

## Greg Altman Transcript

CC: This is September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2015, ah, we are at the Alpena County Library, along with me, ah, doing the recording and asking questions will be Cindy Kus. I'm Carole Cadarette and we are interviewing Mr. Greg Altman. Morning Greg.

GA: Mornin.

CC: Let's start out with how, we're talking about music of course, you're a very diverse person; but we're talking about music and the music scene in and around Alpena. What brought music to ya, Greg?

GA: Well, I've been singing since, since I was ah, six years old, primarily in churches- had a little bit of a stint in, ah, choral music in, in high school, junior high school. But ah, when I moved to Alpena, in '89, I was singing in church, and, and ah, some friends of mine- I didn't know at the time were gonna be good friends, ah-Joe and Marian Brisson, they were sitting in front of us and they turned around and after the service, and said, "Hey, do you want to join our choir?" And so I got involved initially in music here in Alpena at the St. John the Baptist Catholic Church Choir. And within a short time was directing the choir. And um, did church music for about three years, four years, before I did anything else. But then in the, in the, Christmas of '91, I believe it was, my now ex-wife bought me my first guitar. And I've been singing John Denver music, um, since about the middle 1970's, because I was friends with some people that are now residing in Bay City; but we were stationed up at Rapid City, South Dakota in the Air Force together and we went camping. And when we would go camping, ah, at the time, Jerry Henderson, he had a ah, old Nova that had a 8 track in it, and he would plug in John Denver 8 tracks and we would listen to John Denver music back and forth to the campgrounds. And ah, we would sing around the campfire and, and they always, they always made the comment about how much I sounded like John. And so I started listening to his music more, and bought his recordings, whether they were 8 tracks or cassettes, I even have a couple-

CK: LP's?

GA: 33 1/3 LP's. Yeah. And just kind of adopted his music as, as my own. I, I, I just it seemed like everything that he was going through in his life, eventually I went through-

CC: Mmhuh.

GA- and I could really relate to his music. And so I was singing it, I was singing it as I did dishes, I was singing it as I, as I ah, worked in the house, as I drove, I was working part-time at the time, and so I was the house-husband, (whispers) quote unquote. And, um, I think it was the, the Christmas of, it was '92 or '93- my ex-wife bought me my first guitar. And, and her logic was that if I could sing his music, I should learn how to play his music. And so I took the anthology, John Denver's Anthology songbook, and I started, I started learnin' chords. I, I learned chords that looked easy- A D- chord and a C-chord and a G-chord and things that I thought, if I knew the song, I would try to match the chords to it. And um, that just has developed into um, just an amazing ride. Um,

CC: Hence the John ah, John Denver of the North via Greg Altman.

GA: That's, that's what I've been labeled, yes. Um, I still go, still recognized as that today.

CC: Ah, should we assume Greg, that you do read music?

GA: I do read music, um, in fact I played clarinet-

CC: Ok.

GA: -in school many years ago, and, and that's where I actually learned to read music. But as I got more involved, involved in choral music also, I picked up ah, not only, um, treble clef, but bass clef; because ah, I'm gifted, I'm blessed with a ah, the ability to sing in three octaves, so, so, ah, I can sing bass, or I can sing tenor or I can sing alto, and I can sing soprano, and some of it's falsetto, but that's ok, you know.

CC: Mmhuh

GA: It's, it's, it's just kind of a neat way of be-, you know, not everybody can do that so, I'm very blessed and privileged to be able to do that so...

CC: So really in years you've been, as far as singing, ah, minus the guitar, plus the guitar, from the time you were six years old, until this day.

GA: Yes, including musical theater-

CC: Not knowing how old you are, how many years is that? (Chuckles)

GA: Now you're gonna make me do math.

CC: Well, I'll let you do the math.

GA: I've never been any good at math.

CC: Me neither.

GA: Um, that would be forty, no, excuse me, fifty-two years...

CC: Ok.

GA: Fifty-two years I've been singing um...

CC: And over that time Greg, you've, you have played and be, and been involved with a lot of musicians.

GA: Oh boy, um, yeah, I was talkin' to my lead guitarist ah, Mr. Dick Reade, who's a transplant and knows very few of the musicians of the area, but I, I was telling him, how many different musicians that I've played with over the years and some just, just once; and, you know, but you know I used to put together exactly, I used to put together um, a benefit concert for Shelter Incorporated and over those years I invited, I invited musicians of all kinds from all over the area. I kinda focus mostly on, on guitar musicians, you know, um, guitar vocalists. We had a few out of the ordinary...

