The following transcript was provided to Archives and Special Collections by The Gathering: Collected Oral Histories of the Irish in Montana with its associated audio recording.
Thomas Powers: Year in a row and Rory Makem...Makem and Spain Brothers had come out, and Rory Makem played guitar with us and he did one piece—a solo—and he sang Tyson's song about Charlie Russel.

John Lovell: Yes...I hate to admit it, but I really like that kind of music [laughter] I lived in Wyoming for too long and I—

TP: Oh, oh.

JL: And I cowboys and I lived down there for six years, in Cody and when I was 14 I started going to Big Timber, cowboys on a dude ranch up there and one of the great moments was sitting down in the bar in Kaycee with Chris Ledoux’s son. Drinking a beer with him, talking. I worked on a ranch just a few miles from his place, so it was quite a bit of fun. Chris Ledoux is kind of- you either like him or you don’t, but it was kind of fun.

TP: Well how old are you?

JL: I'm 26 now.

TP: Okay, and are you doing master's work?

JL: No, no, I’m just doing my bachelor’s. I wound up getting a two year degree in Powell in outdoor education and rec management and started working at Sierra. Moved to Kaycee for eight months and then worked at the feedlot in Powell, and then got a job at Sierra Trading Post and did that for three years and decided it was a dead end job. There was no hope of advancing unless I moved to Cheyenne, and I don’t like Cheyenne that much. It’s a beautiful place, but I don’t think I could live there and decided that I needed to go back to school and do something different or I was gonna wind up working those kinds of jobs for the rest of my life. As a lot of people in Cody do, that’s all that’s left really. Sierra’s the big high end job unless you work at the rodeo or the museum, but yes, the museum takes an education.

TP: And doesn’t pay anything.

JL: Yes it doesn’t pay anything either. [laughter]

TP: Cody is at right at the east gate of the park right?

JL: It is, yes.
TP: Just outside—

JL: Fifty-two miles from the east gate. If there was any way of getting any kind of better job down there I would have stayed, I love Cody, absolutely love it, but there’s just nothing really for the young crowd to do. It’s so service based with the park that, yes, town closes up in the winter all the main street stores close up. They shutter their—

TP: Really?

JL: It’s worse than West Yellowstone

TP: Worse than West Yellowstone.

JL: At least west keeps it open for the snowmobilers—

TP: Right.

JL: But Cody doesn’t even have that they started closing down Sylvan Pass every week for avalanche danger and you couldn’t get a permit to go in through that gate so they just canned it and everyone went up to Cooke City, you know if they are coming from Montana they don’t bother with Cody, if they come from down south they come through, but they only stay a night and then go up to Red Lodge or you know one of the little cabins up by Cooke.

TP: How do you...I’m not at all familiar with that territory, how do you get from Cody to Red Lodge that time of year? You can’t go through the park or Red Lodge, Cooke City.

JL: Cooke, there’s...there’s two passes that leave out of Cody if you head up like you’re going to Billings you’ll come into Red Lodge. Then you can’t get to the park but there’s another one further south called Dead Indian that takes you over the top. They started plowing that road so you could actually get into Cooke City but for a long time you couldn’t and that was our big draw in college that was where we had all of our fun little graduation parties because we were all young, we’d go to Cooke City right after the snow melted far enough to get in because the Beartooth Pass would still be closed. And the only sheriff had to come from Montana. He couldn’t come from Wyoming so it was a three-hour drive for a sheriff to get there, by the time they figured out there were kids up there, by then we’d be gone. [laughter] It’s a different part of the world.

It’s very different, it’s maybe on a good day if you take everything in maybe 12,000 people and Fourth of July weekend its ten times that. I think the last year I was down there we had 180,000 people come in just for Fourth of July. Traffic was backed up so far I rode my motorcycle when I was down there everywhere. Fourth of July I wound up riding it on the sidewalks just to try to get to work on time. I left an hour and a half early and lived 6 blocks away and didn’t make it on time. I had to start jumping on sidewalks [laughter] and going through people’s yards and could finally get there, but its...Like I guess Labor Day weekend in Dillon the locals just kind of move back—

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TP: Disappear.

JL: —and let the kids do...they will. It’s just too much. I guess maybe like Saint Patties up here, but it’s kind of different.

TP: Kind of, yes. And the situation here has gotten...Well, one of the reasons we do what we do at the Civic Center is because when I was in school a long time ago we would come home, the guys who went to Missoula came back to Butte very often spring break Missoula was on quarters then. Spring break was the break between was the break between quarters so your tests were done or there were occasions where you took tests during Saint Patrick’s Day week. But your tests were done or nearly done. Kids come back from Missoula and Bozeman to here because I went to high school with...We’d go to the Knights of Columbus, and sit in the Knight’s sit at the KC with the old Knights—the guys who were my father’s age who we all knew. They would be there and we would be there and their wives would be there, some...The KC is a boys club, but the bar at the KC here was...the wives would be there and the kids would be there and it was a clubhouse you know. It was comfortable for everyone and we would sit and talk with one another and with our parents—contemporaries—and it was great. But then it turned into spring break north.

JL: Yes, that was the big thing that everyone at my old college did. They came up to Butte for Saint Patties. That was spring break for them that was their big draw, and I’d talk with some of them. Do you know? I’d worked Saint James when I was doing my EMT in the ER one Saint Patties. Do you realize...I guess maybe it’s tamed down some since I’d been a kid, but do you realize what’s going on up there? I mean, it’s pretty wild. It’s not for them the big weekends going down hanging out at the fair grounds on Fourth of July and it isn’t that big of a thing you’re drinking beer out of the back of your tailgate. This has a few more people—

TP: Whew, yes.

JL: —and more closely packed. I was glad for the Civic Center. I wouldn’t have probably come over to Butte for Saint Patties if it wasn’t for the Civic Center.

TP: Well, the thing that we’ve done and I don’t I can’t remember exactly I think that for me 18 years in a row I’ve been on stage in the Silver Dollar right after the parade. Eighteen for me, probably 17 for Mick and this was ten for Jim and John, so we’d go right after the parade. The place is packed-

A couple of those years...Several of those years, John the Yank came in and played which was a hoot, and absolute gas. The place would be wall to wall people and this was before they moved the stage. The stage used to be kind of in the middle of the “F”. The room is essentially an “F” shape.

JL: And that was where you played this year, right?

TP: Yes.
JL: Okay.

TP: But it used to be the stage used to be in the middle of the “F”, here facing south—facing those windows—where they have that temporary bar, and it would just be crammed with people especially that center room. We’d play a few and the Yank would show up and we could see him coming. His nephew Paul always brought him in, and Paul would have his box, Paul would have the Yank’s box in a box a case, but it was a cardboard box. Paul would have the box in an old suitcase and the security guys the black shirts that they hired for the day, “Make way for the Yank. Make way for the Yank.” [laughter] Everyone would just get out of the way. We’d trundle him up on stage and he’d sit down and play for 15...Not 15 he’d play seven, eight, nine minutes. The place just went wild, cause, well the last time he was a hundred years old.

JL: Yes, well that recording of him on your CD, I...Bernadette mentioned we have that in the archives and it’s just so he’s...What? Ninety-two, ninety-five when he recorded that.

TP: When he recorded he was 95 when he did that recording.

JL: And he plays really well. [laughter]

TP: Until the last time I played with him, his last public thing was at the Fest, the Irish Festival when he was 100 so he was 100 and a half because his birthday was March 10, and this was in August...so he was beyond his hundredth birthday. His beat was absolutely rock solid [tapping on table]. He’d miss notes, but he didn’t get out of time.

JL: Yes. That would just be so amazing to see I usually listen to older music like Utah, I wish I could have seen him, I can say I saw Chris LeDoux before he died a couple of times. I saw John Prine. I’ve seen some of the older guys. Saw Bob Dylan, but for me [unintelligible] the old bar in Glenn. It’s 20 minutes north of Dillon.

TP: I’ve never been in the bar.

