



## ***Kansas 1972 Podcast***

### **EPISODE 7 – RETURNING TO OUR ROOTS – THE WALNUT VALLEY FESTIVAL**

#### **SERIES INTRO**

##### **Tracy Quillin:**

This series was made possible by the Friends of Humanities Kansas.

##### **Kara Heitz:**

Welcome to *Kansas 1972*. A lot happened during that pivotal year, including the founding of Humanities Kansas. In celebration of our 50th anniversary, we'll be telling stories from that era of Kansas history. So, tune in, chill out, and get the lowdown on Kansas 1972.

#### **EPISODE INTRODUCTION**

##### ***The Wichita Beacon, October 1, 1972, "Winfield Swings to Bluegrass Sounds."***

*"The Wichita Beacon, October 1, 1972. To all intents and purposes, Winfield might well have been the heart of Kentucky this weekend. Bluegrass fans from New Hampshire to California and Minnesota to Texas converged on the city for what was billed as the first annual Walnut Valley Bluegrass Festival and National Guitar Flat-Picking Championship."*

##### **Kara Heitz:**

In the Fall of 1972, around 10,000 people descended on the Winfield, Kansas, fairgrounds to enjoy a long weekend of camping, crafts, and bluegrass music. And for five decades, thousands of music lovers have continued to come to south central Kansas each year to take part in one of the most beloved bluegrass music festivals in the country. This year, the Walnut Valley Festival celebrates its 50th anniversary. (Hey, just like Humanities Kansas!)

In this episode, we'll learn about the origins of the festival...

##### **Bart Redford:**

There are three people that that really are considered the founders of the festival and that is Stuart Mossman, Joe Murrutt, and my father, Bob Redford.

Why the early 1970s was a ripe time for an event this like

“I do think people were looking for something that, felt simpler and kinder and easier to get your head around.”

What continues to make the festival so special going on 50 years now...

“Everywhere you walk, every 100 feet or 50 feet, there’s a little jam going on”

“It’s this one week out of the year that you have carved out where you just have this incredible, intense, experience with other people.”

And the larger community created around the Walnut Valley Festival...

“And then when we see each other every year, it’s like the family is getting together, the whole family.”

## **SEGMENT 1 – THE WALNUT VALLEY FESTIVAL**

### ***American Music: From Folk to Jazz and Pop Art, Part 1***

This program is a musical journey, a journey back to the roots of American popular music.

#### **Kara Heitz:**

Last September, I headed down to Winfield to check out the festival for myself. Growing up in Kansas, I of course had heard of the famous Walnut Valley Festival but had never made it in person. I wandered around the festival grounds for a couple of days, audio recorder in hand, and interacted with lots of people who graciously shared their memories and stories. You’ll be hearing the voices of these festivalgoers throughout this episode.

Also, quick side note. I’ve always called it the Walnut Valley Festival, but it seems very few people connected to the festival actually use this full name. For people in Winfield and Cowley County, it’s usually just called “bluegrass” or “festival,” as in “I can’t get together with you that weekend. It’s bluegrass.” And for bluegrass fans coming from outside of the Winfield area, and especially from outside of Kansas, the festival is often referred to as just “Winfield.” You’ll hear the Walnut Valley Festival called all these things in this episode, so heads up.

To get a sense of both the history of the festival and what it's like now, I first spoke with Bart Redford. Bart is the executive director of the Walnut Valley Festival, a role he took over from his father, who was one of the original founders in 1972.

**Bart Redford:**

Walnut Valley Festival music festival, it's gone through a number of different name changes. But it started in 1972, and it was developed as primarily a concert-oriented festival, but also offering contests. And by that, I mean, instrument contests. Our flagship contest is the national flat-picking Championship; flat pick being a pick used in picking a guitar.

***Kansas Folk, Art & Individuals* documentary, 1977**

The National Flat-Picking Championship is held each year in Winfield. Bluegrass music has such appeal that people of all age groups come from all over the country to participate. They come to play, and they come to listen.

**Bart Redford:**

And then as it has developed, there's a lot of campground picking jams that go on. So, there's a lot of folks that come here that actually play themselves and spend most of their time, you know, picking down in the campground.

