

## Nick Sibbeston

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NS - My interest in music began when I was a young boy in Fort Simpson. I was fortunate because the *Lafferty* family, *Morris* and *Eddie* and *Peter*, were musicians, guitarists and fiddlers and so they always played for square dances. And so, I would sit there watching them and just really admire them. And eventually when I was a bigger boy, I was able to get a little \$13.95 guitar from Sears Catalog, "Palm Beach" I think was the name of it. So that's where I started learning how to play the chords and spent hours and hours and hours with my cousins behind our house in the grass, in the shade, playing and singing. The music we sang in the old days were just the country and western. I didn't have a radio but others did have a radio and what we heard at the dances, you know *Peter Lafferty* in particular was always singing and eventually as I got bigger, I went to Inuvik where I played a lot of guitar. And then Fort Smith where I played in a little band in Fort Smith towards the end of my high school years and then Akaitcho Hall here in Yellowknife, where we had the "Arctic Ramblers" came about. All of us had played guitar and other instruments formed a band, "Arctic Ramblers" and so there were many guitars, rhythm, not even bass I don't think but someone played lead guitar. We took turns playing lead guitar and *Richard Lafferty* was the fiddler at the time, but we had *Gordy Cardinal*, *Billy Bourque*, and *Alfred Lockhart*, *Isadore Tourangeau*, all these people were the musicians in those early days that we played.

And then from there, I eventually went back to Fort Smith and we had a band there. And so we used to play for summer dances at the armories and again mostly guitar and *Robert Beaulieu* played the drums, *Isadore (Tourangeau)* played lead and I played rhythm mostly. So that was the extent of my music career. After high school and just a couple of years beyond that, I really didn't play much after that. I just played for myself, to the point now where I just play music in church and that's what I do.

MMS - Okay. Going back to the early days in (Fort) Simpson and your youth there. What years would have that have been....

NS - It would have been in the 50s.

MMS - In the 50s?

NS - Yeah. 50s and I didn't have a radio to listen to music, but I would always go to the dancing. Almost every weekend there would be a dance and so *Peter Lafferty* and *Morris Lafferty*, *Eddie Lafferty* and there were other people in town. *George McPherson*, *Albert Tonka* and then there were other people that played. It seemed like in the old days, so many people played guitar and so many people played fiddle. So it was common to go visit and see and hear people playing music. And then the kind of music, in terms of the songs. I remember eventually, my uncle

*Charlie Hanson* got a jukebox in the hotel in the café there and so there was a variety. He would get new, what were hit records, I guess from in Edmonton every month or so. So we would always have the most current songs, sung by *Johnny Cash*, *Johnny Horton*, *Kitty Wells*, *Hank Snow* and people like that. “Everly Brothers” were a big hit in those days.

MMS - Was that the only jukebox in town then?

NS - Yeah, it was the only jukebox and only source of real, good canned music in a sense. Other than that it was just live music at dances.

MMS - At the dances were they mostly playing the traditional, old time fiddle music?

NS - Yep. Oh, for sure. Always square dance tunes, square dance music, waltzes and schottisches and dances like that. And then, *Peter (Lafferty)* would sing some of the songs, *Hank Snow* and *Johnny Cash* and other singers that were current at the time. *Wilf Carter* and people like that. *Hank Snow* was a big singer and very popular in those days.

MMS - Yeah. Was there ever any musicians, mind you a lot of the people that you're talking about at that time were still living off the land and coming in to town...

NS - Yeah, there was a lot of people living in the bush at the time. And in the 50s it was kind of half and half. I would say half of the people were still out on the land, families that made a living hunting and trapping. Some of them were musicians, some of the *Cli* boys played fiddle and guitar and some of the people up the river did and the people in town. There were many families, the *Villeneuves*, the *McPhersons*, the *Sibbestsons*, the *Laffertys* and people like that, lots of people that played music. Music was a big part of my growing up and life and culture in (Fort) Simpson in the early days. That's what formed I think my interest in music and made me enjoy and play music while I was young and into my teenage and young adult years.