JL: But it looks like it’s closed. But when I was in high school I was running around with a girl who lived out there, and she said, “Well, you need to come out Friday night.” So I showed up and there’s these three old timers just pounding their whiskey down. Nine o’clock rolls around and they all reach behind the bar and grab out their instruments and just sat in the corner and started playing. More and more people kept showing up, and it wound up being this big huge jam thing. Those are the kind of musicians that are, well, it’s one thing to stand on the stage with 10,000 people screaming at you, but some of those unsung smaller singers are just phenomenal and the musicians are phenomenal. You know, it’s so hard to keep track of all of them.

TP: Oh yes.

JL: You just can't do it.
TP: No.

JL: Missoula's a little bit better place for it, there's some music up there, but last night I went to the cowboy bar to see a band, it was quite terrible, but—

TP: Went to the cowboy bar?

JL: It's called the Sunrise Saloon out by the Elbow Room down off of Brooks and you walk in and it's like walking into Wyoming. For some reason last night I was kind of homesick. I wanted to hear country music and line dance and swing dance and but I went in there and it was like being back home. Then the band jumped up and started doing some really terrible covers and I felt bad for them.

It happens. I'm no great musician. I can't really critique them too much. Covering Bon Jovi probably wouldn't be my first choice. You know, that's how it goes.

How do you come up with songs that you want to play? Do you have more a repertoire than your CD that's out or—

TP: Yes. The band, the band itself has been in existence for nearly 20 years, and the genesis of the band was kind of a kind of a peculiar thing. But the songs...The way I the way I started singing was...the way I started singing Irish songs was...and the way I got turned onto Irish songs was...A long, long, long, long time ago when I was a little kid—a grade school kid—I have one cousin on my father's side of the family—one first cousin on my father's side of the family—and bunches on my mother's side. This one cousin is a bit older than I—considerably older than I—and he was...had been educated gone to college, graduated, was working as an engineer. Living, I think, in New Mexico at the time. Came back, this was probably 1963, 4, 5 in there. Showed up at our house up on the East Side, and had these records of the Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem. These were the first Clancy Brothers and Tom Makem records that were on Columbia. They were these Irish songs that we hadn't heard before because we heard “Who Threw The Overalls in Mrs. Murphy's Chowder” and this and that and the other—“Danny Boy” and “When Irish Eyes are Smiling” of course. This this was a different kettle of fish. And they were...well, they were folk songs.

Part of it was right in the teeth of the folk revival that was happening in Greenwich Village and you had mentioned Dylan earlier, and you know Dylan and Peter, Paul and Mary and Van Ronk and all of those people. Well, the Clancy Brothers had ended up in New York and Tommy Makem ended up in New York in Greenwich Village. You're talking about the guys in the bar who pulled out their instruments and were sitting in the corner sitting in the corner smoking cigarettes and drinking whiskey and singing songs and that's what was going on there at the time and all these people knew one another. The Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem figured out we could do this and make a living at it. How crazy is that? So anyway, that's how I got turned onto Irish folk music and I knew...over the years our family collected all of these albums and we listened to them all the time. It wasn’t something that ended up being played from March 16 to March 18. They got played all the time and every time one came out somebody found it and bought it and everybody in the house listened to it and you learned them sometimes you learned them right, sometimes you had [laughter] you had to
make stuff up because either they were dabbling nonsense or they were singing in the they would put in a line in Irish, and we had no Irish or some things were just...You didn't know what it was and this was not from the Clancy Brothers but these the first that I heard the song about the Black Velvet Band and the reference to Van Diemen's Land. Well Van Diemen's Land they might have well been speaking Irish, what the hell is Van Diemen's Land? Well you have to go to college to learn that Van Diemen's Land is what we now call Tasmania. [laughter]

Anyway, that's where my first Irish songs came from and I sang these songs we listened to these songs we listened to these songs and we wore the grooves out on these records in our house. That was the inventory what we myself and my siblings learned them all. We learned every word. We listened to those albums to the point...You know how this works. You listen to an album, and you learn the order and you can be in your car you can be sitting in study hall and one of the songs comes to mind and you sing it through and then you go into the next track. That's how all of us are, still with these songs, that's where the songs came from.

JL: Okay, well...kind of shifting into you know what you’re doing now. Are all of...I went through the list and tried to remember which ones I’d heard and which ones I hadn’t, but is that CD mostly original work or did you kind of pick and choose original and—

TP: The new CD...I can’t think of what’s on it. [laughter] The new cd Dirty Old Town is, has...got sources that are varied. The tunes are mostly traditional tunes, the tune sets...There may be some of Mick Cavanaugh’s work sandwiched in in some of those tunes sits something that he dreamed up on his whistle and said and worked on and worked on and worked on of course. Then, “Oh, that would go good in between these two other tunes.” Two of those pieces were written by Jim Shelf—“Fill the Glass” and “Sligo Town” I think...“Sligo Town” on it?

JL: Yes, yes it is.

TP: Shultz wrote those two...“Fill the Glass” he wrote after having seen Liam Clancy there we go back to that again he saw Liam Clancy probably a year and a half or two years before Liam died. Jim was in Ireland, happened to see Clancy and in concert and wrote that wrote the song...because of because of seeing Liam Clancy having heard Liam Clancy so much so many times. Jim presented this song to me at a birthday gathering for me and it was and he worked he beat that thing into the ground [laughter] he, but what a wonderful song. A wonderful song so those two are Jim’s pieces the others are traditional Irish folk songs from here there or wherever...from whatever sources that somebody someone of the four of us in Dublin Gulch heard somewhere. Some of them are pretty...pretty much straight forward like the recording we heard them from, some of them are completely reworked and that’s the beauty of having three guys like that let me hang around with. So that...that’s what you get. When you have four guys listening to this and saying I like this and I like this and I like this and a guy like Jim who, can write them. Yes, he has the music ability and the poetic ability...Just so it is an amalgamation of influences outside influences on the four of us mostly.

JL: Yes...I like watching how that works cause I my dad oh he graduated high school in ’69, I think and his first jump into employment was buying a record store and...He ran a record store in Dillon for a few

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years before he went to work at the mine and you walk into his room and I told him if you if you kick the bucket, you cannot get rid of your vinyl because he just has milk crates stacked going around his room and you know when I think of music I’m thinking Peter Paul and Mary, Neil Young, Bob Dylan, Janice Joplin, you know uh, Crosby Stills and Nash what else there is but I’ve noticed that’s starting that sound is coming back again with modern bands. There’s a band I saw in Billings from Portland that you know their new record sounds like Neil Young is singing and the guitar work sounds like Neil Young and you know the first time I played it for some of my other musically inclined friends, “That isn’t Neil Young. He didn’t write that, did he?” [laughter]

“No, this is Weinland. It’s a band out of Portland and the singer is my age.”

“Are you kidding me?”

TP: And some of that makes some sense because in that...what works...you can plug in and play loud and pound stuff out but you can’t do that in the shower.

JL: Yes, yes I am pretty eclectic with my music taste, I’ll listen to anything, but, very low on the list is rap, some R and B I really like, but rap isn’t that big of a thing and heavy metal, even hard rock and roll I like on occasion but like you said, I can’t sit down at my computer with my guitar and try and figure out how to play it. You know Neil Young is about as wild I can get on the guitar and still be able to do anything with it. Aside from learning how to strum really hard on three chords [laughter] and break all my strings, I play a Les Paul Classic I can’t do really heavy string work it just breaks on me [laughter] Now why did you...The why is maybe the wrong word. How did you come to play your instrument?

TP: [laughter] You keep going back to MY instrument but—

JL: I can’t remember what you called it. I’ve always called it a skin and bones but that’s what the Scots call it.

TP: Ah, its a bodhran.

JL: Bodhran.

TP: Bodhran is the Irish name for that drum its b-o-d-h-r-a-n.

JL: Okay.

TP: I started playing it because I needed something to do with my hands when I wasn’t singing. Kind of. [laughter] The first...I never seen one or heard one any of that until I first heard The Chieftains. In, when, 1980 something probably and being basically pretty lazy and not...not ever having a great passion compunction to learn an actual instrument...saw bodhran and thought...I can probably do that, even me. [laughter] The first one I got was a gift from my now wife who showed up at a, for my birthday with a bodhran, and thought well okay. I pounded on that for a while and there are more bodhran jokes than accordion jokes and there are more bodhran jokes than banjo jokes and with good

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reason. But, you know, it’s a pretty rudimentary instrument really rudimentary instrument...It might add a little bit.