**West Campground A, WVF 2021**

Everywhere you walk, every 100 feet or 50 feet, there's a little jam going on and you're welcome to everybody. Whoever you want, you join in with any jam they see. Go on.

**Bart Redford:**

...you know, and we have not a few artists who actually finish up their sets on the main stages and come down and, you know, play around on either one of the campground stages or in one of the jams that's, that's going on.

**Pecan Grove Campground AM C, WVF 2021**

Where else can you sit down with your musical heroes? I mean, I can't sit down with Eric Clapton and play music with him, but I have played plenty of music with Mike Marshall and Daryl Anger and lots and lots of other incredible musicians, because that's the that's this music. There's, there's that boundary doesn't exist...

**Bart Redford:**

It is primarily, I would say, folk and bluegrass,

### ***American Music: From Folk to Jazz and Pop Art, Part 1***

Striving to recreate the nostalgic sounds of their Scots Irish ancestral homeland. The fiddle, the banjo, the guitar, and the mandolin created a sound that was called bluegrass or country.

#### **Bart Redford:**

...but we have quite a few different styles. We've picked up some Western swing and some Western music. There's a Celtic influence.

#### **Pecan Grove Campground PM C, WVF 2021**

Oh well the music, what my wife and I discovered is that the music was so. More diverse. It was a. It was a. Like a mash up, you know, of sounds and music out in the campsites. we hear, I hear, some of the greatest live music I hear anywhere any time, you know, right here in campsites.

#### **Bart Redford:**

We are we're not a large festival...my father used to like to say that we're not the biggest, but possibly the best. And we've had some success in terms of pulling out bands that maybe weren't big at the time but played here and then got huge or in the early years. We just, you know, we had some bands that that really set the tone really for modern bluegrass and some of the people that you know, we have back every year.

#### **West Campground A, WVF 2021**

So, the shows in the early days were really great. You know, they had the big headliners, Doc Watson and Norman Blake and Red Clay Ramblers. Those were some of my favorites. And oh, the. Bluegrass revival.... And so we could go on and on with the characters we remembered from those early days. And that, of course, was a big draw here, too. They had, you know, there's always somebody good here and interesting shows.

#### **Kara Heitz:**

Camping is also a big part of the festival experience. In the early days, many of the people I talked to remembered pitching a tent on the fairgrounds or even just throwing a mattress in the back of a truck.

#### **Pecan Grove Campground AM A, WVF 2021**

We came in 1983 and when we, when you, come camping, this field was completely empty. I mean, it was it's grown that much. It was really much smaller. We used to camp down, down by the river, and there was never anybody here when we first started coming. So it's just grown and grown and grown. But people also had smaller rigs.

You'd have tents or maybe pop ups. You didn't see the big campers that we have now. So you didn't get much room. Get out.  
You're comfortable now?  
Yes, it is. Bathrooms are nice.

**Kara Heitz:**

As the longtime festivalgoers themselves have gotten a bit older, they may now prefer the conveniences of campers and RVs, but what really matters about the festival has remained the same.

**Pecan Grove Campground AM B, WVF 2021**

It was a lot more tents and campers, but we were a lot younger then, so we could camp in tents and stuff and pretty much the same actually. A few more people and a lot more campers. They got more room with campers than you did with tents. Other than that, I think the first were pretty much been the same. That's why everybody likes the same thing every year. Get to meet your friends and pretty cool

**Kara Heitz:**

What makes the Walnut Valley Festival unique, though, is something else that goes on in the campgrounds besides camping. (No it's not something prurient, although I'm not saying that kind of stuff doesn't happen at festival.) What makes Winfield so special, and what keeps many people coming back year after year, is the music inside the campgrounds.

**Bart Redford:**

...are a sizable percentage, I would say, who spend most of their time down in the campgrounds.

**Pecan Grove Campground AM C, WVF 2021**

A lot of people think of the festival as being what's on the stage. We know people that have been coming for 25 years and have never been inside the fairgrounds. Because at 8:00 tonight, there'll be a jam of, I don't know, 5 to 20 people. And it'll go as long as people want it to go and then people filter off and go to another one. So that's the festival...

**Kara Heitz:**

While the main stage is always a draw, over the years a number of stages have been established inside campgrounds by the campers themselves.