MMS - Yeah. Were there any other of your family members that were musically inclined?

NS - No, there was just me. I'm the only one in my family. My mother played a little bit of violin but not very much. But some of my uncles, *Phillip Lafferty* and people like that played fiddle. And like I said, all the... *Jim Lafferty* and that family and *Peter's* sister, *Agnes (Lafferty)*, who's now *Marie*, and *Verl (Lafferty)* and *Bobby (Lafferty)* People like that, all very music family. So they were at the dances and then they occasionally sang. *Peter Lafferty* did most of the singing in those days.

MMS - We're talking the 1950s here. What kind of access, was the road even into (Fort) Simpson?

NS - Not at all. (Fort) Simpson was very isolated and so in those days there was only a winter road and occasionally you'd get vehicles coming to Simpson but it was a pretty closed community. And the only transportation is by river in the summer and then they did have airmail, the mail plane that would come maybe once a week or something like that. But there wasn't

much traveling done by people, just kind of went back and forth from the bush and the idea of going south to Edmonton, it was just unknown.

The only place you went to, when you came to town, there was a big hospital, so a lot of people visited. And I remember some of the people there played music too, you know, *Edwin Lindberg* used to play music and *Eddie Hope* and there used to be music at the hospital too. Some of the patients knew how to play and so they would play music and I remember *Father Posset* would record them. There was a little bit of music provided from there. Other than that, the only other music was in church, the sisters of course and the priest and brothers, they had mass and so they would sing in church. But it was very different kind of music, with the organ and so forth.

So the only chance to hear real music was from the *Lafferty* brothers and from the dances that they had. And a few people would have radio. So they would listen to the radio, particularly in the winter time. So you'd get all these southern stations and hear the music that was popular and played in the south.

MMS - How about from other communities? Anybody coming up the river, down the river? Up the river, from Fort Providence?

NS - Places like (Fort) Wrigley in particular, there were a few people. *Edward Hardesty* in Wrigley played and there were a number of other people that played fiddle and guitar in places like (Fort) Wrigley. There wasn't any communications or travel to the other surrounding communities like Nahanni and Trout Lake and (Fort) Liard. This was much, much later that they had roads. But from (Fort) Wrigley, it was just down the river and so there was a certain amount of travel between (Fort) Wrigley and (Fort) Simpson. And so I was aware that some other people in (Fort) Wrigley played music. Yeah.

MMS - So obviously touring southern musicians and others, they were very-

NS - No.

MMS - ... coming down the river.

NS - No such thing as seeing anybody from the south or from Yellowknife or (Fort) Smith, or anything like that. It was only much later as I became a teenager and traveled to Inuvik to go to residential school and then Fort Smith and then eventually Yellowknife and Akaitcho Hall that you became aware of other people and other young people that played music.

MMS - Yeah. How about electricity?

NS - No.

MMS - How did you get through...

NS - No, we didn't have electricity in our house at all and then eventually I think the *Lafferty* family, *Jim Lafferty* was one of the first families to get power because *Morris (Lafferty)* worked

for the power commission but there was no electricity in town. There was electricity at the community hall in the center of town where the dances were held but apart from that. No everybody was, it was just a little town. And the power when they set it up, I would say in the 50s, it all went to just the white people in town. The hospital, the mission and the army signals and the stores. And then slowly it went to the odd family and then spread throughout the town. But in our own house, we didn't have electricity. We just used candle and cole oil lamp and that was our main source of light after dark.

MMS - So in talking with other people, say from Fort Resolution, they remember when electricity came and they remember when the road came in. And so those events and introductions of technologies, if electricity is a technology, it changes. Did you see that in (Fort) Simpson?

NS - Oh very much so. I remember tape, recording with a tape recorder. I remember it was still pretty crude in its initial stages but *Father Posset* when he recorded the patients in the hospital that made music. And then the *Laffertys* eventually got a little tape recorder too and so we used to tape the music and I used to play guitar good enough to chord and follow the fiddling and *Peter's (Lafferty)* singing. So we would get together occasionally and we made tapes. So we did a bit of that.