JL: Well yes it I try to pick out instruments when I’m listening to music just to, I guess it’s from band when I was younger I try to pick out all the different sections and...You blend in so well where you know a drum set would just destroy it. Even someone just on a snare drum would just destroy it.

TP: Truth in advertising, on the on the recording you've been listening to I played bodhran on some of those tracks, Mick also played bodhran on some of those tracks. On one, and I can’t remember which, the engineer who recorded it who is also a drummer played bodhran. On one and on that and I will take credit for the suggestion at least I said you know what would fit nicely in here, is if Dan played the bodhran with brushes. So on one of those tracks, and like you say a snare would be too much. But Dan played on one of those tracks Dan plays the bodhran with brushes, so—

JL: I’m gonna have to go through and listen to that again and see if I can pick it up.

TP: [Laughter] That is more...for our live presentation it gives me something to do it gives me something to contribute but I’m...I’m far from a bodhran player—

JL: Well at least you do it.

TP: Well, yes.

JL: Yes you could be George Strait or various other people stand there do this.

TP: I’ve heard of other, there are different philosophies about that too, I was very self-conscious for a very long time about just singing...A friend of mine who is a great musician and played until very recently in a blue grass band, John, our fiddle player our banjo player. Rick is a great musician and he said, “Hey, what you do is completely legitimate. You do something that...there are a whole bunch of other guys can’t.” And with that, with that little push from him, and that little push came over the course of 30 years. He spent 30 years saying, “It’s okay. It’s okay to just sing sing sing a song for us.” That generosity...that I get from these musicians is a wonderful thing. Or maybe its a terrible thing, they may have created a monster.

JL: Well a good sounding monster anyway. [laughter] Somebody who actually has vocal range, I mean, that’s, that’s good enough. And you don't have to put up with someone like me trying to sing. [laughter]

TP: I don’t know where we were. Oh, I think I remember who it was, and this this may have come from the same Patrick’s Day years and years and years ago, a local guy who in his cups late one Saint Patrick’s Day after we’d done if we did any performances we had done our performances and we’re kind of coasting and in a bar. This guy came up and he said “Ohhh, Tommy I love I love your singing, and you know all the words.” [laughter] Which is always a plus another very dear friend of mine who said...who is a great entertainer in his own right but didn’t sing much said, “I don’t know how you can

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do it. How do you remember the words?”

I said, “For the most part the songs are just stories.” The songs that I sing, the songs that I like the best are just stories and you tell the story and that’s how you remember the words granted some of it is having repetitio est mater studiorum as my Latin teacher—

JL: I start Latin next semester.

TP: Repetitio est mater studiorum: Repetition is the mother of learning. Repetition, repetition, repetition. You listen to it 10,000 times you sing it 2,000 times and then it just it goes together, but the songs tell the story tell the story and you start at the beginning and you get to the end.

JL: And that’s what I like so much about...kind of broaden it out even to folk in general, it is usually story.

TP: Sure.

JL: It isn't verse chorus verse chorus but those are fine and dandy for a little bee bopper when you’re standing in the shower, but in my mind it doesn't make as compelling a piece as a story we like “Whiskey in the Jar” because of the story behind it, not for the, “what for the daddy oh.”

TP: Right and...doesn't everybody? You know go Google “Whiskey in the Jar” or YouTube and go “Whiskey in the Jar”.

JL: Oh yes, Metallica covered it. I mean that’s for my age—

TP: Yes.

JL: That’s gold.

TP: A local guy who I met through my brother is a musician and working on a project of...he loves Phil Lynott from Thin Lizzy, and he put together covers of all of these Thin Lizzy songs. He called me and said, “Do you think we could do ‘Whiskey in the Jar’?”

I said, “Let’s see what comes out.”

Well, he did ten or twelve covers and this one isn’t a cover but it’s “Whiskey in the Jar” and unlike I never do anything but we had a ball doing it. But it’s the story.

“Brennan on the Moor” is another one that tells the story but I can’t tell you the number of times that the power of the story. Years ago I used to have a little Volkswagen Jetta and I’d be traveling here and there and rather than turn on the radio the stereo the whatever i’d just sing and I’d be start singing “Roddy McCorley”. I don’t know if you know the story of Roddy McCorley.

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JL: No I don’t.

TP: We’re gonna cheat here and say that I’m gonna repeat a quote it’s been said that “The songs from the revolution of 1798 are as thick as autumnal leaves.” “The Rising of the Moon” comes from ’98. Roddy McCorley was a young northern Irishman who was martyred, murdered for his part his patient in the revolution of ’98. I’d find myself on the highway with a death grip on the wheel singing “Roddy McCorley” [laughter] going 85 miles an hour. Ooh, ooh better scale this one back get to the end of the song quick and sing a lullaby.

JL: [laughter] Calm down before we come into city limits.

TP: But that’s the other thing about the songs...the exposure to those songs in me triggered an interest in where did the story come from, and so many songs are...get convoluted and twisted and bent and changed, “Whiskey in the Jar” over the years but where did this come from, well originally from the Revolution of 1798 then there are songs from...“The Bold Tenant Farmer”...from periods in Irish history that makes you interested in Irish history.

In our culture in the United States I have found not just among the Irish but among the Italians and among the Scandinavians and the Serbs and the Croatians and all of the people who came to this little microcosm. The first generation that came, and they didn’t speak English many of them. You’ve heard the stories of the no smoking signs posted on the Butte Hill in 17 or 18 or 25 different languages?

JL: Yes.

TP: Well that first wave from whatever country didn’t speak English and when they had children they told those children you become American. You’re not Croatian you’re not Yugoslavian you’re not Polish you’re not German you’re not Irish you’re American and that would be my father’s generation, my mothers generation. While their parents who came here didn’t speak Irish because you know the English tried to beat the Irish out of the Irish for centuries that generation became American and only. In the case of my own family my mother’s mother wasn’t very generous with her information to her children about where about her path to where they were because it was not a...It was a rocky road. It was not pleasant and it wasn’t pleasant to remember and it wasn’t pleasant to convey. The same with my father’s father. But I think also some of those people were hiding things. You don’t tell everything you know for a number for any number of reasons.

But I think it’s typically my generation, the third generation, that starts...that is comfortable enough to start to look backward so we ask our parents what their parents told them and they tell us...Well, they told us what they told us, but a lot of what they got they got firsthand but through osmosis and not directly this is what happened when, where, how, and why what. They got was listening to their parents...their parents...My parents’ generation heard their parents talking with their contemporaries.

So that’s how they learned about where they came from one generation removed. I think that next generation—that third generation because its more comfortable economically, sociologically, culturally—I think that generation is able to become intellectually curious about where they came
from. And have and they are able to exploit resources that the generation before didn’t that first generation was here out of need solely for sustenance, almost. The second generation things were a little more comfortable they were American. There was no disputing they were American and when they got curious it got pushed off a little by these old people by that time they were old people. Pushed off of a little you don’t need to know that you don’t want to know. That and I don’t want to go through that again. I’m glad to have that behind me. People didn’t leave Ireland because it was a great place to be.

JL: Yes, yes precisely. I’ve been thinking a lot on that kind of stuff especially since I started working with this project, and you know how much I don’t know about my own family. I interviewed my grandmother just to get it all down before it disappears but my grandfather he died when I was 12. He was in his late 90s but he used to run a dry farm in Dillon and would go to Idaho Falls because the wood was cheaper with a wagon pulled by horses. Pick up wood bring it back and build his barn a stick at a time, but so much of what he said I didn’t pay attention to.

TP: Of course not.

JL: He was you know, one...He would have been one or two generations the Lovell side of the family kind of came over with the Mormon Exodus from Nauvoo so we have that whole side of us, and I really don’t know anything about that but we have his diaries but that doesn’t tell what his grandfather told him that he might have remembered but didn’t write down, you know, working through my grandmother I’ve- my great grandfather my grandfather and he would have been my great uncle were all in WWII together. Wouldn’t have known that if I didn’t ask her I mean I have their uniforms I have their papers from some of them but I really think- it seems that with my generation anyway it’s almost to the point of complacency.