**Bart Redford:**

We've got several campground stages that have established themselves were going on 20, 25 years, maybe, and so they have their own schedule. They have people show up at their campsite and say, I want to play on stage five or stage six or stage seven or stage 11, and they'll put together their schedule. And so a lot of people just kind of make their way around and catch those shows,

**Kara Heitz:**

Probably the most famous, perhaps even infamous of these is Stage 5.

**Pecan Grove Campground AM D, WVF 2021**

Well, stage five is it's like it's like hip hop meets the Apollo. It's a stage on the literally on the back of a of a Chevy Grain truck. And you get 20 minutes two mics. No sound checks. People draw lots to see who plays when. And as some of the best music I've ever heard, you get these people that you don't think that they're smart enough to tie their shoes and they're up there just rippin' it.

**Kara Heitz:**

It all sounds pretty amazing, right? Of course, those of you listening who have been to the festival are probably nodding your heads in agreement, and hopefully reliving some great memories.

So how did this festival actually get started? And why has it endured for so long?

**Bart Redford:**

There are three people that that really are considered the founders of the festival and that is Stuart Mossman, Joe Murrith, and my father, Bob Redford.

**Kara Heitz:**

So who are these three guys and how did they get this thing off the ground?

To help me take a deeper dive into the history of the festival, I also spoke with Seth Bate. Seth recently published a wonderful book on the history of the Walnut Valley festival, which we'll link to on the episode webpage. He started attending the festival in 1989 and married into the Murrith family. He started researching the history of the festival as part of his master's degree in public history at Wichita State University, where he also works. Seth is really THE expert on the Walnut Valley Festival. We had a great conversation sitting where else but outside at his festival campsite.

**Seth Bate:**

In 1968, and then again in 1971, there were folk festivals that were out at Southwestern College, and the 1968 festival was a larger event. It was significantly the work of Sam Anschluss and Stuart Mossman and a bunch of their buddies that they got together.

The Southwestern College Folk Festival in '68 relied on the college's sponsorship and donations from community, especially community businesses. There was another smaller version of that in 1971, ... the people who put it on in 1971, many of them also ended up being volunteers or staff members or enthusiasts of the official Walnut Valley festivals that began in 1972.

**Kara Heitz:**

The late 1960s and early 1970s were a time when music festivals were entering into the larger popular culture, with events like Monterey Pop and Woodstock. And this wasn't just for rock and pop music. Genres like folk, country, and bluegrass were also part of the burgeoning festival scene.

**Seth Bate:**

The two festivals that probably had the most inspiration for people who started the Walnut Valley Festival. One was the Newport Folk Festival, which saw, you know, significantly, Pete Seeger had a guiding role in in those early days. And the other was a festival in Mountain View, Arkansas, put on by Jimmy Driftwood, who wrote some great American songs. And so many of the people who kind of got enthusiastic about what would become the Walnut Valley Festival had it visited one or both of those.

**Kara Heitz:**

So, these experiences with earlier folk and bluegrass festivals in both Winfield and elsewhere helped plant a seed.

**Seth Bate:**

Stuart Mossman by 1972 had a significant early guitar building and selling company operating. And one of the ways that he was making a name for himself was going to festivals to network with people and to sell instruments.

So, Joe was a friend of Stuart's, took some guitar lessons for him, from him, ended up doing some work at the guitar factory. And Joe was a Jaycees friend of Bob Redford's, and both Joe and Bob had worked on the motorcycle races...

**Kara Heitz:**

Winfield had hosted motorcycle races for about a decade, and some of the organizers of that event were looking for something new, preferably an event that would be more broadly popular.

**Seth Bate:**

Stewart and the gang that hung out at and worked at the guitar shop, really loved going to festivals and were always kind of wanting Joe to go too. And Joe kind of a home body, and he was a farmer and couldn't get away much. And so part of their ribbing over time was Stuart's saying, You've got to come to this festival and Joe saying, if you put on a festival here, I'll go do that.

**Kara Heitz:**

Bart Redford remembers his father's role in this story.

**Bart Redford:**

...my father was really sort of annoyed at Stuart and other guys coming back and talking about all these great music festivals that they'd been to and thought, Well, why can't we do something you know here in Winfield?

**Seth Bate:**

And in one of these kind of bantering conversations, Stuart, who was always a dreamer, said, Well, you know, if I had \$10,000, I could put on a pretty good festival in Winfield.