And then when I was away at residential school over in Inuvik and then (Fort) Smith, *Peter Lafferty* used to make a tape, him and *Morris (Lafferty)* and they would play music and sing and they would talk on it. And they would send me a tape occasionally, so I had a chance to hear music from home. It was just so good and so big and that was the ultimate in music. I didn't really know very much about the music in the south in a sense but that was the best music that we had. And so it was really good.

MMS - How beautiful that they would think of you that way and even back then to be able to send you a reel to reel tape in the mail.

NS - That's right.

MMS - On the mail plane.

NS - And we would play it over and over and over again and listen to it with all our heart and just enjoy it so much. It became very ingrained into our mind, the fiddle, the square dance tunes and then the songs that *Peter (Lafferty)* used to sing.

MMS - With the introduction of the road, maybe not so much electricity but the road and the accessibility, did that bring more musicians or was it just the....

NS - I remember in the early 70s when the road came to Fort Simpson, an all-weather road came to (Fort) Simpson. I wouldn't say it affected things very much. Of course, people were more mobile, now you can get into your vehicle and drive south to places like Hay River and south to Edmonton. So there was more mobility but in terms of the music, I don't know if it really affected. We didn't have musicians come in. There was, I would say, more travel by people but I

don't know whether it affected... I can't recall anything significant as far as how that affected the music in (Fort) Simpson.

MMS - And it sounds like if you said until the 70s, I would have thought the road would have gone in there in the early 60s or something, but it was...

NS - No, it was in the early 70s that we got a road into Fort Simpson and also before that there used to be a winter road that would go around. And for a couple of months in the winter time, we used to travel on the winter road. So at that time, I was going to university in Edmonton and so I remember one winter I came home and traveled on the winter road with *Peter Lafferty*.

MMS - When you got your \$13.95, sorry I forgot the name of it now....

NS - "Palm Beach."

MMS - "Palm Beach" guitar, this question I always ask is where do you get your instruments? And you obviously ordered it through the catalog.

NS - From the catalog. Oh that was a big, big price too. My grandmother, we were living pretty humbly and we were pretty poor. My grandmother had an old age pension and it would be \$40 a month at that time. So we had that to live on, so there wasn't much cash to spare. So getting \$14.95 or so out of there was quite... it took a long time to put the money together and order it. But when it came, I think it was the nicest instrument and wow, you could play a chord on it and do a run on it and so that was a big... and I just spent hours and hours, that's all I... I spent a lot of time.

I oftentimes would watch *Peter (Lafferty)* and listen to the way he played and then in the next ensuing days I would try to remember the chords and then the tunes that he played and the runs that he made. And so play it just for hours and hours. And my cousin and I, my cousins *Bertha* and *Kenneth (Sibbeston)*, we used to sit behind our house in the shade in the grass and play. I would play and they would sing. We would sing for hours and hours. So we really got into the music and we tried to learn the music and tried to sing and tried to play guitar. And there was a few other boys too that was learning how to play guitar primarily, not so much fiddle but guitar. And so, that was my kind of introduction into music and playing guitar.

MMS - Before you got your own guitar, your "Palm Beach" guitar, were you borrowing other people's instruments? Or did you just want a guitar and....

NS - No, that was it. I used to watch *Peter (Lafferty)* playing guitar and longingly looked at them playing and of course it sounded so good. They were just beginning to electrify, get little things on their guitar that made them louder. Both the fiddle and guitar and get a little speaker. So it was just the start of getting ways of increasing the volume and then recording and so it was very introductory to recorded music and such.

MMS - Where would you get your strings or your picks or....

NS - Well, we just got them. Well, the guitars of course come with a full set of strings. But as far as the guitars, probably from *Peter (Lafferty)*.

MMS - Oh okay.

