

nods his head in thanks.

Shortly after his return to Stained Glass Bluegrass, WJMA dropped the program over what Red calls "philosophical differences." And so he moved to his current location because it has high-speed internet access; he could still send the show to WAMU. And isn't it ironic that this low-tech music, played on acoustic, almost never electric instruments, with simple melodies, harmonies and lyrics, mostly about the same simple subjects, is actually flourishing because of high-tech things like CDs, computers and the Internet? "Oh it's been a boon to bluegrass, and to this program in particular," says Red as he wheels up to the microphone to announce the next half hour of the program.

"Next up on Stained Glass Bluegrass," says Red in his signature delivery style. (pause) "Blue Ridge from their (pause) sensational new gospel recording on Pinecastle and the old favorite, (pause) 'Do You Call that Religion?'"

Red rolls back from the microphone again and talks about retiring from the show. "I'll give up the radio if I have to," he says resignedly, adding that he'd like to be closer to his daughters in Louisa and Spotsylvania as well as his son who lives with him now. "We're both semi invalids, but he's a great help to me."

Red plans to keep it going into January; that way he can claim he hosted SGBG for 25 years. "Then I'm going to cut back to once or twice a month." He has a replacement in mind...Bob Westbrook, the fellow who filled in for him when he was in the hospital.

Red laughs as he quotes his own father, who one day said to him, "You'd better hope you find a job where you can sit on your ass and talk because you're a lot better at doing that than anything else." Well this past Memorial Day marked the 50th anniversary of Red doing pretty much just that on the radio.

Bluegrass stories

In addition to his radio programs, Red Shipley was frequently invited to be Master of Ceremonies at various bluegrass festivals that have popped up in and around the Washington, DC area. And frequently he found himself introducing and befriending his childhood heroes from the days he heard them on live radio. He came to know everybody.

The Country Gentlemen: "They were entertainers far more than the average bluegrass band," he says of their stage shenanigans. He remembers one night they opened for Johnny Cash at DAR Constitution Hall, and Red gave the local boys an encore. "Cash got mad about that, 'Damn local group gettin' an encore in front of me.' And he threw his whiskey bottle across the room and it smashed against the wall. He was to the gills, that night. And I said, 'I'll be working with those guys next week but you'll be back in Nashville, Tennessee and have forgotten all about us.'" That shut Cash up for a little while.

Then there was the Seldom Scene. The name actually came from Country Gentlemen leader, the late great



Contributed photo
As a child, when he was listening to country radio in Bristol, he had no idea he'd meet or become close personal friends with bluegrass legend, Mac Wiseman.



Contributed photo
Red Shipley served as MC at more bluegrass festivals than he can remember. Here, he introduces IIIrd Tyme Out.

Charlie Waller of Gordonsville. Waller used to say the band played so infrequently, they were "seldom seen." The name stuck.

Red was working a bluegrass festival at Whippoorwill Lake on a freezing cold October day. "We weren't going to get paid, I could tell that...not enough people. The Seldom Scene was going to close it out." So he approached the band saying, "'Boys do y'all really want to do this thing? Let's just pretend you did and not. Let's just go home.'" But they wanted to play. " 'Okay,' " said

Red in resignation, "and I went to the microphone and said, 'and now ladies and gentlemen a group that needs no introduction,' and I walked off." John Duffey's jaw dripped. "Is that all you're gonna say?" he howled.

And then there was the time the Japanese group, Bluegrass 45 toured the U.S. festival circuit. Red introduced them and sent his buddy, Mac Wiseman to get him some fried clams. Asked how many drinks he wanted, Red held up two fingers. The next thing you know, Bluegrass 45 is coming off the stage. They had interpreted the sign language to mean, "two more songs." The promoter was furious. "You gave them the signal for two songs!" he hollered. Red replied, "You know I wouldn't do that to the boys. I was telling Mac Wiseman to bring me two drinks, that's all. Get back up here."