And at some point, Bob said, Well, if you can sell me on it, I'd invest in that festival. And Joe says, you know, Bob was a great person to sell to because Bob was a salesman and he appreciated a good pitch. And so Joe must have made a good pitch and said, we need 10 people to each put up a thousand dollars. Bob said If it's such a good idea, I'll put up the \$10,000.

And so the nucleus there was Bob who appreciated music but wasn't particularly a music enthusiast and thought like a business person. And Joe, who had that kind of farmer mentality that if you work hard enough, something will pay off eventually. And Stuart, who had these great connections and that sparkle that got people excited about things. And I think while the personnel have changed over time, those three elements are still at the core of the festival.



**VO: *The Wichita Eagle*, September 17, 1972, “Bluegrass, Guitar Picking Festival on Walnut River”**

“*The Wichita Eagle*, September 17, 1972. The first Walnut Valley Bluegrass Festival and National Guitar Flat-Picking Championship will be held at the Winfield, Kansas fairgrounds on Sept. 29-30 and Oct. 1. Sponsored by the Southwestern College Cultural Arts Board and the Walnut Valley Association, the festival will feature county guitar and bluegrass band contests ...Lester Flatt, Jim and Jesse, Doc Watson, the Lewis Family, Byron Berline, the New Grass Revival, Dan Crary, Morman Blake, the Stone Mountain Boys, and the Bluegrass Country Boys will be some of the nationally acclaimed artists in concerts during the three days. ...

“We plan a lot of fiddle, banjo and guitar music out under the trees along the Walnut River,” said Stuart Mossman, festival director. “Everyone who plays is invited to bring their instruments and join in with those who just want to come and listen...”

**Kara Heitz:**

So how did that first festival go? What do people remember about that inaugural year?

Again, Seth Bate.

**Seth Bate:**

The exciting part that people talk about is getting three of the of the legends of flat pit guitar on stage together, swapping tunes, and that was still unusual enough that people were amazed by it. And people talk about how electrifying it was, and it was exciting enough that even people who didn't really consider themselves students of guitar, loved that moment.

And the weather was terrible, and they didn't sell very many tickets and they lost a lot of money.

**Kara Heitz:**

But despite these setbacks, they persevered.

**Seth Bate:**

But they kept going, but they kept going, and the third year, by all accounts, had beautiful weather and great attendance, and they all kind of knew what they were doing and the guitar contests were starting. The guitar contest was starting to generate some excitement in that flat picking world.

Flat picking as a style was still relatively new, and it was the style most associated with bluegrass players.

**Kara Heitz:**

And it wasn't just the music that was memorable. One festivalgoer I spoke to was a Winfield local who came to the first Walnut Valley Festival as a teenager.

**Pecan Grove Campground AM C, WVF 2021**

I was 15, remember. It felt silly to me. And I remember coming here with my brother, who was six years older than me, sitting around a campfire and watching the guy with the washboard Leo. Washboard Leo here in the campground and it just, I just felt like I was in this den of yeah, like a gypsy camp. And, like, I'm sure I could smell funny smells and, you know, it's just like, wow, this is culture shock a little bit for me. But it was it was fun.

**Kara Heitz:**

Since the 1960s there had been a revival in interest in folk music (including bluegrass) in America, with younger listeners invested in both rediscovering traditions but also newer and more popular variations on these musical styles. So there is this kind of association between youth culture, even hippies, and bluegrass.

*The Wichita Eagle*, on Oct. 1st of 1972, reported about 60% of the attendees at the first Walnut Valley festival were young people. Bob Redford is quoted in the article as saying, "Most bluegrass fans are 50 or over. Apparently, the college students are getting away from rock and going to this."

**Pete Seeger's Rainbow Quest #31, 1966**

Do you agree with Alan Lomax, his definition of music that bluegrass is folk music and overdrive?

I think that's about the best, best definition of bluegrass that I've heard.

When I first heard that tune about 30 years ago, it didn't go so fast. Little piece. A short little. Piece. Burton gave it all away to my darling and Sally Goode, and it was still in third gear.

Well, with today's higher speeds, I guess the music takes on its speed also.

