

# Penny Ballantyne

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Yellowknife, NT

*(NWT Archives, Northern Musicians Project, accession number pending)*

MMS - We're going to start it here because it's sort of a preamble for people. I'm talking with Penny Ballantyne here today, September 13th 2019. If you could tell me about your early years of playing music and how you got bitten by the music bug?

PB - Sure. I grew up in small communities. I was born in Churchill, we lived in Frobisher Bay, now Iqaluit and then Fort Smith. And in Fort Smith I started taking piano lessons with one of the nuns at the convent, *Sister Cote*. So the convent was attached to the hospital. I'd go every day after school and practice because we didn't have a piano at home. So I did a Royal Conservatory thing with her 'til the summer of '67 which is when we moved to Yellowknife. And that summer I bought my first 45 at "Wally's Drug Store" which was somewhere in the city, with "The Loving Spoonful and just got exposed to the music that was starting to happen. I really hadn't heard anything. You'd hear a bit of Beatles on the radio. From time to time you'd hear something but then I sort of discovered the world of records and that you could buy records and all that good stuff. So we moved to Yellowknife and I was-

MMS – Can I hold you to Fort Smith for a while?

PB - Oh sure. Yeah.

MMS - For sure.

PB - Yeah.

MMS - How did you get your records, besides "Wally's"?

PB - My dad had a membership in the Columbia Record company. You'd get these mailers and you could get, if you joined you get 10 records for 10 bucks. So I started just ordering things I hadn't heard of. So one of my favorites from that time was *Doug Kershaw*, "The Cajun Way", which is a fabulous album but just a whole other style of music I'd never heard before. And jazz. I ordered a *Chet Baker*, *Motown*, *Aretha (Franklin)*, *Marvin Gaye*.

MMS - Did you know those names of the people that you were buying or...?

PB - No.

MMS - ... was it just sort of random thing, pick a jazz album?

PB - Shot in the dark, shot in the dark.

MMS - Or did the record company actually because I think sometimes they would just go, we'll send you 10 albums. Give us \$10 and we'll send you 10 albums.

PB - No, but they had the, the printed material was by category. So it was just shot in the dark stuff but it just opened my eyes to how big music was because up until then, all I really knew was what was on the radio which was a lot of country and western which I still love. And then the classical I was getting exposed to through my piano lessons and then the whole Columbia Records thing opened up bigger stuff.

MMS - Yeah, yeah. For sure. The radio at that time, you would have been getting, would you be getting CFYK? Would you be getting "The Voice of the Golden North" or was it from here or was it another station?

PB - I don't recall honestly in Fort Smith. I have really vivid memories of being in Churchill and hearing *Hank Williams* songs and things. In fact, just a little side thing, I was just with my parents at their 65th wedding anniversary and I was taking them on a car trip to the southern Okanagan. We were going to be in a car for a day and I made a playlist of everything I could remember from growing up and they just loved it. They knew all the songs but a big part of it was country and western stuff and *Johnny Mathis* and records my parents had. "*Herb Alpert* and the Tijuana Brass", "The Limelighters". Just crazy stuff. Then we moved to Fort Smith that summer and I ended up in *Mrs. Dagenais'* grade eight class at St. Pats and she became my piano teacher. So I continued on with the Royal Conservatory stuff which I really, really liked. My parents bought me a piano. I finally had a piano at home which was great. And then in grade nine, I remember it was the spring, I got a call either from *Gary Tees* or *Tony Gilcrest* saying that they heard I played the piano and was I interested in auditioning for their band, "The Stained Glass Illusion" which came right out of the blue. But I had been playing a lot of stuff by ear and so they came over and I had the piano upstairs. But I can't remember how we got this but we had this very traditional kind of organ that I had in my bedroom with the two keyboards and the pedals and everything. Kind of like what your mom had. So I remember them sitting on my bed in my basement bedroom and I played "House of the Rising Sun" and "Light my Fire" and whatever else it was. I played a bunch of stuff and they said, "okay do you want to be in the band?" I said, "sure." And that was how that started.