CC: Mmhuh, mmhuh.

GA: But we had a few out of the ordinary.

CC: Mmhuh, mmhuh.

GA: But ah, you're group- Three, Three on a String, is that...?

CC: Three on a String

GA: Three on a String did it one year.

CC: Yeah, yeah.

GA: I always try to bring somebody in that was a little bit different.

CC: Mmhuh.

GA: Ah, and yeah, I think, I think we did nine years of that, I've, I've lost track.

CC: I'd have to get back and look, but it was a long time, Greg.

GA: I'm thinkin' it was nine years.

CC: Lot of, lot of time. And is, speaking of fundraisers, right up to this day you're doing fundraisers all the time?

GA: I, the group, I work with now, Music for You, we, we, enjoy doing every, any kind of benefit, um, and of course we're, we started, ah, Mr. Dick Reade and I started at um, care facilities in the area here: Greenview and Turning Brook primarily and um, we've just kinda worked our way out of there and to some other things; but yeah, we, obviously, um, any musician, any musician, in the Alpena area anyway, that considers them self a professional musician, they realize that, that they do more for less. You know, you, you don't get paid-

CC: No.

GA: - very often. There are some very generous people out there, ah, we work with the Association of Lifelong Learners, we've done a couple of concerts with and for them, and, and, they always take good care of us.

CC: Ok.

GA: Um, but, you know. It's, it's, you don't do it for the money anyway. I mean...

CC: No, very well understood. Ah, your music style, besides, I know that you branched out a bit from the John Denver style...

GA: Yeah.

CC...with the band you're with now. And, so what would ya call your style?

GA: Well, it's interesting because, you know I've played with so many different types of musicians. Um, the first band I played with was a group called The Joyful Noise.

CC: And were they local?

GA: They were.

CC: And then-

GA: That was predominantly the Brisson Family –

CC: Ok.

GA: And then, um, Dave Shafto, out of, ah, Posen, and um, yeah, Dave Shafto, and, and his wife Bernie, out of Posen. Da-, I, Bernie didn't do a whole lot in the group, but Dave, Dave was kind of the thrust, main thrust behind the group.

CC: Ok.

GA: And um, that was a charismatic Christian group...

CC: Ok.

GA:...that worked out of Posen primarily, we rehearsed in Posen at Dave's house in his basement, and we traveled all over the state. We went as far south as Monroe, ah, we went into the Upper Peninsula a couple of times, I think Newberry, and we traveled to the west side of the state. So we were all over, and that was, that was really the first, ah, group, I, I, worked with. And so there I was, my, my, I barely played the guitar, really, I mean, other than some songs that John, ah for John's music, but, um, they encouraged me, you know, especially ah, um, Joe, we call him Joey, Joey Brisson. You know Joe Brisson?

CC: Mmhuh.

GA: He's young Joe, he, he, kept telling me, it doesn't matter, you play what you play, you play what you play and, uh, and so, I, I, I went from there into, into a small group of musicians. We referred to ourselves as Nordern Flight, that's with a D, N-O-R-D-, yeah, N-O-R-D-E-N Flight. It's kind of a play on words, we had ah, that was, that was, Ed Dowling that came up with that, um, I, I don't think if we, if he were sitting here, if I, if I suggested that to him, I don't think he'd take credit for it; but it was, it was his idea. He said, "you know, we gotta make ourselves sound like were more than just Northern Michigan," he said, "So we should, we should change that to Nordern, so we sound a little bit more like the Upper Peninsula,

CC: Mmhuh, mmhuh.

GA: And so, that's where that, that came from.

CC: Ok.

GA: So that was Ed Dowling and Julie Wood, and Ed Gatzke, and we played basically everything we could play.

CC: Mmhuh.

GA: I mean, cuz Ed did a little bit of rock n roll you know, and Julie's a keyboardist, and a vocalist, and ah, Ed is very much of the same ilk as I am, predominantly folk...

CC: Mmhuh.