**Kara Heitz:**

But the influence of youth culture is only one aspect of the larger bluegrass scene at the time. It was also about good old-fashioned family-friendly fun.

### **Pecan Grove Campground AM C, WVF 2021**

I stumbled in for. For one day. And I was just so taken with the whole experience. And remember, it would have been raining a bunch and we went to a kids concert. John McCutcheon and other people put on this thing just for kicks aimed at kids. And these families are out there and they're splashing the water and just having a great time and you can see the campsites in the background and I'm going Man. This is I want to be part of that. This is just there's something about this place that is family and community in a way that nothing else that I've ever seen.

### **Kara Heitz:**

And as Seth Bate comments, the family-friendly focus was a conscious move on the part of the organizers from the very beginning.

### **Seth Bate:**

I think for Winfield, the town, not Winfield, the event. The Walnut Valley Festival created, in many cases deliberately, but created an image of a place where it was fine to take the family. My single favorite thing that I found in the research was *Winfield Courier* article from the year it was starting of Stuart Moss when speaking to the Winfield Rotary Club and saying This is going to be a family friendly event, many people over the age of 50 will be attending and bringing their families. So if the 50-year old's are coming, it must be okay

### **Kara Heitz:**

Remember that 1972 was in the middle of a tumultuous era in American history. (And if you've listened to any other episodes of this podcast, you'll know that is true!) The various protest movements of the era, the counterculture, economic disruptions, growing ecological concerns made many people feel overwhelmed and uncertain about the future.

You see attempts to grapple with the complicated times in the grants given by Humanities Kansas (then the Kansas Committee for the Humanities) in 1972. Titles include "Family Values in a Changing Kansas," "Traditions in Transition," and "Changing Human Values."

Through these programs, people were coming together to try to find common ground and build community through discussions rooted in history, literature, ethics, and philosophy. However, sometimes people just wanted a simpler way to make sense of the messy present.

**Seth Bate:**

I do think people were looking for something that, whether real or almost real or entirely imagined, felt simpler and kinder and easier to get your head around.

And I think the Walnut Valley Festival was one of those places where people could find that, or at least could have rounded up into that experience. And so, to come to a place where you just throw a tent down and you get out your guitar and you find some friends and you go see the soap making demonstration and you... sing some songs that maybe you learned from 78 records, I think captured some of that feeling for people.

**Kara Heitz:**

As the 1970s moved on, while the festival was going strong, Stuart Mossman and Joe Murrith stepped back from their roles in the festival, and Bob Redford became the executive director, a role he held for decades until his son Bart took over in 2017 after Bob's passing.

Bart still remembers how much his father loved his work.

**Bart Redford:**

The festival was something where it really was a labor of love for him. He enjoyed getting out and meeting people during a festival. There were a lot of people who would see him every year and, you know, come by and say hi. And he just loved hearing people's stories and where they were from and talking to them.

**Kara Heitz:**

And it's this connection with other people, forged every year through seeing each other again and again at the festival, that really stood out to me in almost all my conversations with festivalgoers.

**West Campground A, WVF 2021**

... the folks over there have camped next to us for many years. So we play with them all the time. And then when we see each other every year, it's like the family is getting together, the whole family.

**Kara Heitz:**

To better understand the dynamics of this community. I spoke with Robert Gardner, a professor of Sociology at Linfield College in Oregon. He's the author of the book "The Portable Community: Place and Displacement in Bluegrass Festival Life." I'll put a link to the book on the episode website. I asked Robert Gardner to explain his concept of "portable community" and how it relates to the Walnut Valley Festival.

**Robert Gardner:**

Portable community really refers to this intimate sense of community that emerges from recurring or temporary events. So, these are types of communities that emerge, flourish, disband in open fields or parking lots or even hotel lobbies over a relatively short period of time. And they really emerge in various types of events like bluegrass festivals or rodeos or sporting events, NASCAR events, dog shows, comic book conventions or even professional conferences.

**Kara Heitz:**

One key aspect of these kinds of portable communities is that they come together reliably at regular intervals, which gives the community a sense of stability and even familiarity. Gardner's own experiences at the Walnut Valley Festival connect with this point.

