

The interview was at 6pm on 6/18/2024, held in the Church building at Heritage Park. The interviewee is Jim Fuhrer (JF), a local business owner (Honey Bee Good), music history enthusiast, and a prior member of different local bands. The interviewer is Cheyenne Antell (CA) from the Portage County Historical Society. Jim brought his child (HF) along to the interview who can be heard in the background of some audio, and is added to the transcript if responses were made by either Jim or Cheyenne during the interview. The interview was split into two audio segments which were combined for one full transcript here, which runs 18:36 total.

CA (00:02): Welcome, my name is Cheyenne Antell, are you willing to introduce yourself?

JF (00:07): Absolutely, Jim Fuhrer.

CA (00:10): Can I ask how old you are and where you live currently?

JF (00:14): I'm 40 and I live on the north side of Stevens Point.

CA (00:19): You're on the north side of Stevens Point, were you always here?

JF (00:21): From a very early enough age. I consider myself a Portage County representative.

CA (00:28): From that early age, can you tell me when you began playing music or what you began with?

JF (00:34): I started with a keyboard guitar class in junior high. There was an acoustic guitar that my mom's dad left behind when he just disappeared. That was one of the few things we have from him. It sounds like a Johnny Cash lyrical reference but he disappeared and that was the guitar he left. I had no idea how to tune it or anything but I always thought it was so cool so I would pick it up and start plucking around on it occasionally in the basement, and that led me to wanting to take that keyboard guitar class. I learned some very basic things about playing both keyboard and guitar. Music was always a big thing in my family growing up, so there were always radios playing or records playing, when our record player was working. Old records, like original Zeppelin and Rolling Stones and Alice Cooper albums. My stepdad was a big influence on getting me into Alice Cooper and KISS and actually a lot of old Merle Haggard country. My mom's a big fan of blues and a lot of old Bob Siegart stuff. We always had music like that and those records playing.

HF (01:58): Look at the sports things!

CA (02:03): We do have a lot of sports things over there, you're right. Are those records the sort of things that influenced you and your music at that age? Were there other music influences that you had?

JF (02:11): Sort of. Having music around all the time definitely helped, but one of the first big influences was probably ACDC and Angus Young playing guitar. The entire energy and drive of him playing and everything about the image was so cool. This amazingly cool comic book meets real-world situation. That's a lot of what rock and roll was to me. This cool energy force that you just want to learn how to tap into.

CA (02:58): That's really interesting! After the class did you continue both keyboard and guitar or did you pick one?

JF (03:05): Just guitar, I focused more on that. Learned how to tune a guitar and play some basic chords. I grew up just up the street from a good buddy of mine, and his dad played drums in a band in the area called Smoky Express. An old polka / country band. I remember being taken to a bar when I was like 9 with him to go watch his dad play. It was really good, it was a Halloween show so they made a last-minute kid's category for

costumes. That was pretty fun, I won a 6-pack of root beer. We got to watch his dad perform and he actually picked up drums at such an early age as well. That's part of why I wanted to play guitar as well, so we could start a band. He was the first drummer I ever started a band with. We were in high school then.

CA (04:14): What was the name of your first band?

JF (04:17): Cannon of Society.

CA (04:19): What kind of music did you play?

JF (04:22): Not good. It started out when I met Jeff, who went on to start the Mudgettes and the VRC6's when we were both working at Hot 'n Now when we were both 15 or 16, and he was playing bass and naturally we started a band. We were talking music while we were flipping burgers. He knew Bryce so that was an easy start, and he came up with the name. We initially started, as all things do at that time, as just playing in the battle of the bands. I remember we did 3 or 4 ACDC covers. It was kind of a mix of ACDC meets punk rock because one of the covers we did was the ACDC song "Big Balls". Which was actually funny because now when I look back I can remember the teachers giving us sort of a side eye, like "I don't know if you should be playing this" but we did it in the style of The Dwarves which is a punk band. It started with the slow chords like ACDC would play it and then we would explode into the chorus. It was definitely ear-shatteringly not as good as we thought.

