



Edwin Nettles

*Interviewed by Michael Chiarappa*

### **1. Learning Young (00:31)**

**E. Nettles:** When I was a kid, I remember one time we had, uh, the little slats like the, uh, crate, you know they made crate slats out of.

**M. Chiarappa:** Um hum, um hum.

**E. Nettles:** I took them and I carved me some swords and knives, you know.

**M. Chiarappa:** Oh really?

**E. Nettles:** That's about it.

**M. Chiarappa:** When you were, when you were-?

**E. Nettles:** That was back when I was a kid.

**M. Chiarappa:** Um hum.

**E. Nettles:** I was about ten or eleven years old. But that was the only thing I ever carved.

**M. Chiarappa:** Um hum.

**E. Nettles:** And I had done a little painting, well not painting, drawing, when I was in school. I could draw.

**M. Chiarappa:** Oh really? Uh huh.

**E. Nettles:** That was back when I was a kid too. I'd-Once I was grown all I was doing was work, 'til I started whittling.

**M. Chiarappa:** Right.

### **2. Working with wood (00:33)**

**E. Nettles:** When I started whittling on cedar and-

**M. Chiarappa:** Um hum.

**E. Nettles:** And enjoying the characteristics and the color of it and the, uh, different ways you have to cut and play with wood for it not to split.

**M. Chiarappa:** Right, right.

**E. Nettles:** Plus the design of the wood, a lot of times what you cut out of the raw log, you can see in your mind's eye....uh, the characteristics of it or what, what it's best to make out of it, you know?

**M. Chiarappa:** Hum, hum.

**E. Nettles:** You can, sometimes you can see a form out of the r-raw wood you can get an idea of how it'll carve, you know, with the different characteristics: the grain, and-

**M. Chiarappa:** Uh huh-

**E. Nettles:** Knots, and the color, shape.

### **3. Carving wildlife (00:22)**

**E. Nettles:** I-I'd try to stick with mostly native designs. I-you know, in the hunting books and stuff I'd see pictures of elk and big horn sheep and stuff, but I mean, uh, I could whittle them on wood but I like to stick with my native wildlife. Little-

**M. Chiarappa:** Um hum.

**E. Nettles:** Whitetails and-

**M. Chiarappa:** Um hum.

**E. Nettles:** Our stripe bass and bass and catfish and bird dogs-

**M. Chiarappa:** Um hum.

**E. Nettles:** And quail, stuff we have around here, you know?

### **4. Carving model boats (01:33)**

**E. Nettles:** Kirby, he brought up a piece of cedar and was whittling a canoe.

**M. Chiarappa:** Uh huh.

**E. Nettles:** And I got tired of looking at him whittle at the little piece of cedar, so I told him to give me a block and I whittle a little canoe too and I made a square-end canoe instead of pointed at both ends.

**M. Chiarappa:** Uh huh.

**E. Nettles:** Then I decided I'd whittle me a little out-repli-you know, a little replica of an outboard to stick on the back on the end.

**M. Chiarappa:** Um hum.

**E. Nettles:** Like toothpick electric motor on the front and I stuck 'em on there and I just thought it was neat and it looked pretty neat, you know, so then I decided to get....different books and stuff that show you boats and motors of your real ones and I started trying to make them exactly like they were, you know, to where, you know, they looked like little models.

**M. Chiarappa:** Right.

**E. Nettles:** I got pretty good at it.

**M. Chiarappa:** Um hum.

**E. Nettles:** Took about five years, but I can take a block of cedar and whittle a boat about fourteen inches long. I can cut out a hull to look like a Hydrosport, or a Ranger Bass Boat, or a Boston Whaler.

**M. Chiarappa:** Um hum, um hum-

**E. Nettles:** Anything like that and then when I get my hull cut out, I cut all my other little pieces. I've cut motors that look like Johnsons. I've cut motors that look like Evinrudes or Mercuries and different sizes from down fifteen horsepower on john boats, up to two hundreds on the back of-

**M. Chiarappa:** Right-

**E. Nettles:** Of Boston Whalers and stuff you know, but I can glue them all together. Once I've whittle everything, I make the cockpit, my seats and my little electric motor. I even make my depth finder. Little blocks of, like a depth finder. I'd graph the quartering. I'd try to draw the little picture out where the line is for the bottom and the fish showing on from there.

**M. Chiarappa:** Right.

**E. Nettles:** Just like little exact models more or less. Well not exact, but just carved models.

### **5. Gathering cedar (01:07)**

**E. Nettles:** When you want cedar wood you mostly have to go down to the big rivers and you ride down the river until you see where some cedars grow in the woods to where they're shaded by other trees to where they have a straight trunk section and some straight limbs.

**M. Chiarappa:** Um hum.

**E. Nettles:** Because the ones that are real-have the Christmas tree like limbs to them straight from the ground up-

**M. Chiarappa:** Ri-

**E. Nettles:** They're just about worthless, they're so knotted.

**M. Chiarappa:** Hmm, Um hum.

**E. Nettles:** But you can find a straight section of one blow'd down from a hurricane or a storm.

**M. Chiarappa:** Um hum.

**E. Nettles:** You can saw off the trunk. Or live ones we've only sawed the limb off because you don't want to destroy a tree, you know?

