely. I would never worry about another guitar store moving in, it would only help! And it only does, the more you have in one area. That's why that happens in New York City. That's why there is a diamond district, that's why there was a restaurant row, or this or that, they all help each other. Even on the Lower East Side, all the Indian restaurants were all on one block. They're all gone! I didn't even know that, and a couple months ago I walked over there and I went, "Where are they all? They're all gone! They're all empty stores." They just, they moved out, you know? I remember when Souen moved in, right in the middle of that block, and I said, oh, this is weird. Japanese moved into an Indian-only—every one was filled, and every window was filled with guys playing sitars, and trying to bring people in. There were guys on the sidewalk hawking them in. They were happening, even into the '90s. I used to go there all the time. [01:05:00]

Dziedzic: I wanted to ask how the nightlife had changed, too—not just the businesses but the landscape of businesses.

Kelly: Well, you're asking the wrong guy here; I don't go out at night. [laughter] But I look out my window—I'm on West Broadway and Prince, so I'm right in the middle of a party area, where there's bars all around me. So the nightlife is always happening there. I don't sleep like I used to sleep anymore, so I'm always up, three, four in the morning, looking around, seeing what's going on. This is definitely a city that never sleeps. It will always be that way. My mother loves being here because of that. She's always loved the city, even though she loves the beach and her house in the country, but she loves the city. I got her an apartment in my building too. She's on the other side of the building, but facing the same street and all. And I always see her. I look up, she's up there looking down. [laughter] There's always a freak show going on over there.

That's always Europeans, all the time. All the tourists are European, usually. They go to Cipriani's, and that other one, Tre Merli. Those, they're owned by Europeans, they're run by Europeans, and they attract all these European tourists. And so it's all people speaking German, and French, and Italian, and Portuguese. [laughs] It's just so interesting. I never mind it. I think it's awesome. But over here, it's like the old Village. It's kind of quiet. Being in the middle of the street like this, you can go hours without anybody coming in.

Dziedzic: Mmhmm. So Jimi Hendrix was your first and last night out? [laughs]

Kelly: Yeah, pretty much. I never had any money. I was always just paying my money, and staying in these shops and living in the sawdust. I was eating pizza every day—one slice—I did that for so many years! I was just too poor to go to anything.

Then when I was on the farm and had those shops, Judy was supporting me. She was a schoolteacher and I was learning how to build Appalachian dulcimers better and faster, and trying to make a living doing it. But if it wasn't for her, I never would have had that opportunity to do that. Living like that, it's always been a struggle. I didn't have time to go to concerts, or any money to do it anyway.

I went to Woodstock. That was the last thing I did in Long Island as a kid. It was 1968. I was about to go to Maryland Institute the next year. It was August, and September I was leaving, so I had a few weeks left in Bay Shore and we all decided to go up to Yasgur's farm. And we got on the New York State Thruway, we got within 11 miles of the site and had to park, and walked. And we got there at the very end. [laughs] It was all over by the time we got there. But I saw Jimi Hendrix playing there. He was the last one of the last acts, closing it down. That was worth it for me. I got to go to Woodstock, and saw him play there. It was just all mud, and everybody was leaving. What a scene! But I'll never forget that, that was the last thing I did on Long Island. [laughter]

Dziedzic: So when did you start doing commissions?

Kelly: Well, any time you have a store, any time you had a shop, building—so even in Maryland, there was a tenth of the commissions that I have now, but you get orders from people. We call them customs. You get an order for a custom guitar, and usually a custom means they want it a certain color, or they want it a certain way. They like your work, can you do something different? Can you make it with this kind of pick-ups in there instead? Can you make the head fatter or skinnier? Then it becomes a custom. You're actually custom tailoring the guitar to them, and their playing style, and for them. Even back then, in the '70s, I was doing that because that's what having a small, one-man shop's about: you have to be able to do that in order to survive. And if you can do that well, you'll get word of mouth. "Oh, you gotta check his guitar out. He'll make it any way you want it." So, you get that all the time, we still get that.