MMS - Grade nine?

PB - Grade nine, yeah. End of grade nine.

MMS - So you were 13 or 14.

PB - So I was 13, yeah.

MMS - 13, wow.

PB - Yeah. So I mean, in retrospect I was pretty young to get exposed to what ultimately you end up get exposed to when you play in a rock and roll band anywhere, right? But musically it was really, really fun. So we would practice at *Tony's (Gilcrest)* place. His parents were great. It was right across from St. Pats school or at *John's (Tees)* place because *John* had his own place so we would practice there too.

MMS - Who would've been in the band at the time that you told me about?

PB - *John, Gary, Tony* and me.

MMS - Oh wow.

PB - Yeah, just the four of us.

MMS - Just the four of you.

PB - Yeah.

MMS - Wow. So yeah. I've seen some pictures of "The Stained Glass Illusion". You were fairly progressive for this town.

PB - It was really fun. First of all, *John* and *Gary* are just so incredibly talented. There was nothing that they couldn't play and they were really tuned into the new music that was going on. So we were playing "The Animals", we were playing "The Doors". We were playing, not a lot of "Beatles". They were more into the edgier kind of stuff and they were just great. They were super supportive to me as somebody coming in and went as far as, they got me a keyboard so I could play.

MMS - Wow.

PB - They'd set up my stuff for me all the time. It was kind of like having big brothers. They were very protective. So it was great and it was a lot of fun.

MMS - So what kind of places would you be playing? What kind of events?

PB - Sure. So we played school dances and there was this kind of friendly competition between us and "The Universal Music Machine" "UM<sup>2</sup>" with *Tom Hudson*. I mean, what a voice that guy has. They were so good. They were super, super good. *Marc Whitford*, all those guys. So we would kind of alternate. They'd come play a dance at St. Pats, we'd play a dance at Sir John or the student councils who picked the bands would kind of ... In retrospect I think it was very fair, they gave us both shots. A lot of school dances and then whatever we would privately be hired for, event parties or dances at "The Elks". They used to have open dances at "The Elks" upstairs when it was where "The Twist" is now, right?

MMS - Yeah.

PB - So we used to play there a lot, especially in the summertime. We played "Raven Mad Days" in the back of trucks. We played, probably our most famous gig was playing for *Princess Anne* and *Prince Charles* when they came with their parents in 1970 for the NWT Centennial year. So we were hired for the youth event, I don't know what the Queen and Prince Phillip were doing but I think they were at some stuffy dinner. So they had this youth event for *Charles* and *Anne* down at the beach on Frame Lake when that used to be a beach.

MMS - Wow.

PB - Remember when you could ride your bike out to the beach and spend the day there?

MMS - Yeah.

PB - So that was there. So they had us playing and they came in. I remember they went right by us and none of us were impressed that it was royalty. My grandmother who's English, was visiting at the time and was just appalled that I was going to play in my jeans. Anyway, we played and then I missed meeting *Prince Charles* because he came over at the break apparently to meet the band but I had gone to get a hamburger so I missed him. But the write up in the "Edmonton Journal" was *Princess Anne* and *Prince Charles* walked on this dusty beach at 9:00 in the evening because of course it was summer and bright, to the deafening cacophony of the local band. I remember having to look up what cacophony meant and it wasn't good. I remember telling the guys in the band that we didn't make a great impression on the "Edmonton Journal" reporter. But anyway, we had fun.

So we did those kinds of things. Then at the same time I started playing with *Alex Czarnecki* and *Wilf Schidlowsky* in the band that *Alex* formed. *Alex* was my grade nine English teacher and of course I had *Wilf* for homeroom I think in grade nine. Then that year *Alex* arrived with a whole bunch of young teachers. *Gary Loehr*, *Gerry Soretsky* There was a whole group of them that arrived en masse and they weren't a lot older than we were. At this time I was 15 and they were probably in their early 20s. So I was invited to start playing with them and then that was really different because of course, *Alex* came from jazz background. So we were playing a lot of jazz standards which I really, really loved and he was really, really talented musically.