Later that same day, a woman asked Red, "Are you sure these young men are from Japan?" And I said 'ma'am where else do you think they would be from?' Cause, I mean they were all very Asian-looking. And she said, 'that's funny, their instruments look just like ours.' "

Stained Glass



Bluegrass

" 'Remember the Cross,' Bill Monroe and the Bluegrass Boys from a recording of the late 1940s.

(pause)

We're on your way with this edition of...

(pause)

Stained Glass Bluegrass

(pause)

Red Shipley, happy to have the pleasure of your company...."



Photo by Phil Audibert
Red Shipley is at home behind the microphone; he's worked in radio for 50 years. For the last 25, he has hosted Stained Glass Bluegrass, aired on WAMU every Sunday morning and on bluegrasscountry.org, every Thursday morning.

The IBMA award

Thursday evening, Red Shipley was recognized as the International Bluegrass Music Association Broadcaster of the Year at the 17th annual IBMA Awards.

Two others, Kyle Cantrell of XM Radio and Terry Herd of the Bluegrass Network were also nominated for the honor.

"Frankly it's not a real big deal," says Red. But you can tell it is. He asked IBMA vocal group of the year frontman Doyle Lawson to accept the award for him Thursday evening at the Grand Ole Opry House in Nashville, TN.

Red finishes his introductory spiel and rolls his wheel chair back from the microphone as his engineer and assistant, Nick Henry cues up this week's play list for the Sunday morning radio program that Red has hosted for the past 25 years. "I used to say that I had as listeners, everything from atheists to Zen Buddhists," says Red of his diverse audience. "We have four generations of some families listening...people who listen on their way to church and there's a large number who haven't seen the inside of a church in a long time and maybe feel they probably should." Red wheels over to the TV table, picks up a drink cup with his one good hand and takes a sip of water. "Everything from Senators and Congressman to preachers, Jewish rabbis, the

Internet at www.bluegrasscountry.org. To some, it sounds hokey. To others it is a substitute for going to church. To still others it is a priceless archive of this 100 percent true-blue, American-born and bred music.

Behind the microphone, Red is a natural. He should be; he's been on the radio in one way or another for the past 50 years. He doesn't use a script and only occasionally refers to his play list of songs and performers. Everything else he does off the top of his head. With Nick's help at the computer, where, by the way, three days worth of this music is stored, Red records the program every Monday evening. This is accomplished from the living room of his modest apartment that he shares with his son, in the



Photo by Phil Audibert

The host of the Stained Glass Bluegrass radio program, Red Shipley, reads his play list to his assistant, Nick Henry, who finds them in the computer and puts them in the proper sequence.

Home. That reminds Red of a conversation he had with a Middle Easterner who listened to Red's Christian radio program, well, religiously. "You've got to remember Mr. Shipley, not everyone grew up in the mountains like you did," Red quotes him as saying. "But Mother is mother and home is home whether it is a cabin or a tent." Red pauses and says softly, "I never forgot that."

Nor did he forget the time when he took a cab home from the WAMU studios, and his driver was an Iranian. "He'd been listening all morning. I told him who I was," says Red. They went to a coffee shop and "we talked for two hours."

Stained Glass Bluegrass is a radio program of almost entirely Christian bluegrass and gospel music aired every Sunday from 6-10 a.m. on the Washington, D.C. NPR station, WAMU, 88.5 on your FM dial. It is also broadcast Thursday mornings on

shadow of the water standpipe in the town of Orange. The only reason Red lives here is because he has access to high speed DSL that can shoot the finished product to the WAMU studios in Washington.

One of the first things you notice about Red's living room is there are no pictures on the walls...not one. In fact there is little decoration of any kind...a couch, an easy chair, a TV, stacks of plastic storage boxes containing all the CD's he's collected over the years, a microphone on a boom stand, and a computer...nothing else. In some ways this lack of eye candy is understandable...Red is not focused

on the visual; his is 100 percent auditory.