TP: Sure.

JL: You know we’re a lot of kids my age, well kids, I guess younger than I am, young adults and below really don't give a hoot where they came from or what their story is.

TP: Right.

JL: You know they are so comfortable it doesn’t matter.

TP: Yes and there are, God, there are a myriad of reasons for that, that’s a study for the sociologists.

JL: Yes, yes, it is. That’s well beyond me but you know through the music you can kind of go back and pick up some of those pieces a little bit, maybe not family story but you...You can kind of get some context. Some ideas of things that were going on if your great grandparents or grandparents didn't tell you about leaving in 1916 you can go back and find songs...What’s the name of it? James Connolly is the only name I’ve found. Charley and the Bhoys did it and it you know about James Connolly starting up the...What did he start? The IRA?
TP: The Irish Republican Brotherhood.

JL: Yes, that’s right.

TP: You know which...My history is lacking, but you know the Irish Republican Brotherhood became the Irish Republican Army but you can’t say IRA now because they—the IRA—were terrorists. The IRA were terrorists in the 1970s and the 1980s and the 1990s and the 1960s, but in 1916 the IRA was the same as the revolutionary forces right now today in outside of Tripoli. That’s what those people were doing and those...Its not at all dissimilar because you know the IRA Patrick Pearse was a mathematics teacher...So those people were not terrorists.

JL: Yes, yes, and I...I’d say compared to William Wallace even if the movie messed it up [laughter] it’s the same kind of thing.

TP: Right, right.

JL: Ghandi, that might be a...He was non violent. The American Revolution was the same kind of thing.

TP: You betcha.

JL: It was the exact same thing. [laughter] We just happened to get it a little before they did that why I got interested in all this stuff in the beginning. I was born in ’84, and I remember the troubles in Ireland being...The fall of the Soviet Union was big and the troubles in Ireland were big, and that was what terrorism was and then.

TP: Then some of that wasn’t good clean terrorism when they took out Mountbatten’s yacht. Was he a legitimate target? Maybe so, maybe no. Were they terribly clean? Nnnnoooo. Did they do some really bad stuff? Yes. But they I think about the Blanket Men, the guys in the North who went on hunger strike.

JL: Right. I’m just gonna snag another tape for this.

TP: Those guys—

[Telephone rings]

TP: Hah! Ta this might be a good time for a break.

JL: Yes we can take a take a—

TP: Sure.

JL: If you are—
But I used to push the power mower at the cemetery in high school and college and I would sing all day long I would some of it would be Irish and I sang a bunch of Bob Dylan and a bunch of Neil Young.

JL: Yes, have you heard Mister Bob lately?

TP: I had never seen him until September.

JL: Was that when...when he was in Missoula.

TP: Yes.

JL: Okay, so you were at that show too.

TP: Yes and I had passed up a couple of opportunities and I saw was gonna be in Billings and he was gonna be in Billings like Thursday before our festival. It was not going to work out he was gonna be in Billings in August and then I saw he was gonna be in Missoula mid-week. I thought I need to do this just because I’ve never seen him. And so I went. Blew off the afternoon went down...Here’s how little planning there was I went to my boss in the morning and said, “D you think you could live with out me this afternoon?”

She said, “Sure, what do you have going?” I said, “I want to go to Missoula and see Bob Dylan.” [laughter] So I packed a bag got in the car drove to Missoula stopped and saw my friend Rick Ryan who was just packing to leave to go to [Washington] D.C. His wife had taken a job with the State Department, and they were going somewhere as it turns out. This was at the time they were kind of figuring Addis Ababa so she’s doing health stuff with the State Department in embassies but they’re based in Ethiopia. Rick was...they were...I got there they were literally packing up the kitchen, and they were on their way out and we talked about Dylan. He’d seen Dylan a bunch of times before, and I dropped some stuff to Kari, parked at my friend John John Jiner’s house and walked down to the park. Didn’t have a ticket, just figured I’m gonna go see it, and it was great. I am the only one in this house who does Dylan. I’d never seen him before. So I just I went with no expectations walked in bought a ticket bought a hamburger bought a couple of beers and freelanced and wandered around just kind of coasted missed the first act which I’m disappointed in now cause I heard they were great.

JL: They were amazing I can’t remember who it was but I think it was a local band more or less I thought.

TP: I think they were from the like Portland or Seattle and one of them was it Gabriel Byrne’s son?

JL: Very well may have been.

TP: Two guys. I didn’t see any of that and then Mellencamp I can take or leave. I was really impressed.
JL: Were you?

TP: Yes I thought his show was really good and really fun, and then Dylan...I just sat and I started at the right at the front of the house mixed kind of and moved out in front and worked my way and worked my way back and just kind of cruised around and watched and listened and sang along and...I haven't kept up with what he's doing. But he did so much old stuff, and I knew he was gonna because I'd been going to his website and they post the set list. But I had a ball.

Then I was thinking what a study in contrast between Mellencamp and Dylan. I really enjoyed both of them but Mellencamp wowing the audience and and cajoling the audience and cavorting the audience and Dylan stand sing [nnnnnn nnnnn nnn nnn]. [laughter] Stage goes black, he goes over to the other microphone, and him no backing vocals. None, it's just him.

JL: Well that's his trademark, I mean—

TP: Yes.

JL: I don't know if he could have someone sing with him and have it be the same.

TP: No. Well, I think when he was traveling with the band he'd come out and those guys would do. But you think of Dylan and his musicianship, he can't carry a tune in a bucket, [laughter] and he will indiscriminately change keys in the middle of a song because he has no range. There Dylan is a poet not a singer. And he's a whackjob [laughter] but it was so...I'm really, really glad I went to see him.

JL: Yes so am I. [laughter] My dad is so big into music but he's getting to the point where he doesn't want to go to shows alone so. I can't remember what it was maybe four years ago John Prine came and played the Alberta Bair in Billings. I was in Wyoming and paid attention to what's going on in Billings and called mom up, “Hey, does Dad want to go see John Prine? Do you want to come see John Prine?”

“Oh, sure I’ll go,” and I brought one of my buddies I went to school with and it was great. It was like a coffee house. We were sitting down so close.

TP: Twelve hundred seat coffee house.

JL: There was only like 50 people there.

TP: You are kidding me.

JL: It was a dead house so he was sitting up there singing, “What do you want to hear? Well, I only know three chords so you gotta pick something I know.”
TP: No way.

JL: It was back and forth and went to that and dad just came away gushing. He loves John Prine.

TP: Oh, there again Prine. Singing better than Dylan...but there it’s the story. John Prine’s stories are are...God they’re...he tells great stories. Some of them are funny. Most of them will rip your heart out—so many of them.

JL: Yes, one of my relatively good friends down in Dillon you know we all go to the Moose when I come home and one of them, my best friend from high school is an old crusty logger and his buddy is an old Vietnam vet so every time I come home we have to sit down and we just run the jukebox. It’s the new college bar down there so all the kids are playing their rap and rock and all this but we load it up and start bringing on Young and Prine but we always have to do “Sam Stone” without fail.

TP: Sure why not? A trip back to Vietnam, but he probably takes them all the time.

JL: Well Skip, he’s a character he’s...What is he? Crow and Cheyenne, I think. But he was Black Ops in Vietnam and did all the over the border stuff and he’s another one I want to sit down with and talk but it’s taken me- I’ve known him for ten years and he’s finally opened up enough to say “I was in Laos. I was in Cambodia,” but he won’t go anymore. I don’t think he wants to, and I don’t really want him to either.

TP: Yes, and like I said he may go back there. My brother in law who was over in Vietnam, and he is haunted. He is haunted. His head is screwed on as well as anyone you will encounter who has been over there and it comes back and it comes back and it comes back. I’m so lucky I never had to register for the draft. I’m in that little window. My brother did and a couple of years after him did and then they discontinued it I didn’t even have to register.

JL: Wow. I think I still qualify for Selective Service but I don’t think I have my card anymore.

TP: The only reason Selective Service knows I exists is because I file taxes. But how lucky for me.