**M. Chiarappa:** Right.

**E. Nettles:** Now the blow'd down ones you can saw the trunk off of them because they're just going to deteriorate anyway.

**M. Chiarappa:** Um hum.

**E. Nettles:** But a lot of the lands beside these big rivers is plantation land you had to make sure you don't end up with buck shot through your truck.

[Both laugh]

**M. Chiarappa:** That's right, you were saying that. Yeah, yeah.

**E. Nettles:** But now-now that was with the cedar but now I-we've got a bunch of cedar. We hadn't really been whittling with cedar lately with the boats. We've been enjoying whittling with mimosa and sycamore, making canes and started making plaques. We've been getting boards with already cut boards and stuff, making picture carving, you know, carving plaques and stuff.

**M. Chiarappa:** Right, right.

## **6. Other types of wood (00:41)**

**E. Nettles:** Me and Kirby we mostly, we go find our wood together.

**M. Chiarappa:** Uh huh. So-so you guys-

**E. Nettles:** Ride around in a pickup truck and look for a sycamore tree out in the woods with some good branches on it. You don't want to cut the trunk off a sycamore or no kind of tree, you know, you don't want to destroy it. But-

**M. Chiarappa:** Um hum-

**E. Nettles:** You find you some good limbs, and well, the same way with mimosa trees, which you can find them growing side of roadside and cut some good limbs off. You need a tree with a straight branch coming off of it that don't have a lot of little branches coming off the branch, cause anywhere you got a branch coming from a limb-

**M. Chiarappa:** Right.

**E. Nettles:** You have a knot.

**M. Chiarappa:** Um hum.

**E. Nettles:** And the knots are-well there are some wood that knots you can cut through fairly easy. But there's other woods that knots are just about like granite.

## **7. Carving spoons (00:39)**

**E. Nettles:** There for a while when I made the boats then I'd also I'd make spoons. Like, well like the little spoon you'd see with people's heads totem pole fashion, one on top the other.

**M. Chiarappa:** Um hum.

**E. Nettles:** I've made some pretty nice ones like with seven or eight heads.

**M. Chiarappa:** Um hum.

**E. Nettles:** People's heads cut out and around. I'd make-I could make a pretty fair feature, a little character.

**M. Chiarappa:** Right.

**E. Nettles:** I could make men, women. Some of them I'd make with a crown like a king and the others with a little baseball cap on their head-

**M. Chiarappa:** Oh really-

**E. Nettles:** And some with mustaches and beards, you know.

**M. Chiarappa:** Oh-uh huh, uh huh.

**E. Nettles:** I've made a couple like Mister Clean, baldheaded with big ears and-

**M. Chiarappa:** That's right-

**E. Nettles:** Who knows, whatever head I'd want to carve out on top of it.

**M. Chiarappa:** Uh hum.

**E. Nettles:** Then I'd carve me a little at the base of it. Either a spoon or a fork where you can hang them on the wall.

### **8. Doesn't paint his work (01:48)**

**E. Nettles:** I've seen all the people, the way, now a days with carving, at least around here, everything things with birds.

**M. Chiarappa:** Um hum.

**E. Nettles:** The wildlife exhibition in Charleston everybody-anything from a songbird to a shorebird to a duck to water birds, wading birds, you know?

**M. Chiarappa:** Um hum.

**E. Nettles:** Everything. But all of them, they take all the time with that wood to form that pretty figure out and everything.

**M. Chiarappa:** Um hum.

**E. Nettles:** And then in my opinion they turn around-I mean, I know it's pretty to look at lifelike birds and stuff but they paint them all to where they're just so lifelike.

**M. Chiarappa:** Um hum.

**E. Nettles:** And it looks just like taxidermisty work that you'd see from a taxidermist, you really, I mean to me, with my eye, now I'm not no art expert or nothing, but I just cant see the enjoyment of looking at the wood and saying, 'Oh this is made out of wood.'

**M. Chiarappa:** Um hum-

**E. Nettles:** It'd be-I mean they-they could make it out of clay and paint it that pretty.

**M. Chiarappa:** Um hum.

**E. Nettles:** As far as material it's made out of, if you cover the material. That's what I think's pretty about wood is putting a good finish to it and seeing the time that you had in that piece-

**M. Chiarappa:** Right-

**E. Nettles:** Of what it was formed out of. The material's as important as the work.

**M. Chiarappa:** Um hum, um hum.

**E. Nettles:** That's the way I look at it. The things, the things I like about wood carvings anyway.

**M. Chiarappa:** Right.

**E. Nettles:** Uh, I-I like to see a little bit of the tool and scratch marks, where the knife marks were, you know?

**M. Chiarappa:** Um hum.

**E. Nettles:** Just in the corners and I love to see the grain of the wood to see, you can tell your characteristics of the wood by your different ring growths and stuff in there, you know?

**M. Chiarappa:** Right, right-

**E. Nettles:** All woods are di-every wood and even the same kind of woods from the way they grow with the seasons and stuff with their-during dry seasons, cold months, and-

**M. Chiarappa:** Um hum, um hum-

**E. Nettles:** Wet years. They have different growth rings. And each wood has different characteristics within its growth rings-

**M. Chiarappa:** Right-

**E. Nettles:** The way they twist and everything else.

**M. Chiarappa:** Right, right.

**E. Nettles:** If you cover it all up you really can't enjoy what-what it's made out of, you know?