**Robert Gardner:**

The first time I attended Winfield, I was driving through the gates, and I showed my ticket, make sure I was, you know, in the right place and they handed me a set of bumper stickers, one of which said, "I can't, I'm going to Winfield." And it had the dates for the next Winfield Festival third weekend in September. Right? You know, it's going to happen on that weekend every single year, and so people will block their calendars. People will ask for vacation time, you know, a year in advance. But it's very clear that, you know, once you once you're there, the first time, you're coming back, right? And so, there's that sense of continuity that you always know when it's going to be and that it's something that is kind of reliable from one year to the next.

**Kara Heitz:**

Besides returning year after year, there are other aspects of Winfield that help reinforce the sense of community at the festival.

One is just the bluegrass music itself.

**Robert Gardner:**

If you listen to the music, you know, they call it three chords and the truth, right? You have most of the music is, is centered around a very simple, simplistic, you know, sort of structure that allows it to be very accessible to a wide range of people. You know, you have a G chord, a C chord, and a D chord and, you know, about 10,000 bluegrass

songs. And so it provides this easy entry point for people to kind of tap into it, to listen to it, to recognize it.

***Pete Seeger's Rainbow Quest #31, 1966***

There's something about picking and singing, which, well, you can, all you need to do is get a guitar player or a banjo player, a mandolin player, a fiddle. And they just need to know the key they're in and they can sail off.

**Kara Heitz:**

Even with all the accomplished musicians on stage and in the camps, Bluegrass is a style of music even a beginner can feel welcome to play along with.

This welcoming attitude connects to another important part of what creates sense of community at the festival - and that's the campground culture.

**Robert Gardner:**

The campground culture is a really interesting one, because people create themed camps, they usually... not everybody, but there are a core group of people that will develop a camp identity or a name for their camp, and they will keep that that same name, you know, from one year to the next, it becomes a, you know, a reliable place that people can return to and kind of see and recognize. They know that they're going to be able to find their, their group of people or their friends or the people that they met at the festival the previous year.

**Pecan Grove Campground AM B, WVF 2021**

This is my family right here. No, they didn't mean to adopt me, but I forced my way in, at gunpoint. But I'm nonviolent, typically. But this is this is the best camp. And if you ask anybody else they're lyin'.

**Robert Gardner:**

The other, I think, big piece of Winfield and what really draws people in is the campsite jamming. So, there's this ritual of people showing up with their instruments. I read somewhere that there are over half of the participants at Winfield will bring an instrument with them and their musicians. And so you have, you know, obviously you have the professional musicians that are sort of brought there to perform or to participate in the instrument championships that that Winfield is famous for. But you also have amateur musicians who are just, you know, kind of play in their basement or maybe get together with a small jam group in their community.

### **Pecan Grove Campground AM B, WVF 2021**

As the week goes on, even before the official festival starts, that each campground or each camp will have different jams. And it's it goes on under the streetlights till three or four o'clock in the morning. And so there's very little sleep for some. And it just it's just magic.

#### **Robert Gardner:**

Well, they can come there and they can kind of share their songs with other people or get an opportunity to play music with a new group or a new set of people, or perhaps people that they've known for, you know, 20, 30 years and that they've been coming to every third weekend in September and getting together and play music with this familiar group of strangers.

#### **Kara Heitz:**

But while a love of Bluegrass music and related genres unites this "familiar group of strangers," the festival has always attracted a diverse group of people in terms of political views, economic class, religious beliefs, and the like.

### **Pecan Grove Campground PM C, WVF 2021**

Um, well, this is a lot of different people here from a lot of different backgrounds...

#### **Kara Heitz:**

But part of the community created at Walnut Valley helps to break down these barriers.

Here's Robert Gardner.

#### **Robert Gardner:**

The first time I attended Winfield. I pulled into the campground. I tried to set up camp and out of the corner of my eye, I heard or, you know, sort of saw and heard this group of musicians were playing one of my favorite songs, Consult Creek. And so I play guitar. And so I just kind of left my tent there, pulled out my guitar and ran over to this jam because I wanted to play the song. And so I, as I got up to the jam, there were these two gentlemen who, you know, big, tall, burly guys, enormous belt buckles shirts tucked in, you know, enormous cowboy hats.