And of course *Wilf* had this really solid country and western background so we were this kind of weird amalgam of country and western and jazz and "Knock Three Times on the Ceiling if you want me" like whatever was playing on the radio. We had this standard gig at "The Legion". I think it was "The Legion", downstairs. Anyway, for a while there we were playing like, every Friday and Saturday night. So juggling between the two bands. So sometimes I didn't play with *Alex* and *Wilf* because they came after but the thing that I remember vividly about playing at "The Legion" was, I was really young but I was getting this exposure to the really heavy drinking culture that was going on in Yellowknife at that time. You kind of go in there to set up and you'd kind of see the evening progress. And inevitably there was a fight or tears. I mean, there were a lot of people having fun. That was a majority of people were having fun and on the dance floor and having a great time. But there was this kind of dark edge to it that... and it was so smoky. I mean I'd go home at 2:00 in the like morning, we played 10:00 til 2:00. I'd go home and I'd have to wash my hair because I couldn't stand it, it was so smoky in there. But we had a rotation of different drummers that came and went but the constants were *Alex* and *Wilf* and *Huguette Duncan* who sang occasionally with the band, who had a beautiful voice. *Lucille Starr* was this French Canadian singer and she had "Quand Le Soleil Dit Bonjour Aux Montagnes" ("The French Song"). People would just start crying, of course, they'd had a few drinks by then but she just had this beautiful voice that was just so soulful and could just really bring a tear to your eye, so.

MMS - Wow.

PB - Yeah. So that continued until about grade 11 and then I quit both bands because it was really cutting... I was starting to get really serious about school and I was doing my grade nine Toronto Conservatory and I was getting really squeezed for time. Frankly, I was getting tired of the bar scene too. I started to find it a little depressing and I just thought, you know what, I'm just not really digging this anymore. So I quit both of them and the guys were great. Like, I just don't feel like this is for me anymore and with *Alex*, he got the, I need to kind of focus on school thing. Yeah, so I stopped.

MMS - Sure. So that was sort of 1969, 70ish right there.

PB – Yeah, well about 1970. I graduated in '73 so it would have been about '71 that I stopped because the last two years I didn't play and I just focused on the classical stuff. So fast forward to about 1977, I was through university and I moved to the Yukon. When I was in the Yukon I kind of got reconnected with music there because of the people that I was hanging with. I had a boyfriend over there named *Alex Jones* who was kind of like a poet, performing arts guy. So I started doing piano background while he was performing. So we performed at “Farrago” at the folk festival the year that *Stan Rogers* was there which was amazing. I mean, we're a minor, minor act, believe me.

MMS - Yeah.

PB - But just reconnecting and getting back into that scene again. And then I was really good friends with a woman named *Kathy Cross*. So *Kathy* and I actually wrote some things together and we both came over here to play the first “Folk on the Rocks”. Because, well, I knew *Rod Russell* really well because I used to hang with all the hippies in town when I was in high school.

MMS - Yeah. Of course.

PB - That's where a lot of the new music was coming from too because these people were coming from Montreal and Toronto and the south and they were bringing the music they were listening to with them. Anyway, I got in touch with *Rod*. We sent a cassette tape sort of audition from Whitehorse and then we came over and played the first “Folk on the Rocks” and played some original stuff which was fun. Then after that, I moved back to Yellowknife and started having a family. I taught piano for a while at home. The years I was home with my kids, I was giving piano lessons and stuff and that's about it. And now I just play for fun.

PB - Yeah. That's it.

MMS - Can I rewind?

PB - Sure.

MMS - Let's go back to Fort Smith, just because of the history, I know you were really young when you were there.

PB - Yeah.

MMS - But obviously pre 1967 and just even leading up to 1967 there was the competition, whether Fort Smith was going to be the capital.

PB - Oh God, yeah. Oh yeah.