GA: But, um, we, we did a few different things. Of course, we did a few benefit concerts; but we, we, we, did some benefits in Harrisville and the area; but, um, so then I kind of fell out of that for awhile, and um, I had ah, brain surgery in, in, May of 2010 and ah, had to retire, um, went on disability and pretty much figured my music career was over. And then I ran into Mr. Dick Reade. Ah, I'd been invite to do some, do a couple of songs at a ah, what was the Resurrected Shelter Concert at the time, and I went in and I did a couple of songs, and worked with Dick and we became instant friends, and, um, we were so compatible. Musically, he's such a fantastic musician, Dick has been playing guitar since he was fourteen and Dick is now in his mid-seventies.

CC: Mmhuh.

GA: And he played with polka bands and big bands and downstate, and so, he and I started working together and we started like I said, in some of the care facilities. And as we were playing songs, we started pretty, pretty much with John Denver music. Um, John Denver being the major influence of my music. Um, but, and a little Gordon Lightfoot maybe, or a little James Taylor. You know, I'm a '70's person you know, so, and ah, we would requests from the residents, and invariably Dick knew the songs. And the one song that comes to mind when it comes to requests is one we're still doing, um, we did it last night is, um, "Waltz Across Texas." And that was, ah, requested by a gentleman whose, who was ah, who had had a stroke, and, and communicated through his wife to us that, and she knew that was his favorite song, so I learned "Waltz Across Texas." I had never heard it before, ah, went on You Tube and, you know, and, and picked it right up, it's pretty simple song, beautiful song. It's one of the most popular songs we do now for, for, older crowds. I mean, you know, if we work at the Senior Center, yeah, it's a waltz, so people can dance to it. Well that kinda led into, into other, um, what you would refer to as "old-time country"

basically, you know, um, Johnny Cash, Hank Williams, um, my father was a big Johnny Cash fan. Um, and I remember a kid, you know, him listenin' to Johnny Cash on the radio and enjoying it. Um, and so that kinda, kinda resurrected something within me. My father died in 1980, ah, he only saw me perform publicly once outside of a church, which was kind of, you know, but, um, at any rate, um, so yeah, I've branched off into old-time country, um, we do some new country, we do an Avett Brothers song, that's just a wonderful song, called ah, "Swept Away." Um, I picked up a few some songs from weddings that we bring into it. So we're kind of a folk, country and then we picked up a fiddle player, Mr. Don Grabiell, and lightning, Donnie Lightning is his, is his name, is his nickname, and we took off into bluegrass. And now, we're doing Bill Monroe and ah, oh all sorts of different bluegrass and fiddle tunes and what not. And so, we're just, yeah, I mean, we pride ourselves in being as eclectic as, as, we can. We do some Dean Martin, we do some, um, oh um... I can't think of, the, the, the plum, oh my goodness, I can't think of it, "Make the World Go Away" is, is, one of his big hits.

CC: Mmhuh.

GA: Yeah, um, Eddie Arnold.

CC: Eddie Arnold, yep, Eddie Arnold.

GA: Yeah, Eddie Arnold, and of course, excuse me, depending on the population that we're, we're playing for, I mean we have a collection of songs that, that um, may appeal to whatever, and we kind of, you know, for instance, comin' out to Maplewood, there's, we have to figure out our dance tunes, what are our dance tunes? They like to dance out there. So I said "Gee, we can make anything a dance tune..."

CC: That's right.

GA: (Laughs) ...you just play it so they can dance to it."

So ah, so yeah. It's just, you know we don't do a whole lot of modern stuff, but um, we always have a good time and our audiences seem to have a good time. We filled the um, we filled the auditorium at ACC a couple of weeks ago, um, for the Association of Lifelong Learners, and ah, we had a standing ovation, did one encore and ah, everybody seemed to have a good time,

CC: (whispers) I was there.

GA: so....

CK: That's great

CC: So the members, all the members of Music For You are...

GA: Ah...

CC: And what do they play?

GA: Dick the lead, Reade, plays guitar, and sings a little bit. He also plays, he plays banjo, um and he plays um, accordion occasionally; but predominantly guitar. Ah, he also plays piano; but we rarely need a piano player. Um, then we have Diane "boom boom" Madsen on bass and vocals, ah Donny "Lightning" Grabiell on fiddle, and um, Beth "betters" Strong on mandolin and vocals, and she's our substitute bass player, in case, just in case, ah, ah, Diane can't play, which happens unfortunately occasionally, so, so Beth can step in and, and, play bass.