CA (05:43): That's fun though, and fun for the teachers to see too.

JF (05:47): It was an absolute blast trying to do my tenth-grade Angus Young impersonation of duck walking across the not-stage in front of everybody. It was a lot of fun.

CA (06:00): After you start this band and you're still in high school, or even when you're just out of high school and under 21, it can be really tough to find places to play. Outside of battle of the bands were you able to find venues for yourself as a younger musician?

JF (06:16): The cool thing about Stevens Point in general is that there's always been a really healthy music scene here. It's interesting to think about because it ebbs and flows. It's a college town, so every few years it's like the landscape completely changes. Back then, Point Bowl had basement shows. You could rent the basement section that had this green shag carpeting up the walls. You could rent it for \$30 and just have it for the evening. People would rent it, bring a PA in, use digicopy. We would spend \$10 and get I don't even know how many flyers and go around town with duct tape and staple guns, hitting the campus, the campus housing, every telephone pole. That was fun. Point Bowl basement was a place to have shows. Random basements around town, on campus, off of campus. The Mission Coffee House, which is now where PABS is, was probably one of the biggest influences on me growing up. Like I said, we'd be flipping burgers at Hot 'n Now all weekend and Fridays we would close and scramble to get out of there and have \$5 to get in this four or five band show. We would close at 8 and run down there to see the bands playing. Point used to be a really big hub for touring punk bands, metal bands, all sorts of stuff to stop by or go through. Mission was a huge place for that. You'd have bands coming from Chicago, Milwaukee, the Twin Cities, touring through and ...

(First audio ends, second begins below)

CA (00:01): You had just been telling me about the places you were able to play when you were under 21.

JF (00:11): Yeah, we would go as far as out to Almond for the occasional basement show. There was a guy out there named Bob Burns and he started a band called Bob Burns and the Breakups and he would come to town. That was actually my first band dissolved. Bryce, my drummer, started another band called the Frontenacs. That is when Bob Burns and the Breakups started. He would have shows out of his basement.

HF (00:45): Dad, I spilled.

JF (00:47): It's ok.

CA (00:50): That's ok, we'll clean it up when we're done.

JF (00:52): We'd get all over the place. Before The Mission, slightly before my time, Plainfield would have the Plainfield Opera House that would have shows too. There are bands that would come through and play. There were always people trying to find places. We would play college basement house parties.

CA (01:22): Now that you are, of course, above 21 and you've had other bands since that point, is it easier now as a more mature musician to find places to play? Is it tougher since some of those places have shut down at this point?

JF (01:38): Well, couple things to address there. Since this is the punk band community, "mature" is a vague description. As I was saying before, since this is a college town it ebbs and flows. I've seen basements have pop-ups and they'll do one show. I've seen basements that'll do a dozen shows. We've got Hell's Disco, which is putting on a 10-year anniversary show next Saturday. There's always people interested in trying to do something cool, whether or not it starts as "hey it would be cool to have a big house party" and they go from there or people that are more serious, going like "can we do this again? Can we keep doing this? I'll help set it up!". There's always one or two people who come into town that are fresh that do that. It's always breathing in and out. Some years there's less people or it's a bluegrass focused kind of year. In the past couple years we've had a big influx of bands coming in and people who want to play and who put on more venues. There's the Goosenest in town, there's Hell's Disco, I can't remember what Tyler calls his place, but there's all sorts of places. Fifteen years ago there's a place that was called the Dollhouse that we would play at. A band, right before they got fairly big, called The Smith Westerns played there and the plumbing broke that night. It was funny in the sense that you're having this party and this band is playing and it's awesome and all of a sudden one of the water pipes snaps. It's amazing how it can go from this massive, cool party full of people just jamming to this live music to "let's fix this right now and get this taken care of! ... and now let's finish jamming".

