



How long have you been a member of the guitar league?

Not really sure how long I've been a member of Guitar League, but it must be somewhere around a couple decades. My first meeting was in a round building off East Genessee St. in Syracuse. I heard about it from a couple of friends of mine and decided to step outside of my comfort zone and see what it was about. The idea of showing a bunch of strangers how well, or not well, I played, was pretty frightening. I remember the building being cool and the people being very welcoming. The music of the presenters was just great to listen to. I remember going into my first breakout session. I went with the rookies because I was unsure of how I compared to the members in ability. Dick Ward was running a session on how to how to write a blues song. He laid out the basic chord progression and then had everybody just make up a few lyrics here and there and inviting then to sing it out. I remember it being a lot of fun; very inviting. I joined that night.

When did you start playing guitar.

When I was in 6th grade, I got a guitar for my birthday that I'm fairly sure my parents bought at W.T. Grants in Camillus Plaza. It was absolutely a cheap beginner acoustic guitar and I remember it being the coolest thing in the world! I thought I was going to just pick it up and play like all my heroes on TV did. Of course it didn't take more than a few minutes to figure out that wasn't going to happen. I didn't know how to tune it and the tuners we all take for granted today hadn't been invented yet. And though I knew the technique for tuning the guitar to itself; I didn't know how things should sound. So it was a struggle. I started to take some lessons after school from my 6th grade music teacher, Miss Obermeyer. I think it was six dollars a lesson (Thanks Mom and Dad). I told her I wanted to play songs I heard on the radio, and she taught me how to play some chords. I remember learning D, D7, G, C, and all the go-to chords for popular songs of the time (although I avoided all songs that had an F in them). One of the first songs I

learned was The 59th Bridge Street song. I didn't sound too bad on that one and so I was hooked!

What was your motivation to learn the instrument?

Part of it was that my Dad played the ukulele and harmonica at family get-togethers and those were always a lot of fun. He could figure out almost any instrument once he knew how to play a scale on it. Probably the reason I wanted to learn the guitar was it was the 1960's and folk music and rock and roll were prominently featured on TV variety shows of the day. Everyone had guitars and they just looked cool! And, of course, they made it look easy. I just wanted to join in on that. I didn't really get serious about playing guitar until I was in college, and I used it primarily as a stress reducer. I still struggled with getting the tuning right. I got a great tip for improving that when my roommate (now a brother-in-law) told me to listen/feel for matching sound waves while tuning the guitar to itself. College was also when I started to write songs.

What style or styles do you play?

I really don't know. I like to finger pick and I've worked out my own style over the decades that I think sounds pretty good. I don't know if it's Travis picking or some other style of finger picking. I just do what I think sounds pretty good. I am pretty much playing chords and finger picking them. Mostly I strum. When I'm playing in bands or duos I tend to just provide rhythm guitar.

What make or models of guitars do you play?

I bought my first "good" guitar from Oz at Gerber Music in Fairmount Fair. In 1980. A Yamaha FG-770S. Still have that one. Now, I mostly play my Martin HD28. I saved up for a long time to get that guitar and I was able to finally get it in 2006. It's my favorite! When I first got it, I was super careful of it to the point of almost never playing it. Luckily it wasn't too many months before I figured out that I should play it and appreciate it! Now it's definitely a player. Still beautiful with some nice wear here and there. I use it in my solo work, our acoustic duo (The Sheridans), and with The Flyin' Column. I have a Taylor 210 that I had Harry Eibert put a K&K Pure Western pick-up in. I also have a bunch of intermediate level guitars from various makers that are just kind of pretty and sound really nice (acoustics, electrics, and hollow bodies).

What kind of strings do I like?

I mostly use D'Addario Phosphor Bronze EJ 16's. They were recommended by Harry Eibert. I remember saying to him "I know it depends primarily on a musician's preference, but if you are putting new strings on your Martin, what would you use?" He suggested these. I find them to produce a nice consistent tone with a bit of punch. They also seem to last a long time. I'm happy with them overall.

Do you play out?

I get very excited when I get the opportunity to play out. I spent most of my life thinking I would never get the chance to do it. In the early 1980's I formed an acoustic duo (called October) with a friend of mine. That was fairly short-lived. The closest I got to playing out for a lot of years after that was playing in our church contemporary choir. I truly enjoyed it; and I learned a lot from it. And all the while, I was wishing I was in a band and playing out at different bars, coffee houses, and the like. Another friend of mine from the church group and I formed a duo called Moonshadow. We had a few small gigs over the years. We practiced a lot which was very beneficial to me. But I was busy working at my career, raising my family, and being involved in the community. So I didn't pursue it.

At some point I heard about an open mic at Creekside Books and Coffee in Skaneateles. It was run by Joanne Perry; and I heard that it was a friendly venue where you would be appreciated just for sharing what you could. So, I decided to give it a try and it was very affirming. I soon made it my regular Thursday night activity. I met many great musicians and many wonderful people who were very encouraging towards people of many levels from super beginner to highly professional. Everyone had nothing but good things to say to you and great advice to give. It was a great confidence builder. Soon I felt ready to play other open mics around town and that was a great learning experience. I can't recommend playing at open mics enough! Do it!

I would say it's through open mics that I got to realize my dream of playing in a band. When there was an opening in The Flyin' Column, Don Meixner, who I had developed a friendship with through open mics, asked me if I'd be interested in giving that band a try. I was thrilled to say the least! That was a little over 8 years ago and I have loved being in that band! Both Don and Jimmy Flynn have always been very patient and generous in helping me learn the songs we play and putting up with my idiosyncrasies. They're simply a couple of classy guys. I feel like we have some real chemistry when we play and sing. It's a real privilege. I was also

excited to be asked several years ago by my second son, Kevin, to form an acoustic duo and we now play at a few places around town. Kevin's first instrument is drums, but he has become quite a good guitar player. And more recently we put together The Sheridan Band where I get to play music with all four of my kids! We have played a couple of shows It's such a blast playing music with your kids! Nothing like it.

What is your practice routine?

The Flying' Column practices every week as a band. We go over songs that we think we can improve on or songs that we haven't done in a while. We also work up new songs that we'd like to incorporate. We practice around the table at Jimmy Flynn's place. No mics. Just acoustics around the table in his music room. I guess you could say we're "working" on songs, but I just don't feel like it's work! It's just a great opportunity to get out and hang with some cool guys and play music. Of course I practice for our duo and for the family band as well. Just not as frequently. My own individual practice routine? I usually just start by playing 50's chord progressions on the guitar trying different finger picking styles or rhythms. I mix things up just to get my fingers nimble and my ears working a little bit and then I'll go into working on a new song that I haven't played before. I wouldn't say I'm a great "practicer." I think I practice by playing.

What are your current goals and how does guitar league support them?

Just being exposed to a lot of different live music, particularly paying attention to tips, tricks, and techniques that people are using. Also paying attention to the showmanship people bring to performing. I'd like to see what fits me and incorporate that to my work (I mean play!). Guitar League reminds me that everyone is doing great at guitar at whatever level they're at. And that I'm doing fine for the level I'm at for the work I do. It's a great reminder that, in the end, I just play guitar for fun and for personal fulfillment.

Thanks!