CC: And on average, at this point in time Greg, how many times do you play in a week?

GA: Hah! On average, on average I'd say, um, three times a week, on average. There are times when we'll go, I mean, we always play at um, we always play at Building Three in Turning Brook. That's, that's the um- we used to call it the Alzheimer's/ Dementia building; but it's really, it's where they need the most intensive care.

CC: Mmhuh.

GA: The residents over there. So we're always there at 4 o'clock on Monday afternoons, and ah, except for holidays, you know, Labor Day, Memorial Day, like that, um, because if the staff isn't there, they don't want us there. But um, we're always there, so that's at least once a week, ah, we play together. Um, and then, now Dick and, and um, Beth, and Don and myself, we play at ah, Resurrection Lutheran Church on Sunday mornings.

CC: Ok.

GA: And so we kind of have that little, I mean the only that's not there is Diane, and she, well, we won't go into that. No, I'm just kidding. She's-

CC: She's at her own church.



GA: She's, she's at her own church, she doesn't want that, you know, extra commitment. And we understand that completely. So, so, that's, that, but that's so we're not Music For You there, but we're working together, and, and, and we're you know, we're learnin' together.

CC: Mmhuh.

GA: And we always have an opportunity, when no one's looking to, to get together and work on a song or two.

CC: Yep.

GA: So, yeah.

CC: Well, I tell you what, Greg, you've answered just about every question I had, or I could have, but I bet Cindy might have some that ah, you, you, the interview is um, is not I know, not the easiest thing to do- to pull on your memory.

GA: The thing is I'm a talker see, so you get me talkin' and I can answer questions that you don't even ask me...

CC: Is there anything that we've left out that, that you, I mean is there any other names of any other bands that ya played with?

GA: Um, no, I mean I played you know, I played with Larry Daoust and, and um, I played with um, um, Kendziorski,

CC: Yeah.

GA: Um, and I played with well, Clint, you know, um, you know, I mean, I played with a lot of different musicians but we usually it was in, it was within the context of some type of band.

CC: That's called a jam session...

GA: Yeah, benefit band, um, you know, so ah, but, you know, as far as bands go, um, no, I think that's it.

CC: Is there any ah, besides the guitar, any other instrument, that ah, that you'd like to learn to play, or do play?

GA: Well, you know ah, Beth's, Beth's nickname is "betters" because before Beth came along, I was playing mandolin and I nicknamed her "betters" because she plays mandolin better than I do. That's where that came from. So I play a little mandolin, um, I play a little piano; but just enough to be able to, to, you know...

CC: Ok.

GA: ...work on melody for when I need to and things like that Um, I, I, I used to try, used to think about all the different instruments I'd like to play, but I'm most concerned about my vocal, my voice, you know, I, when I first came to Alpena, there was, there was a gentleman that used to cantor at um, St. John the Baptist Catholic Church and ah, he was nice guy but he had an extremely worn out voice. His vibrato was just horrible and you, you just; it was really hard to sit and listen to him, especially being a vocalist myself, and so I've, I've, I've asked Julie Wood from time to time to tell me, you know, make sure you tell me, please, if my voice starts sounding like that; because then it's time to quit.

CC: Yeah.

GA: So, I try to take care of my voice, I try to be um,

CK: How do you do that?

GA: Well, one of the best ways of doing it is to make sure that you don't get sick a lot. And so, I, I, I can't say as I take care of myself...I don't exercise a whole lot, I do a lot of just sitting around, you know, I've always been real slim; but I'm very careful with hygiene. I, you know, wash my hands regularly. I try not to put my hands on my face. During cold and flu season, I get a cold shot, or, excuse me, a flu shot I have all sorts of different ailments going on in this, in my body. Um, we don't need to go into now; but, um, I see doctors two and three times a month for various and sundry reasons and I always have them check to make sure that, that my, I've got, that my throat is good, you know, I mean, I mean, I just, I'm just very conscious and if I know somebody's sick-

CC: Mmhuh.

GA: - you know, I keep, I keep a distance. And it's difficult with my students now, I have thirty-two students in a class, so, and I'm a wanderer in the classroom, but I make sure that I... If I shake somebody's hand, I'm, as soon as I can, washing my

hand. You know, so, they say that most cold's transmitted by somebody's hand to their face. And so I do everything I can to be conscious of that. Drink lots of fluids-

CC: Mmhuh.

