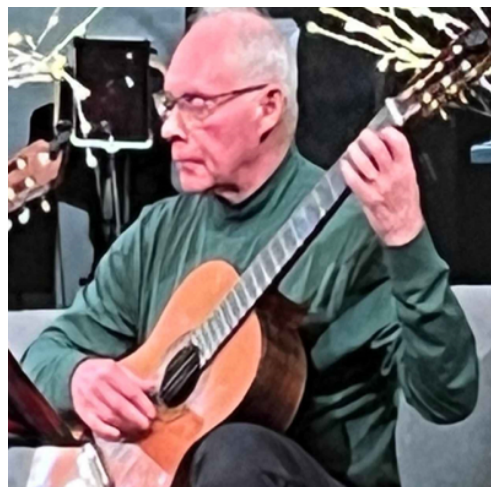


# Syracuse Guitar League ~ My Story

[www.guitarleague.com](http://www.guitarleague.com)

## Russ Yandon

I began playing guitar in January 2016, ten months after I retired as a pharmacist for 39 years at Upstate University Hospital. I had wanted to play guitar since I was a teenager because I had three uncles who played and one uncle in particular, who started as a teenager and kept it up over the years. He was a junior college business teacher in Wyoming, and every summer he would return to Johnsburg in the Adirondacks with his family to spend a few weeks with my grandparents and the rest of the family. He always brought his guitar and there was always a sing-a-long at a family gathering when he came. With that background I wanted to, but never took the time to learn to play until my retirement.



I started on my own with a beginner's guitar and a book for instruction as a new hobby in retirement. I told my friend and colleague at Upstate, Jim Zahra, that I was learning to play. He invited me to go with him to the next Guitar League meeting. I went and enjoyed it so much that I joined right away. I've been going to the monthly meetings since then and picked up a great deal of knowledge from the breakout sessions and found the inspiration to practice from listening to the great players each month.

I have to say that the first two years of learning were a struggle. I was frustrated that I wasn't picking it up and improving as fast as I thought I should have despite my daily practice. At one point I was trying to learn to play bar chords and was gripping the fretboard so hard that I developed trigger finger in my left thumb.

At the December GL meeting in 2017, John Ferrara and his students from his Music School of CNY played holiday songs as is customary for the December meeting. John had a breakout session that night and was there to answer questions. He taught us the proper way to hold a pick and had several other good tips. I decided that night that I needed to take some lessons and told my wife as such when I got home. Lo and behold she bought me a months' worth of lessons from him as a Christmas present that year. I started my lessons in January 2018 and have been taking them ever since. I learned chord connections, making a metronome a standard for practice, play as slow as needed to for learning anything new, fingers close to the frets, proper hand positions, picking patterns, play relaxed, etc. Do not tense up and fight the guitar because the guitar will always win. He taught me to play acoustic guitar with my left foot elevated with a foot rest as classical guitarists do. The last two years I've been working with him learning the skills to play classical guitar.

I have two acoustic guitars- one is an acoustic -electric Martin DXME which was handed down from my uncle in Wyoming when he found out I was beginning to play. The second is a Takamine G-330S which I purchased from Terry at Beat Street Music Co. The third guitar I have is a classical guitar I purchased from John Ferrara. It is an Alhambra model 8P and so far it is bringing me much work and pleasure. I have tried the D'Addario strings from GL and plan on using them on my acoustics. I recently put Cantina Savarez strings with much help on my classical.

My practice routine is left hand exercises, right hand exercises, scales, arpeggios, then new assignments for the next week, and lastly, pieces that I am working on or haven't worked on in a while. I have played at some family gatherings, but not on any gigs as yet. I am still a beginner and feel I have come a long way since I started but have a ways to go before playing before an audience at Guitar League. My goal is to keep practicing and see where the process takes me. I plan on being a GL member forever. I have built up quite a number of songs that we've done at breakout sessions from the last seven years....now if I can learn them all!

That's my story!

Russ Yandon