NS - Just a little piece of plastic. Plastic wasn't very common in those days, so *Peter*, I would have got a guitar pick from *Peter* probably and used that. Even cardboard, a hard piece of cardboard. You used whatever you could.

MMS - Yeah. Did you get some lessons with *Peter* then after you got your guitar?

NS - Mostly just watching him.

MMS - Just watching him.

NS - I never really spent too much time but mostly watching him and occasionally I'd go to their house to visit them and he would play and I would watch him. They would have another guitar, so I would try strumming along, so playing rhythm guitar. So yeah, that was the way I learnt.

MMS - Did you take your turn up on the stage at the community halls or anything like that? No?

NS - No. Not at all, we were so amateur. So un-learnt. We didn't know enough to be up there, it was much, much later as I grew into a young man that I was good enough to play rhythm and go up on the stage to help out.

MMS - Okay.

NS - So in the early days, I just sat and watched from down below, sort of thing. There was a little stage or a little corner where they would play from and I would just watch, sitting there. More interested in the music than dancing.

MMS - Beautiful. Are we still talking the 1950s here? Or early 1960s?

NS - It was 1960 when I went to Inuvik.

MMS - Okay.

NS - Residential school there and there were boys there that... *Richard Lafferty* was there and he played fiddle and there were a few other kids. *Billy Bourque* and myself and a few other boys that played guitar. So I had my guitar there with me. I had actually bought a guitar from *Peter (Lafferty)*. So I took it, it was a "Gibson", a J-45 I think. And so I took that to Inuvik so I had a guitar there. And so from then on, I had a guitar wherever I went. And I went to Fort Smith for two years and then to Akaitcho Hall. So I always had my guitar with me.

MMS - So the chronology, I guess in what age or grade were you at when you went to Inuvik first?

NS - Grade nine.

MMS - Grade nine. Okay.

NS - And then I was grade 10 and 11 in Smith and then grade 12 in Akaitcho Hall in Yellowknife.

MMS - So grade nine to Inuvik then. And maybe you could explain why Inuvik.

NS - Well, as it happened I was living in Fort Simpson then with my grandmother. And so, I had taken grade nine by correspondence because they didn't have teachers at all to teach grade nine. I think the classrooms just went up to grade seven or eight and so I took correspondence, grade nine correspondence and I failed. I didn't know enough to pass so I eventually decided to go to Inuvik. All the kids were getting into this plane, going up to Inuvik. The government had hired a single Otter and it went from community to community picking up kids. I didn't want to be left behind and so I got on the plane and went up to Inuvik. So I was there for a year and so that's how I ended up in Inuvik.

And then the following summer I came back to Simpson. I worked. I was the most surprised guy to find that I had passed grade nine and I remember *Mr. Frey*, he was a principal in Inuvik and I remember towards the end of the school year, called me to his office and he said, "Nick, you just can't play guitar all the time, you've got to study." And so I was the most surprised guy when I passed. And then that summer I befriended *Joe Wager*, who was an electrician. So I wanted to become an electrician so I enrolled to go to Akaitcho Hall in the industrial kind of program. So as it happened, the very last day, the day we were supposed to leave, get on the plane to Yellowknife, the administrator, *Mr. Hancock* said, "There's no more room in Akaitcho. You have to go back to Inuvik," and me and his son, *Richard*, we kind of rebelled and said, "We're not going back to Inuvik."

So we said we were going to quit school. So we quit school for a few weeks and eventually they said, "Okay, there's an opening in Fort Smith. Would you go there in Breynat Hall?" So I agreed to go and so we went. I ended up in Fort Smith and I stayed in Breynat Hall for a few months and eventually transferred to "Grandin Home." They had "Grandin Home" for the boys and another place for young girls. And at the time, the church was interested in making brothers and priests out of young people in the north. So they had a school there in a boarding place where they had young people go and stay there, attended school. So I transferred to that program and so I was there for two years and then eventually I went to Akaitcho Hall.