GA: Um, interestingly enough, my fluid of choice has always been Coca Cola and, and everybody tells me that's terrible for my vocal cords; but it's not hurt my vocal cords any. Um, so, um, it's just kind of being aware of what I can do-

CC: Mmhuh.

GA: - to try and stay healthy.

CK: So you said that you started singing when you were six-

GA: Mmhuh.

CK: Did you come from a musical family?

GA: No, not, not so much. My father played French horn but I didn't know that until after he died. Um, my, well yeah, I guess I'm a musical family, we were a musical family; but we were band music. My, my older brother played, played clarinet and so it was passed to me when it was my turn to, to get into band. Ah, my sister, older sister, I have five sisters, my older sister played saxophone, my second oldest sister played flute, *everybody* sang; but, we never sang as a group, we were, um, what is now referred to as a somewhat dysfunctional family. And so, we all did our own thing. Um, my younger brother, um, he plays guitar and, and sings- ah he's, he's very good. We're hoping to get him involved with us, um, his, he, his, tragically, his, his girlfriend of ah, twenty years, just died recently of pancreatic cancer. And so, he's kind of wondering what to do, and so he may be moving down to the area, and if he does, we'll, we'll get him involved. Um, so, yeah, we, we, you know everybody until my younger sisters came along, everybody, prior to that, um, had some kind of music, ah, education and some type of involvement in music. But, ah, other than my older sister who sings in a choral group in, um, in Omaha, ah, where she lives, I'm the only other one who's performing on a regular basis or doing anything with music.

CK: Ok.

GA: Ah, which is, I don't know if you'd say sad, but I mean it's kind of a shame because the others are very talented or were at one time. But my mother, bless her

heart, she's so proud of me. I, I try to keep her informed and give her cd's, and you know, so she's ah, she's thrilled.

CK: I found that you performed and produced concerts largely for benefits.

GA: Mmhuh.

CK: Um, you've done Special Olympics,

GA: Mmhuh.

CK: -talked about Shelter, Child Abuse and Neglect Team,

GA: Oh yeah, I'd forgotten about that.

CK: What, and you, there's, you say that, um, your primary motivation is to brighten people's lives with your music and good humor. What are the roots of all of that? Of wanting to...

GA: Oh boy- you know I would have to, I would have to say it's, it's, there's two major influences, one is that, um, is, is John Denver- um, and his philosophy and his way of looking at the world. When he was killed in '97, the night that he was killed, in fact, the best I can figure, um, within, within an hour of when he was killed, I was performing at the Future Farmer's of America Banquet at the high school. And of course, doing his music, I was performing solo, and, um, I, I sang a song of his, ah, "Boy from the Country" which is an autobiographical tune that he wrote. And I was devastated when I woke up the next morning to the news that he had been killed the night before. And I, and so, um, I say I, I dedicated myself at the time, I had done that before I think, but, but more and more I, I got to know about what his whole view of the world is and, and- was- and, and um the idea that, that peace is the most important thing in the world. Inner peace, ah, peace between each other, within each other, um and so when I, when I, perform, I figure that's my contribution. I'm, I'm doing what I can do to help people, um, even if it's a sad song- which I do from time to time. Um, if it touches someone, whether it's in, in a benefit concert or a church, or, or, somebody's living room, you know. I've got a friend who, ah, her husband died, and um, one of their favorite songs to listen to together was, was John Denver's "Perhaps Love." And she asked me to do it at his funeral and so I did, and she asked me, "Can you give me a recording of that?" And I said, "Do you want John or do you want me doing it?" and she said, "I would like you doing it." So, so we made a

recording of it and she listens to it from time to time. You know, um, I understand, from having dealt with and been around John's music and his way of looking at the world., as much as I have gotten into that, I understand that, that music is not just about entertainment, um, and it's not about soothing the savage beast or anything, I mean it's, music is what it is to each individual that experiences that music. So, um, sometimes it's happy, sometimes it's sad, sometimes it touches you in ways that you don't understand. Um, there are songs that I listen to that I just, I listen to 'em and I, I, can cry buckets; but if I perform them, I, nary a tear comes to my eye, because I know that that's a performance is, is coming out, it's there, it's, it's not for me necessarily, it's-

CC: Mmhuh.

