He played then so quickly and adeptly that I was completely amazed and signed up that afternoon.

"Frank tested my abilities on the guitar and put me in the intermediate class. I learned the picking styles of all the well-known folk players. The walls were covered with posters that had the names of famous pickers and a tablature showing how to play like them. I learned one style every week. Soon I was put into the advanced class.

"I decided to take up the five-string banjo. I didn't have a banjo, so I borrowed one of my guitar's five strings. I put a nail in the neck at the seventh fret and tacked the fifth string under it. Later, I got a Vega long-neck Pete Seeger model. I started playing at the coffee houses on Rush Street and began making some money. One night after working at the Café Reue, I went over to the Gate of Horn. There was a jam session going on that night with the Limeliters, Théo Bikel, and some of the regulars at the bar. Alex Hassles [of the Limeliters] lured me to take out my banjo.

"I played all night and at the end of the evening Alex asked me to audition for them the next day. I got one of their records and learned the songs. The next day I went to Mr. Kelly's and got the job. I've been making my living in the music business ever since.

"Thanks to the Old Town School of Folk Music, I had a solid foundation to work from. The sound of The Byrds was a direct result of the finger-picking techniques guitar students had been singing together for a couple of months and thought we were ready for the big break. Ray, always ready to further his students' careers, gave us our first paying gig ($15, I think). The appointed day came, and we arrived at the address Ray had given us. We discovered we had been engaged to play old-time country music at a Sunday afternoon fashion show at Cabrini Green. The seats in the gym were occupied by husbands who obviously had been dragged there against their wills. We survived our opening numbers without any major casualties, but the mood of the crowd was definitely not improving. Fortunately for us, we got upstaged by the next participant in the fashion show, who had the tightest pair of fluorescent chartreuse hot pants I had ever seen, accompanied by an amazing display of complex harmonic motion. The mood was transformed and we could do no wrong for the remainder of our brief debut." - Don Fretz

"Of course, neither the atmosphere of barely controlled excitement at the school nor the rapid growth in registration from 160 to 400 by 1964 nor the stream of students getting professional gigs would have been possible without a faculty of extraordinary gifts. Stephen Wade describes the man who taught him banjo:

"There was no frilliness in Fleming Brown's classroom. There was a chalkboard, about a dozen wooden chairs, and maybe one music stand. If there were shades on the windows, they were rolled up tight and the bright sodium vapor lights from the street shone in. Our banjo cases were everywhere, tipped against the wall, or in front of our chairs, on the bare floor. The high ceiling intensified the squall of our banjos as we tuned. Then, we each had to take a turn and play what we had worked on since the previous Thursday. No hiding in groups, we played solo for our teacher and our classmates. One time a student came in with a sock inside his banjo to dampen the sound. Looking hard at the man's banjo, Fleming said, 'If you want to play a sock, boy, a sock.' Another time we never got to join on the second half--no milk and cookies for us.

"Firaly, Fleming would play his banjo and sing for us. It was like being on the edge of the world and someone was taking us by the scruff of the neck. 'Listen to this,' he'd say. 'Isn't this a jewel?'

"Not long ago, 87-year-old Kentucky banjo player Virgil Anderson was sitting on a chrono kitchen chair in his living room. His 60-year-old son, Hershel, was over and painting the house when Virgil pulled him in and asked him to play the fiddle with him. One tune they played was called 'Five Miles' asked Virgil what he thought of the tune meant and he said quietly, 'Five Miles, that's when you're five miles outside of town and the law can't touch you.' In Fleming's class, that's where we were: Five miles outside of town."

"The sound of the Byrds was a direct result of the finger-picking techniques I learned at the School." - Roger McGaugh