I see Cindy now, she's getting orders for things that I would just say no to. There's just too many different things, I don't need to anymore. They want my stock Tele's? Great, I love making stock Tele's! [laughs] They're so simple. It's the simplest one. But she'll be doing a lot—but of course then I'm doing the same thing, making that gunslinger guitar, and the Harley gas tank guitar. But those are fun. They're really weird. They're just crossing over to something else.

Dziedzic: When did you start using the New York City wood? [01:09:54]

Kelly: The New York City wood was—well, the first batch of pine, let's just put it that way. The first batch of pine, I got from my friend T., who, the house that he grew up in—which was built by his grandfather down in Virginia—was being torn down by the new owners, and so he went down there and got some wood from it, and gave me some boards that actually were tables from when he was a little kid. They were tables. And they were pine. And I made a few guitars out of them, and went, “Wow, this is really good.”

Then I said, Leo Fender's first five guitars of the same design that I make now were made in pine because he was experimenting. He would make an amplifier cabinet, and that cabinet was made of pine. So they had a pile of pine there, and they said, well, let's sandwich it up, make it a little thicker, and see if we can make a guitar. It'll be a solid guitar and we'll see if that goes over. And that's what they did. This was 1949, 1950. I was a baby. And they were doing this with a guitar, and making it—which would be in the future the most popular instrument of any musical instrument.

Then, it was like, well, let's, let's just sandwich these boards up, and we'll make this shape out of it, and we'll just see how it sounds. And, ah, it sounds pretty good. We got these nice amplifiers—they had already been making those. They were putting pick-ups on hollow guitars, big old acoustics—that's what they were making previously, before the solids—but they figured because they fed back so much, they would get these overtones and they would go screaming and these awful sounds would come out. So they said, if they said put it on solid wood, it won't do that. So that was the whole idea behind the solid body electric guitar.

Nobody had ever done that, it's a total American invention. It was done right in California by the first few guys that decided to do it. A guy in Indiana, Paul Bigsby; he was doing it even earlier than they were doing it, but he was one guy—had ideas—and they kinda

looked at him and had his guitars, and saw what he was doing, and said, “All right, we gotta take off with this.” So that’s where it all first started, in the 1950s with those shapes and those designs.

Dziedzic: And then you started using the wood in New York City at some point?

Kelly: Then, yeah, the New York City timber thing was—oh, right, that’s what we were. When T. gave me that wood, that whole story about the early Fenders being made of pine, I knew that it was an acceptable wood, that it would sound good. But would it sound better? Would it really be this different thing? I didn’t know. It was really just an experiment for me too, trying to make it out of all this same wood, which is pine. Even the neck, which no one had ever done that. They always went to a much harder wood for a neck. Which makes sense when you think about it; it’s got a lot of string tension on it, it’s pulling it and all.

But I made a neck for a guy about five years earlier than that, and he was an African musician who played a skin-top with a long, round, completely round neck. It had two or three strings on it. It was an African instrument that was based off of something they would make in Africa. It was like a bass, actually. He played it like a bass, and he was getting really famous. He was already pretty famous—I hear him on the radio, still, to this day—but he wanted me to make him a Tele with a round neck because he had been playing this round neck. So that’s what we did, and that was a pine neck.

What I did was I used a closet pole, which is Doug fir—works great as a closet pole for many, many years, and it doesn’t really warp too much as a closet pole. You get a little bow in it, maybe. So I said, “Well, it must be really stiff and stable, and if you were to twist it so it’s on the quarter, it’s going to be really stiff!” So that’s what I decided to do with the necks, to put the wood on the quarter like that, have all the straight lines going up and down, make it really stiff vertically, and it would have that acoustic sound quality as an acoustic guitar top, or a violin top, or a cello top—all spruce, all pine. Same woods. So that’s what I did, and it just changed the whole sound of the instrument by having that big pine neck on there. That was the big difference.

We had that one over there. That’s an old pine one.

Dziedzic: This one right here?