GA: -it's for the people that are listening. And so, ah, yeah, no I'm a performer. I mean, that's, that's the bottom line. I don't know where I got that. I was a pretty shy kid, you know, but, but John tells a story about when, when ah, he was in, he was a military dependent also, and um, he tells a story of how one day he brought his guitar to school and ah, he became one of the most popular kids in school; because he performed with his guitar. Well I kind of did the same thing. When I started performing, people started knowing me. I'm, I'm terrible with names. I recognize people's faces; but people recognize me, and I, and I certainly am appreciative of that. I mean, I mean, I don't need it to survive in this world; but I'm certainly appreciative that I have touched people in such a way that they remember who I am. And, and, um, I end, I end all of our performances now with two things. One is ah, John's song, "This Old Guitar"; because the last verse of "This Old Guitar" ah, it goes um, "This old guitar, is my, gives me life and my living, all the things I like do. Serenade the stars that shine from a sunny mountainside, but most of all, to sing my songs for you. I love to sing my songs for you." And, and so I, I, I I'm reaching out to the audience to let them know that I appreciate, number one, they are here, and listening, and enjoying, and feeling what they're feeling, but also, that I appreciate just being able, being able to do this and, and, and then, um, usually the last thing I say to an audience is, "God bless you and peace my friends."

CK: Ok...speaking of performing,

GA: Mmhuh

CK: And liking to perform, I found also that you were involved with Alpena Civic Theater.

GA: Oh yes. Yeah.

CK: Um, ah, you were in the cast of “Inherit the Wind”

GA: Yep.

CK: And probably a few others...

GA: Yeah, I did predominantly musicals. I'd loved doing comedy, excuse me, I figure, I think I'm a pretty fun guy at times; but, um, I love doing, I, I, I, I did the musicals, ah I started with um, um, *The Sound of Music* and I played, Max Detweiler the talent scout in *The Sound of Music*. So I really only had one small part in there, where I, where I sang. But they heard me singing, and I was relatively new to the area at the time, and so they, they decided for future parts, you know, they would consider me. So, I, I, I played ah, oh, I played in the *King and I*, a role in the *King and I* and then, and then I got my big break. I played um, ah, Harold Hill in the *Music Man*. And, um, that was a dream come true; because when I was in high school, um, in Bellevue, Nebraska, before we moved up here, to, to ah, Oscoda, I was in a high school musical and it was *The Music Man*. And, and, I wanted to be Harold Hill of course; but I was, I was a mere sophomore in high school and so the senior obviously got the role of Harold Hill. I played Ewart Dunlap, the second tenor or the first tenor, I can't remember which it is, in the quartet in *The Music Man*. And so, when they gave me Harold Hill here, I was just phew and, and I, I still have people to this day, and I'm thinking that was probably '95 or '96 or something like that, I still have people that see me today and go “You were Harold Hill.” Which is very flattering.

CK: Yes-

GA: Um, of course then the other role that I tended to, to be remembered for locally is, is, *The Cat in the Hat* in um, *Seussical*. And I went in there and, and auditioned for it and, and ah, I didn't think I had a...I mean I was auditioning for the musical I didn't think I had any chance of doing *Cat in the Hat*, it's such an energetic role, and oh my gosh. Um, but, um, oh I can't think of his name, the director, he chose me as *Cat in the Hat*, and um, I did it and I loved it and um, we had a great time with it and people still comment from time to time about having been the *Cat in the Hat*. Ah, but that was all prior to my brain surgery, um, and so, I don't do, I don't do theater

anymore; because, I, I, tried to and my, my memory just isn't what it needs to be. And I, I've been on stage when people don't remember their lines and it's frightening. And, and, I, I don't want to put people in that position, so I don't do that anymore. I try to keep music in front of me, and songs that I absolutely am not sure of and so we get a little bit of a rap about that, "you got a music stand in front of you" but look, if I can, if I can't remember a song, but I can perform it if I've got it in front of me, then that's what we're gonna do. Because it isn't, it isn't what people look at on stage, it's what they hear that's most important, you know. So, that's what we do.

CK: So is that the biggest, um, drawback from the surgery was not, was memory. As far as musically, were you able to...?