MMS - Okay. So that's how that worked out. Correct me if I'm wrong, the schools, ie: Akaitcho Hall probably weren't even built when you were up in Inuvik. You probably went up to Inuvik because you couldn't go to Akaitcho Hall?

NS - No, I think Akaitcho Hall was built already because I think I heard of people going there. I know that they had just built the Inuvik residential school, both the Catholic and the Anglican ones and they probably needed to. They probably got as many kids from along the Delta in there,

there was still more room and so they went down the Mackenzie Valley gathering children to go to the school in Inuvik. I think that's how it happened.

MMS - So, if your principal's calling you into his office and going, "Nick, you can't just play guitar all the time," what were you playing musically up there? Who were the other players?

NS - Oh, we were just strumming and singing and *Richard Lafferty*, he knew how to play fiddle. So chording for him. It was just amongst ourselves, it wasn't part of a band or anything of that sort at the time. We would just spend a lot of time when we weren't at school and when we didn't have our chores, we would just play guitar, play music. In one respect it was a good form of entertainment and apart from playing a bit of hockey, you went outside and played a bit of hockey sometimes, you spent a lot of time inside. So it was a good way to while your time away and play your guitar, play music, sing. At an early age I knew that I myself didn't have a good voice to sing so I didn't really pursue that aspect of it, it was mostly just chording for other people and playing along with other people that could play and sing.

MMS - Other players locally, do you remember any of the other local players? And also, just the fact that you're coming from the Dehcho region and you're going up to very different part of the territory and Inuvialuit people and so, the different cultural thing?

NS - Right. I don't remember, in particular. I remember *Billy Bourque* in particular and there were a few other people. *Richard Lafferty* was the fiddler and I would guess there was one or two or three other more people that would have played music, played guitar and sang at the time. It seems like in any group of people, there's always a few that are musicians and so it was the case. And eventually though, when I'd gone to (Fort) Smith, it seems as if there were more kids that played guitar and other instruments.

And then we were introduced to drumming and then bass guitar and so there were more of us, in a sense, that played music. And so we were eventually able to form a band and at the school that we were too, the kids played guitar. This was *Tony Buggins* and there were other people that the boys from Fort Res (Resolution), *Cardinal* boys, people like that, that were also into music. So there was more young people playing music it seemed and so they formed a band. At the residential school they had a band. In fact, eventually the band grew and continued.

A number of years later, when *Karen (Sibbeston)* and I came back to supervise there, some of the boys were still there and they had a band. And we had the band come to Lloydminster that fall and play at our wedding. And so they were good enough and they were really impressive and I know the people in Lloydminster were really surprised and were really amused and glad to see people from the north, native people from the north that could play music so well and play at our wedding dance, so that was really nice.

MMS - Beautiful. So we're still talking early 1960s here, 62, 63, is that sort of the time frame?

NS - Yep, yep.



MMS - From what I understand maybe, again talking with the people from Fort Smith, the different musicians and stuff because the college was there and there was these young people coming in from like you say, Fort Resolution, Fort Simpson and even (Fort) Province that way. There was music everywhere in that town. Did you get a chance to be exposed to any of the local guys or any of that whole local excitement that was happening at that time? Or was it even happening and maybe this is pre-dating that?

NS - I forget who were the musicians in town in (Fort) Smith were because we didn't really go attend dances in town very much. It was always usually at the hostel or at the school. So it was mostly young people that were in high school that were the musicians, the guitarists and the fiddlers and the singers. And so it was more, I would say, high school age and people that were my colleagues in school and in Grandin (College) that played music. Yeah.

MMS - I've heard reference from, I'm not sure if I can remember who it was from but did Grandin College ever have a band program or an orchestra with horns and?

NS - I think they did. They played. I think there was a bit of a band playing trumpets and instruments of that sort. I know that *Bishop Piché* was very interested in having young people play, forming a band. But band in the sense of playing trumpets and drums and instruments like that. Not our type of music but more marching band type of music. So I think the bishop did promote that and there were some students that got into that and began learning how to play the trumpet and trombone and instruments like that which were not usually present in the north. In the north, I think you had mostly just guitar and fiddles in the communities.