Kelly: Yeah. That's a big pine neck on that one, too. But yeah, that changed everything. So I had something. I said, all right, New York City pine, perfect stuff. It's in every building. How do you get it? Well, I just saw that dumpster full of wood over there—maybe it's the same stuff? So sure enough, I'm starting to look indoors, outdoors, dumpster—it's the same wood. These buildings are built with this wood! So then, I got wood from Jim Jarmusch. My friend John Campo, I was making him this big arch-top guitar from some reclaimed wood he had. He had a big table, and he wanted me to make him a guitar out of it. [01:14:55] So he said, "Jim is replacing the roof rafters in his loft. Do you want the wood?" And I said, "Sure," so Jim agreed, and he had the guy that was doing the work bring all that over. So that was the first batch of wood, was timbers from Jim Jarmusch's loft. And we made the first batch of guitars, and they just—wow, what a difference in sound.

Then I started seeing other buildings doing the same thing, throwing wood away. And I realized that if they were tearing down a building, or if they were expanding a building—a lot of buildings are from the 1900s, and all the rooms were small. They had coal heat so they wanted to close off other parts of the house just to heat the bottom floor. So they had a lot of small rooms, thick plaster walls and all, but behind it was all this wood. Today, a modern couple comes in, they want to open up a kitchen, knock a few walls down. Then you wind up throwing wood away—and then it's like you see it all over, this area especially because it's being so gentrified, there's so much wood being thrown away. And I miss a lot of it, and when I miss it, I cringe, but I had no room anymore, anyway—

Dziedzic: I was going to say—

Kelly: —I got so much wood, it's like I'm afraid I'm going to run out. And if I see something, "Oh, yeah. Yeah, I'll take it." [laughter] But I got probably more than I need.

Dziedzic: When did that happen, with Jim Jarmusch?

Kelly: That was probably early being here, probably 1993, '94, something like that. Probably '96, around then. That was when it all kinda began with the pine.

Dziedzic: And is that exclusively the wood that you use now?

Kelly: Pretty much, yeah. I mean, I occasionally have to—

[Greeting customer] Hi, how ya doing?

Customer: Can I look?

Kelly: Yeah, help yourself.

Yeah, pretty much, I'm making—I have an old, still some of my early stash of maple from the farm auction days. And I have some padauk from that era when we'd all go together to the lumber mill. And I still have a lot of that wood, so occasionally I'll make one neck from that wood, or something different. But for 80%, 90% of it is definitely all white pine. *Pinus strobus*, beautiful wood. Makes a great guitar. I just got wood from—our movie's been around, and we got to go to Amsterdam. They had a movie festival and the movie showed there, and the people were real nice, and they actually donated some wood from one of the Holland wind mills, from the 1700s. This is some wood—I got two pieces here to make a guitar out of.

Dziedzic: What kind of wood is that?

Kelly: That's beech, European beech from Denmark. I will make a guitar out of that. But that happens too—people will bring in some real old wood for me from somewhere, and ask me to make a guitar out of it. Now I'm making, there's one in the window I finished for Sag Harbor, out in Long Island. They have the Sag Harbor Cinema out there that had been in a fire, and the Methodist church burned down, and they got a lot of wood out of it, and asked me to build them a few guitars. So I made the one in the window, the Sag Harbor guitar, for them. They're going to display it in the movie theatre. And then the other one was for the people who have turned the church into an art center, community center. And they're going to display one of them there and auction the other one off. This is a summer of Sag Harbor guitars; I figure it's a propos, being beach weather. [laughter]

Dziedzic: You mentioned getting some wood from Holland, but what are the other impacts of the film?

Kelly: Oh, the film's been amazing. It's changed everything again, it seems. We've got people coming from all over the world—people buying t-shirts and stuff, mostly, tourists. But they're just so nice, and so happy, and they love the movie, and they just think it was great. We got people just coming in last week that were from New Zealand, and they saw the movie on the

airplane coming here. [laughs] So they're actually showing it on the airplane! On New Zealand Airlines. So, there's that side of it, but it also a lot of going out there, talking to people, bringing it back, showing it around—time I'm not working, so that's all a concern as well. And the filmmaker, and Jim as well, both were concerned about that, that it would change my life too much, and they didn't want me to change, you know? But it's been good. It's been just enough, or not too much, you know. And Cindy's getting a lot of play out of it too. She's getting a lot more orders now, and that's a good sign.