GA: Music, yeah, memory and stability, I mean not stabil-, energy, yeah, if I go more than a couple of hours, um, I'm pretty well wiped out. Um, but yeah, predominantly that, yeah, yeah.

CK: So that's a gift, that all that was left-

GA: Oh absolutely, absolutely; but have, I have arthritis and I have, oh well we won't go into all that. And so, there are a lot of complicating factors. And the fact that here I am retired, I was retired in 2010, so what is this? 2015, so five years ago I was retired, um, but I'm able to do what I love to do the most. I'm able to perform, my music, our music and I'm able to teach my one class at ACC, and that's, that's, you know, it can't get much better than that. I mean...

CK: Thank you.

GA: No.

CC: Um, I do remember someone telling me and correct me if I'm wrong, did you not go to something very special about John Denver? Did you get to make a trip?

GA: I went to Aspen, Colorado last year. Um, every October, surrounding the date of his death, October 12<sup>th</sup>, um, they have what they call, um, Aspen in October Week. And um, I was able to make the trip out there last year for three days. I mean, I, I couldn't be there for the whole week; but I went out for, for three days. And ah, my primary reason for going, other than making connections with other people that, that ah, enjoy John's music and know him, ah, was to visit the sanctuary, ah, his, the sanctuary that was, was built there in Aspen for John and his music. And so, ah, the

Saturday that I was there, I got up and around, and, and talked to a couple of people to find out where it was at, and they said, “Well yeah we’ll take ya down there.”

And ah, I said, “Well, should we drive down there?”

“Oh no, we can walk down.”

So it looks, kind of looks like rain.

“Oh no, don’t worry about it. If it rains it’s just gonna be...”

So I’m carrying my guitar in its case, you know I wasn’t gonna , I’m carrying my guitar down there, we walk about three blocks down to the beginning of the Sanctuary , and um, it’s in, set aside in this little park, and, um, it’s still lookin’ like it’s gonna rain and I’m, I’m, so afraid, I, as a matter of fact they took me in and there’s these big boulders, and the boulders have, have things written on them, engraved in them, predominantly John’s lyrics of some, some of his songs. And uh, we get to where, I think, “Well this is a good place to start, because my intent is to go to each of the boulders and, and perform the songs that are on the boulders; but I look up and the sky is still lookin’ like its gonna rain and I just kind of hesitate and I say, “You know, do you think I should take my guitar out?”

“Oh yeah, yeah, go ahead, go ahead.”

Two minutes after I took my guitar out, the sun started shining, I mean the clouds just opened up, I played for about an hour and a half, ah once I finished with the boulders, I did a couple other songs that people requested. There were, about, there’re couple dozen people sitting there, you know, following me around, and ah, I finished, put my guitar away, and we started walking out of the park, and just as we started walking out of the park, it started raining.

CC: Wow.

GA: And um, yeah, I, I’ll, I will, I will never forget that. I, I, I would like to go back to, to Aspen in October, but it’s so expensive that it’s just not, it’s not practical for me to do that now; but um, yeah, they’ll be meeting there, there’s already people. I belong to Facebook groups that are about John and what not, you know, keep in touch, met some wonderful people, ah, in fact our music has been played, ah, some of John’s songs that we have performed and recorded, has been played, um, out of a podcast



out of Colorado and out of, ah, out of the UK, ah, there's a, a, the one out of Colorado is American's Veteran Radio and it's broadcast on the internet all throughout the world .Of course, and then the one in the UK is ah, is also, is, so we've been playing our music for John, it's been played all over the world...so...yeah, yep, very, very humbling, humbling experience, it's very humbling.

CC: I'm glad we remembered it.

GA: I think, yeah, thank you, thank you for remembering that. See that's the thing, there's so much, there's so much to remember , there's so much to remember over the years and I don't remember everything; but, but ah, you know, you just, you just do the best you can. You know memories come in chains. You start here, and you end up here. (Laughs) That's usually the way I am.

CC: Well we'd like, Cindy and I would like, would like to thank you ah, for comin' in and giving us your history along with a lot of things I did not know about John Denver, ah-

GA: And there's so much more.

CC:- and so we appreciate it very, very much and anything else that you can do to help the, the library put this wonderful, wonderful, informational about our musicians around Alpena together. Any ideas you might have, Greg, it'd be more than welcome and thank you very much.

GA: Thank you, Carole. Thank you, Cindy.