Hi Art,

Here’s a rundown on what I’ve been up to these last few years. After the passing of my wife Mary, I was seeking something I could do make the world a better place with what limited resources and abilities I have. I started teaching classes in folk music again. For a while, I thought that teaching was just a matter of spreading information on a subject, that people didn’t need teachers and if they wanted this information, they could go about getting it on their own. I was wrong. I read an article in Scientific American magazine about the “imaging neuron”, the ability we have to grasp information by physically modeling it and so convey to others. The ability of a baby to point in a certain direction and have adults look to see what the object was and to know that other simians or animals can’t recognize what the pointing signal is, was a revelation for me. We learn by being exposed to the physical aspect of a teacher being in the same room or area and the student consciously or subconsciously absorbs what is being taught. It’s not only the information but the modeling of this information that completes the education. For example, if a guitar or any other teacher of a musical instrument physically demonstrates a skill, the student will get it on different levels. This means that the attitude of the teacher, the “ideology” of the teacher, and the skill set of the teacher will be successfully taught in person. You can’t do this wholly through video instruction. I feel that I have an obligation to share what I know with the public in the best possible way I can by being physically present with my students. So, what is my approach? I believe the playing or singing of music is a communal effort. This is a fundamental part of music education. The virtuoso performer must have an accompaniment in the form of backup musicians or a receptive audience to validate what they do. Music is a democratic expression. Even if you have an autocratic conductor of a symphony orchestra, there must be an agreement with orchestra members that the conductor is a responsive representative of the orchestra. I believe that music is a birthright of the human species. Anyone who is interested in it should be encouraged to study it whether they consider themselves talented or not. If a person shows interest, that is the same result as talent. The greater the interest, the more the talent is enhanced. I also see music as healing. The sharing of it overrides division and enmity. It requires harmony and agreement. If people can make music together, they can learn how to converse with one another. Music is true diplomacy. So I started to teach again. I had classes in my home and at studios that my friends let me borrow, like Rob Sayer who innovated his highly successful Music Class for preschoolers. In these classes, I taught mainly folk music in an ensemble setting in the way that I had learned based on the work of my mentor Bess Lomax Hawes (the sister of Alan Lomax) who initiated the concept of folk music classes in the Forties in Boston, and later in the Fifties in Los Angeles, bringing together folk instruments, fiddle, guitar, banjo, mandolin and singing while exploring the folk song tradition. I learned to teach watching her. This experience later became my approach to
teaching when we started the Old Town School of Folk Music in Chicago, Win Stracke, Dawn Greening and Gertrude Soltker and me in the 1950’s. This started as a class that I taught in a private home of the Greening family in Oak Park, Illinois. The Old Town School turned out to be the largest non-profit music school in the country. I left in 1963 to join the folk group, The Weavers. I am an avid jazz enthusiast as well and taught basic jazz guitar in my home in the mid 2000’s here in Georgia. There, I met Bob Bakert, musician, guitarist, songwriter/performer and a skilled business entrepreneur. We agreed to start up the Frank Hamilton Folk School in Atlanta, where I live, patterned after the Old Town School in Chicago. Bob Bakert’s expertise was essential in the development of our dream. The Frank Hamilton School opened it’s doors in 2015. We met at a local church facility for a while and now are in our new home in Legacy Park, in Decatur Georgia. To find out further information google <frankhamiltonschool.org>. In the meantime, with my friend, producer/engineer Bert Elliott, I have put out ten lessons of instructions in the five-string banjo style of Pete Seeger, who was a mentor to many of us. My motivation is to keep his
legacy of banjo playing alive. He innovated his own style of playing and singing. I teach at the School, five-string Pete style, a music theory class and a swing guitar class. Our view at the School is that everyone who enters our doors is automatically a musician. We are all at different levels. Anyone, any age, any skill level is welcome and we rely on students teaching students as well as teachers becoming students and vice versa. We have teachers in guitar, banjo, mandolin, fiddle, songwriting, ensemble classes, and basic music theory. Some classes are in person and some online. Folk music is not only our birthright but is an accessible way to learn music in general by singing, playing in groups. The most
important for everyone here is to have fun and enjoy the process of learning. I hope you will all visit us soon.

Frank Hamilton