MMS - Yep. Small, portable instruments that you can put into the canoe and they don't take up a lot of room, right?

NS - That's right.

MMS - What kind of music would you be playing? What kind of songs would you play?

NS - We'd play instrument tunes that we would hear, "Pipeline," the what do they call? "The Shadows," "(The) Shadows" used to play music and then *Chet Atkins*, people like that. And then, after that then it was just mostly country and western songs that you would play the guitar or fiddle to them, backing up those songs. Rock and roll sort of thing. And we used to play rock and roll you'd jive to. Jiving was the very big dance in those days, so jiving music.

MMS - You were talking earlier before you left (Fort) Simpson about how the pick-ups were starting to be put on acoustic guitars, were you using that on your acoustic guitar? Or were you playing electric guitar?

NS - No, I never played electric guitar too much. I always had my "Gibson" and we had a pick up on it. But electric guitars like the "Fenders" were becoming popular, so some of the guys at Akaitcho Hall had "Fenders" that they played.

MMS - Yep. So you said you were a couple of years in Fort Smith?

NS - Yep.

MMS - Two years?

NS - Two years in Smith and a couple of years in Akaitcho Hall, about a year and a half in Akaitcho Hall.

MMS - So was that a personal choice that you made to Akaitcho Hall or did you get transferred there or how did that work out?

NS - Well, what happened is the “Grandin Home” were phasing out the program, the children that they had, the boys that they had there were all just young children. Grade seven and on, I would say, until about grade eight or so. And so, we were staying there, there was *Robert Beaulieu*, *Leon Sambele*, *Isadore Tourangeau*, and myself that were there but we were kind of the older boys. And so after we got there a couple of years, they said that they needed the room for the younger kids, so we couldn't stay there anymore. So, I went to apply to Akaitcho Hall and that's where I went for about a year and a half after that.

Then *Mr. (John) Radcliffe* who was the supervisor then, he was the one that was interested in having us form a band which we called “Arctic Ramblers” and so, it consisted about eight of us I would say and a lot of guitars. I think there was a drummer and then there was a fiddler, *Richard Lafferty*. So mostly guitars though and so we would sound like a thousand strings, where we got going, we were in unison and great rhythm.

MMS - And playing?

NS - Dance music, rock and roll, the dance music of the day. And, gee, I'll have to think and remember some of the songs but it was mostly just rock and roll. And kids were into jiving and then the odd waltz but it was mostly, I would say, rock and roll music.

MMS - Sort of a blend of the contemporary and the traditional, I guess and striking that balance. Did you play for school dances? Did you play...

NS - We sure did. We played at Akaitcho Hall and then occasionally we'd play at the school. And we even went as far, one time we made a road trip to Hay River to play in the high school there and then I think the other time we played in town, yeah. Yeah.

MMS - Early 1960s Yellowknife, a whole different time there for sure. *John Radcliffe*...was, I've heard he passed away.

NS - Yeah.

MMS - But in talking with *Albert Canadien* and *John Radcliffe's* involvement with *Albert* and “The Chieftones”.

NS - Definitely. Yeah.

MMS - Very extensive.

NS - Definitely.

MMS - I'm so sorry that I didn't get a chance to talk with *John* although I may have had to travel to Britain...

NS - Someone said he was in Fort St. John area.

MMS - No way, okay.

NS - Yeah, yeah, because I think *Philip Gargan* from in (Fort) Simpson had spoken to him one time and he was in an old folk's home in Fort St. John from what I gathered.

MMS - Yeah, like I say I just kind of go, "Who was this guy?" because it sounds like he was really instrumental and encouraging and at the center.

NS - Yeah, he got our little "Arctic Ramblers" going and then he eventually went out to Edmonton and so *Albert (Canadien)* would really know because he was part of "The Chieftones" but I was in Edmonton going to school when they were out at this residential school and that's where he started "The Chieftones" and they became very popular in Edmonton and then they moved down to the states. So *Albert (Canadien)* would have all that story, he would have told you that, eh?