CA (03:45): It's a very "DIY" community in many senses.

JF (03:48): For sure! It's one where the community tries to look out for these sorts of places. It's a respectful sort of scene. People are very interested in doing these things. They know that if the bathroom gets trashed that the place may not want to have shows again. So you have people looking out to make sure nothing happens at these shows because it's important to them. It's a chance for them to express themselves and go out there and meet people of a like mind, or just speak really cool thoughts and share experiences.

CA (04:33): If you had a group that you knew was coming from out of town, or new musicians that were coming in, how would you describe this community that we have here to them; to help them get involved?

JF (04:46): Supportive. Welcoming. It's a really good time, in these past couple years, for that. There are more places opening that are trying to have shows that are not just basements. Great Northern is trying to have shows, The Annex is trying to have more shows. There's places around town that are trying to get set up to be

able to offer bands the ability to play and come through. I've been setting up shows as long as I've been starting bands. It's really cool to see this network of people. I'll have people reach out to me from California about trying to play a show here because they know they'll be coming through on a tour and they've gotten my name from somebody that they toured with who was going in the opposite direction.

HF (05:38): Dad it's getting late.

JF (05:40): It is.

CA (05:42): We only have two more questions, so he's very close to the end! You have become part of this network, but there's a lot of local residents who don't go to these house shows, they don't know about the music at The Annex for one reason or another. How would you recommend that people who aren't already involved in supporting local music, how could they get involved?

JF (06:07): Part of it is just listening to people talk about it. With social media, it's really changed the landscape so much. I remember picking up 100 or 200 flyers that we would have designed with sharpies and cut-outs from magazines, getting a major copy of that, and spending a weekend plastering the town with those and you don't see that anymore.

HF (06:34): It's getting late dad.

JF (06:37): It is, I'm sorry kiddo. Now you have Facebook and Instagram and ...

HF (06:42): You have two minutes!

CA (06:43): Sounds good.

JF (06:44): ... whole networks of band pages and community pages set up to help with these things now. I'll still get phone calls and texts from random people, and now that's on Facebook too, they'll message me. Something like "hey I'm trying to come through, can you set something up?" and just from the context that I know around here, even if I'm too busy for things I know I can reach out to someone to help them.

CA (07:19): My last question for you is, are you currently in any bands and do you have any plans for your music career, your connection career, getting people into those venues in Point? What are your plans for now and for the future?

JF (07:34): Right now I'm not technically in a band, although for Hell's Disco 10-year anniversary show I did bring back a version of Sega Genocide, which was a band I was in. Our last show, thanks to Facebook archiving things, was February 14th 2010. I'm really excited to play in a band that hasn't played live and that people haven't heard of in 14 years. Besides that, recently, my other band, Rosa Parkinsons, we called it quits two years ago now because of other musical ventures that people were pursuing and I was getting busy with setting up Honey Bee Good and having these two (motions to child). I still play guitar. Not as much as I want or as I wish I had time to. I'm hoping that eventually I can start something again or just jam with people. It's been really fun introducing her to music. I've taken her to some public shows, and I've had some shows in my backyard and she'll sit there and just dance to the live music. She loves it.

HF (08:09-09:48): (slowly repeating and singing a different volume each time) hands to the sky!

CA (09:02): and with that outro music, that will be a perfect addition to the recording. Is there anything else you want to share?

JF (09:11): Point has been a great place, and Portage County has been such a great place for music. It's been a really cool outlet for people to find themselves and who they are. It's cool to see what you can do with music in a community too. We set up shows for food pantry benefits. We set up a skate park benefit show. It extends to more than just the scene; it's actually about the community. It's, in a sense, looking out for the community that you live in. It's fun to see how all these bands and people meet and develop in this area and how they help develop the community.

CA (10:03): It's from the community and goes right back into it. Thank you for this interview! I appreciate it.

JF (10:12): Absolutely!