And you know, they're, they're, you know, sort of pressed jeans and these were some tough looking characters, right? And these were guys that I would have never interacted with in my everyday life. Their lifestyle was very different than mine. Their life experience is very different than mine. But here we are. I haven't even exchanged

names with these, these guys, and I am singing harmonies with them and playing music together.

**Kara Heitz:**

Seth Bate also has a take on this phenomenon.

**Seth Bate:**

And I actually think that there are some people who get a special kick out of, um, like deliberately bridging that gap. It's kind of great and we all know that Hank Williams song, so I might be making that part up, but I think it's a little bit of a thrill to do something that you just don't do in other places in your life.

**Kara Heitz:**

And these kinds of interactions also help create festival community bonds.

**Robert Gardner:**

...it really struck me that this is this is the sort of really, really interesting. Place where boundaries are broken down, you don't necessarily talk about politics, but I think you also it's a kind of there's a there's a sort of healing that takes place, I think, and an understanding that takes place in these types of settings that allow people to reach beyond religious divides, economic divides, social divides, political divides where you just meet people as people and you encounter people as people, and those things aren't important anymore.

**Kara Heitz:**

Robert Gardner's description of the space created from the festival really reminds me of the experiences people reported having when they attended Humanities Kansas events in the 1970s.

So maybe in our current times, when some of these divides seem so insurmountable, maybe we all just need to go to the Walnut Valley Festival ... and also attend a Humanities Kansas program.

**Seth Bate:**

I'm past thinking that everybody coming to bluegrass is the answer to all the world's ills. But it sure makes it easier to live with it.



## **EPISODE CONCLUSION**

### **Kara Heitz:**

One of the terms that kept coming up again and again in my interviews was Brigadoon, the magical village that appears out of a misty Scottish glen for only one day every hundred years, as portrayed in the 1954 MGM musical.

[SHORT CLIP FROM BRIGADOON SONG]

### **Kara Heitz:**

That sense of this being a special, even sacred place, that only happens for a short period of time, really intensifies the experience for many festivalgoers.

### **Robert Gardner:**

One of the people I interviewed said that the sort of the everyday life is the 51-week supply run for Winfield. Right? This is what, what life is worth living for, right?

...It's this one week out of the year that you have carved out where you just have this incredible, intense experience with, with other people. And you know, the rest of the year, you're thinking about it, you're remembering it, you're telling stories about it, you're telling your coworkers about it and you're gearing up for next year.

### **Kara Heitz:**

But unlike the mythical town of Brigadoon, which will disappear forever if an inhabitant leaves its boundaries, the festival community creates bonds with each other that transcends the space and time of the Winfield Fairgrounds for a week in September. These are the kind of bonds that help us get through the other 51 weeks of the year.

This point really struck me during my interview with one particular Walnut Valley festivalgoer, and I think it's an appropriate end to our story.

Note that we're airing this clip unedited. So, you'll hear my voice in the background too.

### **Pecan Grove Campground AM A, WVF 2021**

Yeah, music brings people together. And we just, yeah, this was my husband's dream, was to have lots of people playing under that tent. Sorry, I'm a little emotional.

No, it's okay.

That's what I love about I mean, everybody I talked to just this week, it's crazy.

Yeah, it's. It's my second year without my husband, so, Winfield is very special. So it's also very emotional. So I'm very glad tonight.

And one of our members, his wife is, um, she's an artist. And she made a sign that says Tom's pickin' parlor that we have, you know, hanging up in the porch where everybody used to come at our house and gather in. And they've made signs that we have and under our canopy and everything now, too. So yeah, it's just really it's like when we come to Winfield, even though we're not any of us actually related, we're like family, you know, that's like the camp everybody came to the, you know, my husband's funeral. And that was, you know, because he's what brought them all together. And so. Yes. It's awesome.

[MUSIC]

## **SERIES OUTRO**

### **Kara Heitz:**

Catch you on the flip side!

### **Tracy Quillin:**

Humanities Kansas is an independent nonprofit leading a movement of ideas to strengthen Kansas communities and our democracy. Since 1972, HK's pioneering programs, grants, and partnerships have documented and shared stories to spark conversations and generate insights. Together with statewide partners and supporters, HK inspires all Kansans to draw on history, literature, and culture to enrich their lives and to serve the communities and state we all proudly call home. Join the movement of ideas at [humanitieskansas.org](http://humanitieskansas.org).