MMS - About *John*, yeah.

NS - Because *Albert* was involved with them.

MMS - Yeah, for sure, a lot more. Okay, understandably so. It's just those different people that come into our lives as young people that are instrumental. You were mentioning the fellow that encouraged you to do, the electrician, to pursue that. Did you do that when you were at Akaitcho Hall? Did you go through that industrial course?

NS - Well, I didn't because I was told the day that we were supposed to leave there that there was no room in Akaitcho Hall.

MMS - Oh, of course.

NS - That's right, so I quit school for a few weeks and eventually they said there was room in Fort Smith at "Breynat Hall", so I went over there and took my grade 10 there.

MMS - Okay.

NS - Grade 10 and 11 and then went to Akaitcho Hall, and eventually finished grade 12 and went to University of Alberta in Edmonton. Yeah.

MMS - Your time in Yellowknife, I guess that's the same question I had with you in Fort Smith, was any of the local players and stuff like that. Do you remember that? I mean, I know you were in Akaitcho Hall and you were in school and you weren't of age and all the rest of that stuff, but...

NS - I was pretty well just Akaitcho Hall bound and I didn't really know what was going on in terms of musically in town, who were the musicians in town and played for the dances uptown. I don't know that.

MMS - And like you say, you finished at Akaitcho Hall and went down to school in Edmonton and then as the years passed by, the guitar was a little bit less and less, right?

NS - That's right, yeah.

MMS - Yeah, okay.

NS - Definitely, yeah.

MMS - Okay.

NS - I got married. I got married, I'm sure that a lot of people will say, "I used to play music and then I got married and then it was a whole different life." No more freedom in that sense of being able to play music and do all the things that musicians do, drink and so forth, party. So that certainly changed my life and limited and diminished my music playing. Certainly with bands anyway. I played at home for the kids and so forth.

MMS - But like you say, you're still playing with the church and-

NS - Yeah, now I do. I play music in a church and just try to play music that people enjoy. Not so much the old church songs, I'm not into singing church songs and what not but music. So in our church in (Fort) Simpson, we sing "Why Me Lord", stuff like that. Nice country and western songs that have a Christian element to it. If any song mentions an angel or God, we'll play it in church. Like "Abba", "I Have a Dream", there's a line in there, "I believe in angels," okay, that's good enough to bring into the church.

MMS - Cool. Can I get down into the technique part. I guess, when you first got the guitar and you were playing chords and rhythm, was there an epiphany-like moment or a time when you realized the difference between straight up chording as opposed to that *Chet Atkins*, *Merle Travis* type of finger picking?

NS - Well, without question. I mean, as you learn to play guitar you naturally want to play some tunes and so you would play... *Johnny Cash* is easy to play because they have runs, you know "I Walk the Line", easy to play those songs. But you get into *Hank Snow* songs and it's a lot harder and it's a lot harder to pick a tune and *Hank Snow* was really good, a lot of his music contains nice guitar melodies that... So you just naturally progress, so to play these tunes and you emulate, you try to copy the way they play. *Chet Atkins* is a complicated player. "The Shadows", their

music and songs like, what's the name... "Pipeline" is a song that we used to play a lot. You try to learn and play those songs and we would succeed to a certain extent but mostly just a lot of practice and a lot of copying and just trying to make... You're playing the sound the same as what you hear in the records.

And then, every song has a portion of the music where you play the tune on the guitar so you, again, just try to play that as good as possible. And also, when you're playing rhythm for a guitar there's always runs and so you learn those. And so you go up and down, up and down, sort of thing as the fiddle music plays, going up and down, well you follow that with a guitar and you follow with runs. I wouldn't say I became really good but I was good enough to play with a band and good enough to play rhythm guitar and a little bit of lead. There were other people better than me and *Isadore Tourangeau* was really good and *Tony Buggins* became a good player. But the best was always *Peter Lafferty*, who was so good, such a good singer and such a good guitar player. He played the banjo too and the mandolin and so he played a number of instruments. Have you had a chance to interview Peter?