Dziedzic: How did you decide to take on apprentices?

Kelly: I just did for the first time—I had another guy, Chris, that worked here, and Chris was working here maybe a year or two years before Cindy came. [01:20:00] Or maybe three or four, I don't know how long Chris had been here—time flies. But he was a kid that just came in. I guess he was in his 20s, and he seemed real sure of himself, and confident and he really wanted to learn. He seemed like he really did want to do it, so I took him on first. And then Cindy came in—same thing—she was just real serious, and knew what she wanted. I had three sisters, and I like to help women out moreso, so I figured that would be an opportunity too. And her and Chris just like—phew—they didn't hit it off, so Chris was always like [growls] and Cindy was always overly loving to him, trying to—and I'm in the middle, trying to keep both away from each other. He wound up leaving and going to another guitar shop, and he's working with them one day a week over there now. But we're all friends. He comes by and hangs out.

But Cindy's really starting to take off now. I knew she would, she's a great artist. You can see, this is her stuff. She really attracts customers who want to personalize their instruments, you know? Even though she's more like me—she wants to make good-sounding guitars, and not so fancy, and not so painted up and all. Her artwork, she went to art school and loves to do it, and would much rather do that than bartend. But [laughs] still, she really wants to make guitars more than she wants to do the artwork, and she's sorta getting more work for the artwork. So it's a struggle for her too.

Dziedzic: I'm hoping also that the film has helped with business overall, and not just t-shirts.

[laughs]

Kelly: Yeah, it will. I can't take any more orders right now. Actually, before the film, or during the film, I had probably taken too many already, and then I just decided recently that I'm getting way too many now, I gotta stop. So that's what I been doing. I haven't taken any new ones on, and just trying to catch up. But it's going to be a struggle catching up to already what I've taken in. So I want to keep that honest, and trying to give her more work. We only can do so much here. We only have the one space and it's just the two of us, and it's handmade stuff that takes a long time, so people have to be willing to be patient. And if they aren't, and they want their money back, I'm fine with that too as long as there's no hard feelings. I can do what I can do, but that's all I can do.

Dziedzic: Did you ever have an apprenticeship, when you were learning how to make dulcimers?

Kelly: No, I never apprenticed to anybody. I pretty much was fortunate in the very beginning. That kid I went to California with, before that, when I was helping the kids at the commune, they had a lot of broken musical instruments, and he had a ton of them. I started putting them back together for him, and I got hooked on the whole idea. Plus, I had made that ukulele, that cigar box uke. I really liked the woodworking side of it, gluing things back together and making them work again. I realized, that's a neat way to look at guitar making is to see it inside out. Repairing is a different approach than building. But it got me into a whole idea of building; maybe I could make something.

Actually, it started with a friend of mine. He was a year ahead of me in college and he went to college in Kentucky, and he came back with an Appalachian dulcimer, and I looked at it and went, "Wow, this is really neat." And I heard it on the music, and knew what it did as a sound machine, and said, "Well, this would be really easy to make, and I could probably sell these." That's really where that whole idea started for making the Appalachian instruments.

Dziedzic: Do you have a sense of where you want to go over the next five years with the shop? And with yourself? [laughs]

Kelly: Yeah, I just hope I can survive the next five years, and be able to continue doing what I'm doing. Life's fragile, you never know what's going to happen. I'm losing friends right and left. My best friend would come in here every day and sit here with his little dog, and he just passed away two weeks ago. You're seeing people who are your age dying off. I'm a survivor, I've

always been able to survive, and my mom, like I say, is 94, and she's still kicking, so I'm hoping for a nice, long future. [01:24:56] But you never know. I just love what I'm doing, and I love doing this, and I love the space, and I love the De Angelis family that let me do this, and—

Customer: Excuse me? It's possible to play an acoustic guitar?