Ever since 1995, when Red moved back to Orange, he would go down to the WJMA Studios on Spicer's Mill and do the program live on Sunday mornings. It would air simultaneously on WJMA and WAMU.

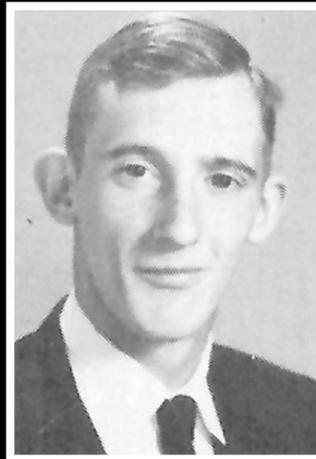
The date, September 11th has a different meaning for Red, because it was on that day last year that he suffered a stroke, followed by numerous mini strokes. At the time, he was taking his son to his job as night manager of the Holiday Inn Express, "and I had a helluva time getting home." He managed to make it to Culpeper Hospital. "I completely lost the use of the right side of my body," he says matter-of-factly.

Today he has regained some of that, but adds, "I can't drive, can't walk very well... but I'm doing pretty good." Strokes often affect speech and memory, and for an old radio hand like Red, that would have been devastating. But, Red was lucky. He could still talk, and there's nothing wrong with his memory; he can provide accurate dates, times and places for events in his life 50+ years ago.

By late October of last year, Red was able to resume the program, "but that was too hard on people; I was being more of a pain in the butt than I am now." His daughter had to come early on Sunday mornings, dress him and help him in and out of the station. "The children wanted me to keep doing it because they felt it gave me something..." he lets the sentence dangle. "The outpouring of people, the number of cards and letters were just overwhelming... from all over." Somebody out there is listening.

With the right side of his body paralyzed, Red also needed help with the controls. He looks gratefully at Nick, who volunteers his time to put the program together every week. "I could not do it without him. He keeps the program going." Nick imperceptibly

Robert



"Red"

"I used to listen to the radio as a kid... wanted to be a disk jockey; that's all I wanted to be," says Red Shipley as he looks back to his childhood in Johnson City, Tennessee. He pronounces it, "TEN-uh-see."

Red grew up listening to live radio programs on WCYB, Bristol, where performers like Mac Wiseman and the Stanley Brothers would play their music for 25-cents a song! "You see, in those days, in the late 40s and the very early 50s, live radio was still in vogue."

Red's Dad worked for the TVA, "and he got tired of those big, high dams and said, 'we're going up to Virginia to buy that farm.'" That was in 1952, and all of a sudden Robert Shipley is living in the boonies of Orange County, Virginia, between St. Just and Mine Run. "Oh gosh, I hated it," he laments, "my radio didn't sound the same up here."

Red attended Orange County High School where he was immediately nicknamed 'Tennessee' by his homeroom teacher. "I didn't know where Gordonsville was, people saying 'oot and aboot,' and I'd say 'Raht naow.'" Two classmates gave him the nickname "Red," for his ginger hair.

Red lettered in football, played end for the legendary Paul Sizemore, and witnessed first hand that extraordinary 40-game winning streak, where Orange was football king, statewide. He even remembers the beginning of that streak. "We went to Louisa; we won the game AND the fight afterwards."

Upon graduation from OCHS in 1955, Red was all set to learn how to become a TV cameraman at East Tennessee State, when he heard that WJMA was looking "for a local boy." He winks knowingly. "That meant cheap help."

He started Memorial Day, 1956, the 5-10 p.m. shift. His childhood dream to become an honest-goodness disk jockey had come true. In those days, he played one hour of rock, one hour of pop, and one hour of classical. "God it must have been awful," shudders Red. He imitates his TEN-uh-see accent. "As the house lahts dee-yum, you

Shipley

can see the conductor lee-yuft his BATT-on for EYE-gor Stravinsky and his Fahrbird soot." He shakes his head in resignation. "It was just about that bad."