JL: Well you know that was a really, really, terrible period you know it—for America, Vietnam the whole gamut for everyone involved but that—

[Break in audio]

JL: I think in my mind that’s where real music came from. Was from that tumultuous time I...you know when we went into Iraq and after nine-eleven, what did we get? Toby Keith singing, “I’ll put a boot up your ass,” and Neil Young coming back out of retirement to put out “Living with War”. The old guy got it, the new guy...We have...My generation has no idea what to do with that.

TP: Well, yes well and the interesting thing about the progression of music from...that the young people started playing in 1955 or ’58. I talk again and I’m gonna go back there because when Dylan,
Dave and Ronkin, Peter, Paul, and Mary and Tom Clancy and Liam Clancy and Tommy Makem were hanging out in Greenwich Village together and they were looking backward kind of at song...writing songs and...singing songs—being bohemian a lot. But then they started to grow and they started...the tentacles started to spread out, and Dylan went his way...They starting being reflective...but the times were a changin’...sorry—

JL: Yes, they were.

TP: Sorry, sorry. But the effect that the times were having on those people on those kids, and it's like they could ship me off to Vietnam tomorrow, well why? So there was great stuff for...great material to write about. They couldn't sing. [laughter] John Prine sings better than Bob Dylan. Bob Dylan was going away, well, close to the worst. Neil Young has his way, and I love, I love them all. I love all three of them. But Dylan said of Liam Clancy, “He’s the best ballad singer I've ever heard.” They were great pals. Bob Dylan and Liam Clancy were great pals and I was...This is what you’re doing. You’re sitting here listening to me talk.

JL: Yes.

TP: When we came home on Saint Patrick’s Day between our shows we left the Silver Dollar and got here and took a little break before we went to the Civic Center and the mail had come and there was a tube in the mail and pulled the tube open and pulled it out and it was...You can look at it later. That poster that’s hanging on a hanger over there, [laughter] and it’s a poster from a show that Liam Clancy and Tommy Makem didn’t do.

JL: Didn't do.

TP: Didn't do. On Wednesday March eighteenth 1981 in Spokane. We talked earlier about spring break being right on Saint Patrick’s Day or at Saint Patrick’s Day that year Saint Patrick’s Day was on Tuesday was on Tuesday and this my memory brings back I had a test had a final on Saint Patrick’s Day on Tuesday. Took the test and I recall it was in the afternoon fairly late in the afternoon like a three o’clock test. Got out of the test and caught a ride to Butte with a friend of mine we got here at six or something went home to my parents had a quick bite to eat went up town and did the uptown thing at that time like I say it wasn’t like it is today.

The next morning myself and one of two of my sisters I know my older sister Pat and I can’t remember which of my other younger sisters got in the car and drove to Spokane. I had a test scheduled on the eighteenth and blew it off arranged to take it later. Went to Spokane to see Liam Clancy and Tommy Makem. I’d never seen either one of them before. Picked up my aunt, got to Spokane picked up my aunt, the mother of the cousin my father’s sister the mother of the cousin who turned us onto the Clancy Brothers in the first place. Picked her up went down to the Opera House and we’re just jacked. I'm just wild eyed at the prospect of getting to see these are my heroes. Which is goofy. I’m a 19 year old college kid and who are my music heroes? Tommy Makem and Liam Clancy? What?

Nobody knows these people. I'm gonna get to see these guys get to the Opera House and the reader...
board says “show canceled”. I felt like someone hit me in the gut with a four-by-four. I just went what? I was absolutely crushed. And to add insult to injury had to make up this test either Thursday or Friday. [laughter] Made a complete mockery of finals week and—

JL: That's what finals week is there for. [laughter]

TP: [laughter] Yes, so at any rate this Saint Patrick's Day 30 years removed, come home, open the mail and here's this poster from this show that I didn't see 30 years before. It came from a woman in Spokane who's involved in the Irish American community there. She was one of the people responsible for putting on this show and she was still pissed. One of them had gotten sick well, they played in Seattle the night before and everyone knows which got sick and what sort of malady he had. [laughter]

So she sent the poster and a little note. She said, “I remember talking to you about this,” and she said, “I pinched this poster out of the Knights of Columbus Hall in Spokane and thought of you and sent it.” I thought that was really great so I sent her a little thank-you note...Fortunately for me after the fact in 1994 in fact Tommy Makem played in Butte, and the person who put that show on contacted me I picked him up at the airport he had dinner at this table. Tommy Makem ate dinner with me at this table. That was on a Thursday in September late September. We were leaving for Ireland that Saturday and within the next week about...I had tea with Liam Clancy in his house.

JL: And all your dreams came true?

TP: Right, Yes! [laughter] You know I said...I said there they said Maureen in my note that I felt really bad at the time but made up for it in the long run. That in the course of ten days I hosted Tommy Makem in my house, and Liam Clancy did the same for me in his house in Ring in Ireland so...some things work out.

JL: Yes well have you ever heard of Katie Lee? I wouldn't be surprised if you didn't.

TP: No.

JL: She was kind of a fifties show girl singer but she was running around with Arlo Guthrie and that crowd. And she was she was from, I think, Tucson and was one of the first women to go down Grand Canyon on the power boats that...Oh, I just spaced his name but she was one of the first women to travel the length of it and got really involved with trying to prevent Glen Canyon Dam from going in.

TP: Okay.

JL: But I went to a writer’s conference in Moab and the first year they did it their theme was Ed Abbey since he was such a big thing down there. And I had been listening to her music forever. They’re all protest songs. There’s nothing...They’re all old. It’s her and her guitar singing songs about the river and I love it down there. It’s my little second home, but I sat down in the auditorium and was listening they had all the original people from the Monkey Wrench Gang up on stage. All the people the book
was based on Ed was dead by then. There was this little short wiry woman that looks like she’s about
to keel over in front of me, and at the end of the thing I tapped her shoulder and said, “Are you Katie
Lee?” [laughter]

“Yes, I am. Who are you?”

She shook my hand and we started talking, and I started doing work along her lines started writing her.
She wound up being one of my really good friends, and one of my allies with some work I was doing in Wyoming.

This woman sang with Arlo Guthrie. She was requested to inform under you know the McCarthy scare
you know the FBI came to her and asked her if she would inform on that little group and she didn't
because she was kind of going her own way towards “un-American activities”. But my god, that's so
cool.

TP: Yes, well, Robby O’Connell is a Irish singer songwriter lives in Rhode Island now. He is a nephew of
the Clancy brothers. His mother was...is a Clancy. I met Robby. Came out this way when...mid-'80s
maybe about the time you were born. [laughter] Did some shows and he ended up staying in our
house just cause he did a show. A gal in Missoula put this little tour together and he played in
Missoula and she called me and said you interested in looking into this and we put a little show
together and he stayed here and we spent some time together and that’s when I found out he was a
Clancy. Shortly thereafter Cindy and I went to the Irish Fest in Milwaukee. The Irish Fest in Milwaukee
is the largest festival in the world.

JL: Really.

TP: Yes. Typical set in...They always do it the second week in August the third week in August. Typical
Saturday paid gate 65,000 people. [laughter] They go Friday, Saturday. They used to go Friday,
Saturday, Sunday. Now they go Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday. So we go back to Milwaukee and it
probably wasn’t our first time but it was...but Robby...Robby was gonna be there with his uncles the
Clancy brothers and Robby O'Connell. At the time who was left? Tommy Clancy was very sick so it was
Patty and Liam and Bobby and Robby. The four of them were the Clancy Brothers and Robby
O'Connell. We get back there and hook up with Robby, and I get to meet Patty Clancy and Liam Clancy
and Bobby Clancy and it was wonderful. We have a great time, and we get in to some places that not
everybody get to places. Some situations that not everybody not all 65,000 see.

There are people who live in Chicago and Milwaukee who go every year for the last 30 years and our
second time there we get to see stuff that they’ll never they’ll never get to see. Anyway, we meet
these guys and just have a wonderful time. You know on the way home on the plane Cindy says,
“What would have happened if you met those guys and they were assholes?” And that is my word,
you know, what if they were a bunch of big jerks?

I said, “I don’t know.” You know hero worship is a dangerous game if you ever get to meet the heroes.
JL: Yes it is.