MMS - Yes, yeah.

NS - Yeah, would he have told you that?

MMS - No.

NS - Yeah, he played banjo and he played mandolin, yeah. Yeah. Maybe you didn't ask him.

MMS - No, maybe I didn't ask him. He's very modest. He's very humble about everything and it was....

NS - Oh very.

MMS - I almost had to drag some of his stories out of him because he was really humble about it. From just even talking with him as well, he grew up in Fort Simpson and took a job with the power corporation and then that job took him to different places. And so he wasn't in Fort Simpson and then he was down south for a little while.

NS - That's it.

MMS - And then he ended up in Whitehorse and just stayed in Whitehorse.

NS - That's right, yeah.

MMS - So his experience up here was within those very early years when he used to...

NS - And in Whitehorse he played there and sang with various bands and so forth. And I know for a while he was out in Edmonton and I'm aware that at one point, he traveled south and did play semi-professionally in bars and wherever they would have him. So he almost became a full professional but I think that way of life too, is pretty tough. Traveling all the time, playing in

little bars in little communities, little towns. And so that would have been a tough way to make a living.

MMS - Again for me the magic is in how something as specific as that one style of guitar playing came in and came in to the traditional musics that were happening here. And how those fusions if you want to call it, sort of happen. And with the electric guitar coming up here, how that happened in that time that you're talking about. You were almost I guess pre-dated "The Chieftones" and the different people that I talked to, like *Tom Hudson* or *Pat Burke*. And those guys were doing full on rock and roll, the psychedelic stuff-

NS - Yep, definitely.

MMS - ... that electric and *Jimi Hendrix*...

NS - Yep, it's the next generation in a sense

MMS - But in such a short period of time. Within the time that you're playing in the early 1960s to even 1969, when they were there, how much the music changed not only locally but globally with the introduction of the electric guitar. For me it's this chronology, but it's also again, "Okay, so the road came in. What happened? Okay, so you got electricity. What happened?"

NS - Right, right.

MMS - "You got an electric guitar in your hands. What happened?"

NS - That's right.

MMS - Those kinds of evolutionary events that happened up here, much less the political, social and economic forces that were just boiling at that point in time.

NS - There were a lot of changes, a lot of political upheaval and stuff.

MMS - It's such a very short period of time that carried over into the 70s as well but maybe it's a little bit of wishful thinking, but I think the music that you were playing or *Pat Burke* or *Tony Buggins* or take your pick, *Richard (Lafferty)*, *Angus (Beaulieu)*, were sort of the sound track for those times. It was the cover songs and stuff like that, those are the musics that you associate with one of those events that happened, whether it was an assembly or the prince coming or the queen coming to visit or something like that. So the musical part of it is just the vehicle back into that time that way. I really appreciate your time today, *Nick*. Thank you so much.

NS - Yeah. I appreciate this, enjoyable talking. I wanted to talk to you because I knew you would be interested in this sort of thing and you don't think that you're a great contributor in any way, I was just one of the minor ones. But *Peter Lafferty* was certainly a great... and people like *Angus (Beaulieu)* were prominent and *Eddie Lafferty* were just absolutely prominent. And then the next second after that, it's *George Mandevilles* and the *Tony (Buggins)* and so forth and in terms of rock and roll music, it is *Tommy Hudson*, *Pat Burke* and all those guys that came.

MMS - Yeah, and also those very early years without electricity, without radio or anything like that. They were steeped in that traditional old timey music, where if you get into *Albert Canadien* and even *Johnny Landry*, they're traditional songs.

NS - Yeah.

MMS - And then they got an electric guitar in their hands and so it's that whole transition point that I'm really interested in for these interviews. But thanks again so much.

NS - You're sure welcome and I hope you can make... you use a little bit of what I said.

MMS - Oh for sure, for sure.

NS - Grateful.