Red claims to have committed every blooper and blunder possible. "Ladies' underwear... half off... at May-Rudasill tomorrow morning," he rolls his eyes at the memory of it. By September of 1956 he became the morning man at WJMA, so that on Friday eves he could announce the football games. "I didn't broadcast a losing game until late in the '58

season."

Red's next career move took him to WPRW in Manassas and then in 1966, on to the local country music giant, Big K Radio in Warrenton. "We were on top of our game then. In the mid 60s to about 1970, we ruled the roost," he says triumphantly. By 1980, Red was Program Director, Music Director, and Operations Manager at WPIK Alexandria. "That was a pretty big-time station." Red was widely credited for coining the term, "Washington, D.C., the bluegrass capital of the nation." It was pretty much true.

It was in 1982 that the original host and creator of Stained Glass Bluegrass, Gary Henderson up and quit. Because Red had substituted for Henderson a few times, he agreed to fill in until they found a permanent replacement. Here it is, 25 years later, and Red is still hosting the show. "I was apprehensive to say the least about taking this program over from Gary Henderson. Gary was like a God in the local Washington bluegrass scene then."

After about two weeks of hosting the program, that great big bear of a mandolin-playing high tenor, John Duffey of the Country Gentlemen and later the Seldom Scene, called Red, saying, "You're doing a great job. I am really glad you took this job. I hope you stay with it." Red blew a sigh of relief. "It really made me feel great."

And then something happened. "Crossovers, that's what the world was mad for in the late 60s and early 70s," says Red, "that's why I got out of radio. I couldn't stand country music. If I heard them play John Denver's, 'Thank God I'm a Country Boy' one more time..." He says something about getting a shotgun "and cleaning them out." Red was also at a crossroads in his own life, and although he religiously drove to WAMU on Sunday mornings from his apartment in Alexandria, he turned his back on full time radio and entered the trade show business which was much more lucrative. Three children and two failed marriages later, Red moved back to Orange for good, where he continued to host Stained Glass Bluegrass from the WJMA studios.

Ask him what's become of local radio, he'll say,

servicing the community."

So a radio station in Dothan, Alabama, for example, will sound exactly like the one in Eugene, Oregon, which is just like the country music station in Bemidji, Wisconsin, with little or no local news, sports, or programming. "Clear Channel wannabees," grouses Red.

He even maintains that it's happening with the NPR stations. "Same thing. They want you to be able to hear the same thing from a public radio station in Dothan, Alabama that you hear in Washington, D.C. They have prostituted the original intent of public radio... And frankly they did it in the name of a political viewpoint. You know yourself, I don't what your politics are, but NPR leans more to the left than it does to the right."

Homogenized radio cranking out homogenized music. "There is no country music anymore; there's no country anymore," laments Red, pointing to the residential street outside. The stuff that's coming out of Nashville, he says, "There's no feeling to it. That's why bluegrass survives. Bluegrass is the only American music. Dixieland died."

He was afraid bluegrass would too until a group of young musicians discovered the lost art of Bill Monroe or Flatt and Scruggs for example. "We were missing a generation in there because people didn't bother to buy their albums. But CDs, all of a sudden they heard those and they liked it. And then young people got into it. There are so many fine new young musicians...and female musicians...there's any number of good female musicians and songwriters now."

Red rolls his wheelchair up to the microphone and proves his point by introducing a song by Mac Wiseman from the 40s followed by a haunting lament from Alison Krauss, recorded just recently. "I think one of the things that has made the program is that it has such a diverse listening audience. And I play a very diverse type of music."

And you thought bluegrass all sounds the same.



Photos courtesy of the 1955 OCHS Yearbook, The Golden Horseshoe.

Top left, Red Shipley moved from Tennessee to Orange County in the early 1950s. He graduated from Orange County High School in 1955 and lettered in football. Shipley (# 35) played end for coach Paul Sizemore, and later broadcast the famous 40-game winning streak for WJMA in the mid to late 1950s.