TP: They were wonderful. Then you know to have what happened subsequent to that in ’94 that Makem...When I was a kid my growing up at my parent’s house I always thought this table was in my parent’s house and I...I thought what would be a gas and how crazy a thought is this it would be so much fun to have the Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem just here playing music in the front room and having dinner. And before all was said and done, Tommy Makem ate at this table. [laughter] Since then his kids have been in this house numerous times and it’s a small world.

I’m a lucky guy a really lucky guy. Not everybody, not everybody...Like I say, what a goofy thing that at 19 or 20 years old went to see these guys in Spokane that none of my contemporaries had a clue about. I’d been listening to them for 15 years, but for—in the long run of things—for me to be able to meet them sit with them eat with them, have a jar with them...Now in the case of Tommy Makem with his kids and Liam Clancy’s kids are doing music and Bobby Clancy’s kids play music. It’s the family business. The family business. Once upon a time I when I was working at that place in Big Timber we had to entertain our guests every Wednesday night. So I started doing cowboy poetry just for grins and giggles for something to do and took my guitar down there. One night I stampeded the horses so maybe that was my first guess. I was good at writing stuff down and I was good at sitting around the campfire and reading it out and wound up getting invited to the big show in Lewistown, Montana. One of my fellow wranglers got into it and he put my name in and got in...got my gold pin saying I was there for that year and it was amazing. But we had all of these old, you know, old style country bands there when they got done...Excuse me. When they got done playing they just went back to their motel room. It’s a week-long thing. They were playing every night. They wanted to go to sleep, get stocked up for the next day. But out of that the Buffalo Bill Historical Center started doing one every summer and they got my name from Lewistown...Well, you actually live in Cody? Do you want to come do this?

I did my little thing and I was with Red Steagall was in my little group and Don Edwards was the musician for that year and I love Don Edwards song—that coyotes song. That’s just amazing. But when they got done with their shows every night we all went back down to the Irma Hotel and we rented out the Governor's Room and...they'd meet you at the end of your session. Whoever brought an instrument we’re meeting at the Governor's Room, show up and we'll go at it. I walked into that thing with my little guitar and my harmonica and I’m 19. Oh this is so amazing. The whole Governor’s Room is just lined with musicians. We had ten, fifteen guitarists, ten fiddlers, mandolin players, banjo players, upright bass the whole...We sat there and jammed all night. I mean, I think I crawled into bed at like five-thirty and then had to wake up and do another show the next day, but it was so amazing I couldn’t...No one could play. [laughter] We just looked at each other.

JL: Okay I got this this is what we want to do but so amazing, and it just doesn't seem to happen anymore with a lot of music. Bernadette commented on that you know when I said I want to do music, “Oh, well, Tom would be a good one to talk to.” She says you know over in Ireland that's the way it works—

TP: Right.
JL: People play a show and then everyone just jumps in.

TP: Everyone just plays.

JL: It isn't really like that over here so much.

TP: Well it isn't and I think there are a whole bunch of reasons for that the people that you will talk to in your project you will encounter very few who play sing Irish music traditional folk. It isn't there in the Irish American community. You look at the Irish...the Irish music players in Montana. They play Irish music because they like Irish music not because they are of Irish descent.

You look at the session players in Missoula and in the Bitterroot Valley. They play music because they like the music. Pretty much same situation in Bozeman. There's a group you know in Bozeman that plays Irish music every Sunday night at wherever they happen to play the Baucus or...Where else do they play? Here and there, but they play because they like to play the music. There's a group in Helena who play because they like to play the music not because they are interested in not because of any ethnic interest per se. You look at Jim Schultz...in fact, your cowboy guys. Schultz played bluegrass music and cowboy music bunches of it and because of connections with friends and friends ended up here doing this with us...If you sat and wrote your list of people that you encountered in your cowboy things and he wrote his list there'd be a bunch of overlap. He and Randy Rieman are great friends. He used to go regularly to Elko.

JL: Okay, there'd be a fair amount of overlap then. [laughter]

TP: [Laughter] A whole bunch of overlap. But he got turned onto Irish music and now plays and writes. It's a German guy writing Irish...German guy from Montana writing Irish music as well as any and just you know jumped in up to his ears.

JL: Yes.

TP: Mick Cavanaugh, our whistle player, guitar player Cavanaugh on the face of it a very Irish name on his dad's side his mother was Lebanese.

JL: Is that Cavanaugh like Cavanaugh's Cavanaugh or is it different?

TP: Different same spelling different-

JL: Yes.

TP: Family.

JL: Yes, okay.

TP: But his mother—and this is a Butte peculiarity—his father was of Irish descent, his mother was of
Lebanese descent. Sacred Heart Parish where I went to school as a very young child was butted on the North by Finntown. My father grew up in a house on J Street which is no longer there. It hasn't been for a long, long time. His father came over on the boat. He grew up on J Street. When I was a kid we lived up in essentially the same neighborhood between you know where the Broadway Cafe is?

JL: Yes.

TP: The little pizza place. We grew up in that block.

JL: Okay.

TP: I grew up on that block between there and The Helsinki. Midway between our house was midway and when I was a kid all of that stuff by The Helsinki was populated. There were buildings there were houses there were boarding houses, and it was not at all unusual in the course of the day a week couple little old Finnish women on their way walking over town. They'd get to our house and my dad would be out with the hose or at the car or at the curb, and they would stop and these would be women a generation older than he and they would collaber [sp] in Finnish. My father spoke no Irish, but he spoke Finnish a little bit a little bit he grew up among the Finns. But boy, this is a circuitous route to where from where I started.

JL: Circles are fun.

TP: Sacred Heart Parish included that little enclave. The Finns weren't Catholic but the Irish were, and there were a bunch of Irish. My grandmother's house my maternal grandmother's house was in that neighborhood and the McGeeans lived up the street and there are Harringtons and Sullivans, old Pete Sullivan, was direct from the old South. Maggie Tolland lived across the street so there were a bunch of Irish in the parish down in this part of the parish there's the church where the Irish mostly lived down here the Lebanese community so you will find in Butte Montana in the generation preceding mine these unions of Irishmen of Irish descent...typically men of Irish descent and women of Lebanese descent who went to church together, went to school together, married. Mick Cavanaugh his mother's maiden name was George...Matt Bodel is married to...What was Vie's [sp] maiden name? Won't come to me. Bodel and a classic Lebanese last name. The Lebanese don't have last names. They all have two first names. [laughter] Their last names are all George and Paul. I can get away with that a little bit because that's how we are in Butte.

Another family, the McCarthy—Hobo McCarthy and his wife was Merse [sp] Thomas—another typical Lebanese last name in Butte. Thomas is a first name, but the Thomas's lived in that parish and so you have these families of half Irish-half Lebanese. Odd, peculiar. And Mick is one of those. Go figure. I don't—

JL: Yes, well, and the diversity of Butte is always struck...You look at it and you know nowadays it's a little tiny town relatively speaking.

TP: Yes.

Thomas E. Powers Interview, OH 435-061, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
JL: In the middle of the mountains of Montana, and it was a roaring metropolis.

TP: Whoo!

JL: It's really easy to generalize you know there were Irish and that's all there was and Chinese thrown in to boot but there's a lot of people migrating in here all mixing together.

TP: Well and that's the thing is the neighborhoods at the...well, from the turn of the century on when there were 80,000 or 100,000 people living in this community they were all up there. They didn't live out here. They were all up on the hill because that's where the mines were. That's where the jobs were, and you go up there today and you look at the houses in the old neighborhoods where the eaves overlap nearly.

This city was fairly ghettoized in that the Italians lived in Meaderville, and well then some of the Slavs. But there was the Italian community in this neighborhood, the Irish in Corktown and Dublin Gulch and the Finns in Finntown and the Chinese in Chinatown and the Serbs and the Croats and they lived mostly in separate neighborhoods, but they worked together. And very, very, very many of them went to church together and many of them went to school together and...That happened in the next generation there again they moved in to where it was comfortable to move in. The Italians went into Meaderville because that they heard about Meader...they heard about Butte Montana from their neighbors their friends their family in Meaderville so of course they would gravitate to Meaderville.