Kelly: Yeah, help yourself.

Customer: Thank you.

Kelly: So, yeah, being able to do this as long as I can is what I want to do. I love doing this. I love coming to work in the morning, and I usually—last night I came by again, worked for another hour. [laughter] Snuck in another one. There's always something to do, it's never-ending. And the space, even though it seems big, it's pretty small, and you've got to constantly move things just to get to the next tool because you got way too many projects going.

Dziedzic: Mmhmm. [laughs] I can relate. Is there anything else that you can think of that you might want to tell me about the—

Kelly: I covered it good this time. I was talking like a crazy man! [laughter] I don't think there's anything in my life you don't know right now. Even the mafia stuff! [laughs]

Dziedzic: I chose not to probe there, but I am curious.

Kelly: Yeah, that was horrible. I really thought I was going to die that day. A friend of mine was over here, and I needed a ride to Canal Street to get some hardware—it was all hardware stores in those days. So I hitched a ride and we're in his Volkswagen van, and he had to stop at a friend's house. He goes into his friend's house, and all of a sudden there's a guy at the door showing me his gun. And he's saying, "Get in the back, get on the floor." And I went, "Uh, ok." So then I'm peeking out and I see him come out of the house, and they butt him in the head with the gun. They take us to Staten Island—blindfolded in a house on Staten Island. Thought I was going to die on the way there. I thought they were just going to—boom, boom—down by the river there or something.

But wound up in this house, blindfolded, and then waiting for them to go back to the city. This was all involved with drugs—he was a drug dealer, which I didn't even really know about.

So I got hooked up in the middle of something just hitching a ride. I wound up, they come back to the city, they kept me as a hostage. The TV was on, I'm watching—it was right during the Iranian hostage crisis, and I'm watching [laughing] this on TV, and I'm a hostage now! With these two guys who just wanted to shoot something. They were gunmen. And they were like, "Did you ever get shot, man?" they were telling me. I said, "No, I never got shot." They said, "Oh, you don't even feel it. Goes right through ya." And I'm going, "Oh my god." It was a horrible experience. Wound up back in the city that night.

Then the next day, I'm on Downing Street in that little shop. I had scissor gates, and I had the gates closed, partially. A big truck pulls up in front of them, boxes me in. Gets out, and on the phone, "We're up on the roof. We got guys all over. You're coming out. We're taking you again." They wanted to do it again. So, I had a big gun in there. I'm sitting there with a big goose gun from this guy who I got involved with, unfortunately. Then they were all waiting around, and I'm looking at my guitars thinking they're all going to be full of bullet holes in a couple hours. But they wound up leaving. It all ended. And then we had to leave and go to California. So that's when I moved to California, was because of that whole thing. The mafia head boss said, "No, those were renegade guys, they weren't part of us. We would never sanction that. But you have to leave because they're still out there, and they're still hitting every store they can. And they're going to go after you again if you go back." So I had to leave. I had no choice. It was an opportunity to go to California because he was moving all his stuff, and I had a big truck, and I could put all my shit in there, go to California again. So I did it.

Dziedzic: So because of your buddy's mix-up with drugs they thought you were selling it out of your shop, or something like that?

Kelly: Yeah. They got me involved with it, and it was just, like—phew.

Dziedzic: Wow! [laughs]

Kelly: But I'd just met John Belushi. I was over at his house on Morton Street, him and his wife. I'm having a Pepsi with John Belushi—this was incredible, you know? I'd just met David Bowie, I'm working on his guitar. I couldn't believe what was happening, being a kid with shops in Maryland. This was my dream, to be back home in New York City, and meeting celebrities. The Downing Street shop was starting to happen, and all that happened, and I had to leave, and it

was just like, ugh! Start all over! And let's do it again! So it was a lot of starting back up again. But this has been working good, this shop.

Dziedzic: Yeah. I'm glad to hear it! [laughs]

Kelly: Yeah. All right! That's it—that's a wrap

Dziedzic: Thank you.

END OF RECORDING