The Irish ended up in Dublin Gulch and Corktown and Centerville and that's where they would end up. But what a bunch of those people had in common particularly those groups. The Lebanese like I said before and the Italians and the Croatians and the Irish predominantly Irish Cath...They are predominately Catholic so they went to church together. The adults the first generation went to church together the next generation went to school together they grew up together they became American together. But one time they called this place Little Chicago. Because it was, and when I say it was ghettoized I don't mean that in a pejorative sense at all.

JL: Right.

TP: But in just in the fact that those peoples of those similar cultures and backgrounds lived together in those neighborhoods, but a microscopic view of the melting pot that is this country. They came from everywhere for economic purposes...in different waves or ripples some came and tsunamis. [laughter]

Some came in waves, some came in ripples, some stayed, some petered out, some got assimilated into the point of not being recognizable anymore. You'll hear people and I hear people today of non-Irish descent say I get sick and tired of all this green shit. [laughter] Okay fine but it is what it is and not...well, partly by accident but the reason that...the reason for all the green shit is because there is so many of us here because so many of us came because of socioeconomic political reasons a hundred years ago and more. But that's what you get if you...If you want to be Italian resurrect the Christopher

Thomas E. Powers Interview, OH 435-061, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
Columbus Union Hall whatever, Association.

JL: Well, I was happy to see the Scottish bagpipers in the parade this year. That made me somewhat happy.

TP: You know why they always march while they play?

JL: I do not.

TP: There are two reasons that I know of there are probably more than two. One is that they are trying to get away from the noise. [laughter] The other is that it's harder to hit a moving target.

JL: I could agree with that. [laughter]

TP: When we went over to Scotland they piped in the haggis [laughter] and whenever I hear bagpipes now I—

TP: Think of haggis.

JL: I'm transported back to Stirling Castle. [laughter] You my grandmother took us back over there when we were relatively young. I was 12, 13 years old.

TP: Really.

JL: She wanted us to go back and see where her husband's side of the family came from, where all the McDougalls came from. So she took us over and it...that's where I'm hoping to get into grad school is University of Stirling. Then maybe bop over to Ireland for my PhD. That's a ways down the road.

TP: You think? [laughter]

JL: [Laughter] Just a little bit just a little bit. I don't know. Stirling has a really good medieval program. That's my cup of tea right now is medieval stuff so I kind of like looking back at William Wallace, Brave...William Wallace is not Mel Gibson. That's not how anything really happened. [laughter]

TP: [Laughter] But go to the source you know.

JL: Yup precisely, and that's just it. There are poets writing about what was going on. Mel Gibson was there with his little Australian accent. [laughter] That and I think he said not a the now right and that was about it. [laughter] But we were in Scotland when it came out. It was the premier in Stirling we watched it at the castle and the our tour guide was just...speaks up with her beautiful Scottish brogue not ever close not even close. But it made it popular enough that researching it is kind of a good thing. Gotta follow the money I guess. I guess for one final last little question and then we'll do some video of you playing.
TP: Keep going back, keep going back to that.

JL: Well I beat two notes and call it good. [laughter]

TP: [Laughter] There are two of them in there we could trade. [laughter]

JL: Oh there we go. [laughter] I can kind of do spoons. [laughter] That's kind of close but I guess the big question I have for you is why is music important and why is it something that you have chosen to do. What is its purpose? We've kind of hit on quite a bit of it, but what does music mean to you?

TP: I like to sing the songs. Why does anybody do it? Why do you play guitar, why does Mick play the whistle? Mick plays the whistle because he can [laughter] and he plays the guitar because he can and he plays the banjo because he can and he plays the mandolin because he can. Why do I sing? Because I can, and it's enjoyable. People have been foolish enough over time to say you do that well, and I've been foolish enough to believe them.

Mick said...One time after a grueling Saint Patrick's Day season that he said, “I don't know if you remember singing this.” Or he said...you know, some of...We can get overwrought in some of those days because the days get long and it's a lot of work to go along with the fun that's involved. He said that after one particularly long season—March seventeenth season—he says, “All I wanted to do was sing a couple of songs.” [laughter] It's nice to be able to sing a couple of songs, and that's one of the nice things about my instrument. Not that one...It's pretty portable. It's more portable than a whistle.

JL: You don't ever forget to bring it along with you, I bet.

TP: Right. You know it's always there that has its pluses and its negatives too because sometimes it's nice to sing a song, sometimes it's nice to not sing a song and sometimes you get laryngitis all of a sudden.

But...why do we sing? I like to sing. It passes the time...Who knows? Why do I do what I do? And this is going off your question, away from your posed question. Why do I get up in the Silver Dollar Saint Patrick's Day after Saint Patrick's Day? Because I like to sing a song and anybody who does that who says, “I perform, I entertain, I sing in public for the music”...Anyone who says, “I don't do it at least a little bit for the claps,” isn't telling the truth because it is really, really fun and invigorating and enjoyable and selfish to end a song at the Silver Dollar and have the place erupt. That's fun, that's fun that makes me feel good.

So the guy who sits in his broom closet at home with his accordion and beats it to death and beats it to death and gets to be the best in the world and never takes the accordion out of the broom closet he's doing it for the music. Those of us who get up on stage do it at least partly for the claps. But that's not where you start with it that's not where I started with it.

JL: Well that was beautifully eloquent. [laughter]
TP: [Laughter] Ha! Bullshit!

JL: Deep philosophical answer to the question. [laughter] We've been going an hour and forty. Do you maybe want to switch over, and if you don't want to play it if you just want to pull it out that's fine.

TP: I'll pull it out and we can look at it a little bit and do what I can.

JL: I'll jump back here so I can actually make sure I can get everything on it. I am actually going to put another one of these in. I'm not really sure I trust the meter that much.

TP: Can you do one more beer?

JL: Yes I can do one more. I'll kill this.

[Break in audio]

TP: [unintelligible]

JL: In theory.

TP: In theory. So where are you gonna be during this back where you were? We can hide this drum mostly behind the table.

JL: What's that?

TP: We can hide this drum mostly behind the table or we can move if you like.

JL: Your fine right there. I'm just trying to make sure that it's all set up right. I'm not the video guy of legend. I'm not Patrick or Brandon or any of the rest of them.

TP: How many people are involved in this?

JL: In the class there's ten.

TP: Okay.

JL: We have ten students but as far as total I really don't know. I don't have any idea how many interviewers we actually have.

TP: Okay.

JL: There's quite a few of them there's quite a few of them it's something I should know. I mean we talk about it but I don't remember off the top of my head. I know Dillon has its own little interviewer there's a few up here in Butte.
TP: [Drumming]

JL: There's quite a few people floating around. Then there's I think around 125 signed up for being interviewed. Something like that.

It's almost like a bongo you kind of have to learn where to hit it to get the right sound.

TP: [Drumming] While I'm doing this [gesture] I'm doing a bit of this [gesture] back here. This here's what I know about bodhrans. I know the difference between a bodhran. I know the difference between a bodhran and a trampoline.

JL: Ah, well, that's a good distinction to have.

TP: This is one of my favorites. The difference between a bodhran and a trampoline is you take your shoes off when you jump on a trampoline. [laughter]

[Pause] The implement we use to tune a bodhran? A pen knife.

JL: Ah, right down the middle?

TP: Exactly. [laughter] And how do you know there's a bodhran player at your door? He keeps knocking faster and faster and doesn't know when to come in. [laughter]

[Drumming] Like I say a fairly rudimentary implement. Framed drums are common in many many cultures you look around Montana and the people who were here first very many of their nations have frame drums. I heard somewhere sometime that the first bodhran were made out of cheese boxes and goatskin. Peeled over cheese boxes and nailed in. Often you'll see them with cross bars. Almost all of the serious drummers the serious percussion players get rid of them because if you have crossbars you can't do [gesture] this.

JL: Yes.

TP: They come in all different sizes and shapes for this climate, area, territory, 5600 feet and negative two percent humidity. It's almost essential to have a tunable drum. This drum was made by a fella with the unlikely name of Albert Alfonso, and he is a Cuban American who lives in Texas.

[Laughter] So you have a Cuban American living in Texas making Irish drums, and Albert makes great drums this drum is really, really massive. Very, very heavy.

JL: Is it?

TP: Albert uses this brass tuning ring. Talked to him on the phone one day and he said, “You know how we Catholics are there's no substitute for mass.”
So this drum is tunable, and I've had it awhile and it's fairly serviceable but pretty heavy and I can kind of keep a beat on this [drumming] and play a little bit. Then I watch guys who are musicians who play these things and I just feel like bringing out the penknife.

[Drumming] You look at guys there are whole bunches of different styles of how they play these things have come into great vogue now.

JL: Oh have they?

TP: There are some there are some great, great, great players who there are guys who make music with a drum a single drum. I use mine mostly just for a little bottom end when we do songs and I'll play along with tunes some, but I don't dedicate near as much time to it as I should to be a drum player.

[Drumming] But there it's kind of fun, and the noise, the noise is okay.

JL: Yes.

TP: Like I say you see them everywhere now and these things [gesture] sticks I've heard them called tippers. There's a guy in Chicago name's Kevin Rice that I took a lesson from one time and he doesn't like the term tipper he likes cipin. Cipin is the Irish word that means little stick. So he likes cipin. Tipper is predominant pretty wide spread as the name for this but you know you take- you go from taking a cheese box and stretching a piece of goat hide over it and playing it with a stick to...I put these little pencil grips on mine so they don't slip out [drumming] and when guys go to things like this [gesture] felt headed. Like a timpani mallet almost.

But a little tougher not as soft. [drumming] This one, I bought this one. I made this one. I bought this one. Mick and Jim brought back from a festival from Washington DC I put a different pencil grip on it. [drumming] And I will I very typically use both hands [drumming]to do triplets and rolls but you see some of these young hot bodhran players who hold the stick like this play with one and play twice as fast and twice as many strikes on the head, as I will. This that's another homemade jobby.

JL: Yes, skewer sticks?

TP: Yes, but if you look around a drummers and a lot of them have gone to playing with hotrods or things than that bigger than this bamboo sometimes hardwood different diameters. [drumming] This drum like I say is an Albert Alfonso of Texas. This one I can't ever remember the guys last name. First name Christian last name starts with an H, a German guy.

Eaman Murray who was here a couple a couple of years ago with Bauoguy [sp] I believe for our festival had a drum like this and this is the cut rate of this guy's drums. He has bunches of drums a German guy so I have a Cuban drum and a German drum. There are some Irish drum makers who make Irish drums, but in to what's available. [drumming]
JL: Is that one real hide or is it a synthetic.

TP: No this is real hide and I don’t know what it is. I bought it online. It was relatively inexpensive bought on a lark because I heard the one played. It's maybe birch ply frame skin of some sort maybe goat I'm not sure. This is black electrical tape. [laughter]

JL: Oh is it, really? [laughter]

TP: Ha!

JL: If it gets the job done.

TP: Yes this is black electrical tape several plies this. This Alfonso drum—he has his special tanning thing or finishing thing for the hide, but Albert's drums—and he may have this trademarked—he leaves some skin or leaves some hair on the skin and the brass tacks. Lots you'll see brass tacks but his pattern, but then he puts this comfort thing on it and this is actually stuff you'll find around doors on automobiles.

JL: Oh, oh, it's like a weather strip. [laughter]

TP: [Laughter] Exactly, but it gives just a little of something on the edge that isn't quite as sharp and hard as the wood.

JL: Yes.

TP: If you go to Albert's website I don't know if he still has these photos out. There was a photo of him sitting behind a drum kit of these various sizes deep, deep. Not so deep. Big, small—it’s like what a nightmare. This guy has all sorts of different drums—high end drums, lots of high end drums. Problem with a little drum like this that is as deep as this is that it is hard to hold onto. But sometimes you'll see drums with a cutout to put your- a little notch to put your arm in. There are guys who can make music with these I sometimes keep a beat sometimes not so good.

Saw a guy named Jimmy Higgins play with Alden in Butte a bunch of years ago. Now he was sitting on stage and he had drum in his lap and was playing with an actually a timpani mallet and he'd strike the drum with the mallet and move simultaneously the back of his hand and make that drum go [whoop] and I was watching, but way lower tone than that, and I was watching this band and hearing this sound and I couldn't figure out what was producing that sound and it was this guy with this drum and a timpani mallet.

JL: Almost like bending a guitar string.

TP: Bending a guitar string, and it was like whoa! That's when you know you pack your drum away and put it in the attic. [laughter] So there are guys who actually play those when I sit in the background a
little bit.

JL: Well that's my policy too. I just sit in the background, look like I know what I'm doing. [laughter]

TP: [Laughter] Sometimes enough is too much.

JL: I like those big groups cause then I can just—

TP: Watch. [laughter]

JL: I can at least make the movement with my left hand. The right one might be going like this [gesture] but everyone is watching their left hand of the other musician so if that's doing something relatively okay it doesn't matter.

TP: My friend John Jiner [sp] watches, watches, watches everybody around. Well, like we'll sit there and rehearse and something that he's never played before and he'll watch and within half a time through or one and a half times through he's really close and he's playing the fiddle. But he says I've done this long enough that he plays the fiddle and plays the banjo and he builds guitars and he fixes guitars and he knows he knows the music, he knows Irish music and he knows bluegrass music and he knows old timey music and he knows country music and he says, I've done this long enough that I can have a pretty good idea of what chord a guy is playing from the back. [laughter] He can watch this [gesture] and have a pretty good idea of what the guy is playing on his guitars.

JL: More power to him.

TP: So like I say those guys keep me around for my good looks undoubtedly. My friend Steve Malloney is married to a gal named Sadie Lavelle her dad Dez and her mother died a couple of years ago. Her parents had a diving service...Dez Lavelle had a diving service in Valentia Island but its l-a-v-e-l-l-e. And so if that's Lavelle, if l-o-v-e-l-l is Lovell, what the hell is l-a-v-e-l-l-e?

JL: Well speaking of, that island is where this gal was from that Bernadette interviewed.

TP: Must have been must have been Sadie.

JL: Yes, I can't. She's the pharmacist up at—

TP: Yes, same, yes.

JL: Okay, yes. Listening to the two of them talking I couldn't tell which one was which, but yes she mentioned Lavelle. Now how do we spell that Lavelle? How do we spell that Lovell because as far as I know Lovell is Welsh.

TP: Okay.
JL: The family, my dad's family is from Wales and my mother is the McDougal and that's where the Scots comes in but-

TP: Well Lavelle is of course French.

JL: Yes.

TP: And so is Powers.

JL: Is it?

TP: Yes most of those all of the d-e names are French.

JL: Okay yes.

TP: They're all Norman names but Power, de la Pour, became Pour, became Power.

JL: Okay.

TP: So Power and hence Powers is a Norman name.

JL: Okay. I find it fascinating how things get shifted around. [laughter]

TP: [Laughter] Well you look at you...look at names in the United States. You know, Ellis Island changed everybody's name.

JL: Yes, well, and I got in an argument with a girl in my Lit Crit class because her name is Macdougall too and I well, “Oh, you’re a McDougal too. My mother's maiden name is McDougal. I'm a McDougal too.”

She said, “Well, how do you spell it?”

I said, “M-c-D-o-u-g-a-l.”

“No, I'm different I'm M-a-c-d-o-u-g-a-l.”

“Right, well all that means...” and I got my grandmother told me once upon a time my great grandpa say, “I'm sick of the 'a' and I'm sick of the extra 'l' and I want to shorten it up,” so he did.

TP: [Laughter] That's right.


TP: Shaw, George Bernard Shaw, who wrote “Pygmalion” from whence “My Fair Lady” came, Shaw
argued that in English, in the English language you can spell fish g-h-o-t-i. L-a-u-g-h the -g-h- must be where you get the “ff” sound. So there’s women w-o-m-e-n -en- the “l” sound comes from the -e-. The “o” women w-o- w-e- so g-h- o-. So you have “f”, nation, abolition, the “t”, “l” gives you the “sh” sound, g-h-o-t-i—you get “fish”.

JL: I’m glad you explain that for a Lit major it just about destroyed my brain. [laughter] But it makes sense. English is such a messed up language compared to some of the others there’s a lot going on to try to figure out.

TP: It borrows a lot from every other language. [background] Is that somebody here for you?

[End of Interview]