MMS – Or whether Yellowknife was going to be the capital. So that whole thing was sort of going on.

PB - For sure.

MMS - But the other thing is when I'm talking with people like *Pat Burke* and *Tom Hudson* and all the rest of that stuff was the music scene there was insane. *Johnny Landry* as well and sort of even from *Johnny's* being in Fort Providence, it's like a choice between Akaitcho Hall and Fort Smith. For me it would've been, well the obvious choice is Akaitcho Hall because that's what I know. But *Johnny* was even saying, no, we decided to go with (Fort) Smith. So (Fort) Smith was happening. There was all kinds of local bands, they were having Battle of the Bands. Do you remember any of that?

PB - Yeah. It's kind of coming back to me. There was a really good music teacher at JBT, at Joseph Burr Tyrrell (JBT) High School in Fort Smith where the kids from Akaitcho went. His name was *Roger Tripp*. His younger brother and sister, they had a band, he was really young. And I just remembered there was lots of interesting music at assemblies, that there were a lot of students playing, that kind of thing. Also, in 1967 during some tenure, there were these concerts that toured around which you probably heard other people talk about. I remember seeing *Ian and Sylvia* in the JBT school gym and just being blown away by *Ian and Sylvia* who again, had a really unique sound that we were just all starting to discover here because for the first time we were starting to see records in the stores which was a really new thing. We didn't really have a lot of before.

Wow. And there was a music teacher that was there at JBT.

PB - Yeah. *Mr. Tripp*. T-R-I-P-P. And other people from (Fort) Smith of that era would probably be able to tell you a little more. When I left, I only had one year of high school there, I was in grade seven. So band didn't start until grade nine so I didn't have a personal experience. I just remember being aware that I remember assemblies where different students would come in. Oh my God, there were so many talented kids at "Grandin" (College). There were so many talented kids at "Grandin".

MMS - I was going to ask you about that. Again, you were really young. You weren't going to "Grandin" but you were in the community and that influence was there.

PB - Oh, yeah, yeah. And it was small so we did all hang out. So *Steve Kakfwi*, *Antoine Mountain*, *Rosa Washie*, as she was at the time. *Bernie Masazumi*, *John T'seleie*, *Richard McNeely*. We saw each other every day in the hallway.

MMS - Yeah, beautiful.

PB - Yeah, it was small.

MMS - The move to Yellowknife in 1967, like you say, your dad came up here in the summertime. So he got here a little early because from talking with other people as well, it sort of seemed like in December those poor people came up on the plane from Ottawa and stepped off...

PB - Yeah, yeah.

MMS - ... and were just like oh my God, what have I done? And moved families and everything like that. That workforce sort of landed here in order to put together the backbone of a government

PB - Yeah.

MMS - In that respect and brought their families with them. Coming from Fort Smith to Yellowknife, were you aware of that sort of energy that was happening at the time?

PB - Yeah. And it was interesting because, well, my parents came up in, somewhere in the wintertime and I stayed and I just stayed with the neighbour's family to finish off grade seven and then I came up in the summertime but one of the things I vividly recall from that time and you might too because you guys were just living down the street, is that the northern families really didn't interact socially with the people who came from the south. So I remember my parents talking about, or my mom talking about the higher ups you know, that they didn't really associate with. So there was this, I think this social stratification that was really interesting. People from the south came up and felt like they were in the middle of nowhere. We came from Fort Smith and thought we'd come to the big city.

MMS - Yeah exactly.

PB - So it was a really different experience and I think the people who came from (Fort) Smith and from smaller places to Yellowknife with the government, they stuck together and they really didn't interact with the people who were coming from Ottawa or the military or the RCMP or wherever they were recruiting people from for the senior positions.

MMS - Interesting. Just even the whole dynamic of that from 1967 to I would imagine you probably remember the first time that you walked into "YK Radio"?

PB - Yeah. Yeah.

MMS - I don't know if-

PB - Oh yeah. I mean, they were great, right, the *Glicks'* and that whole area of downtown used to just be, it was just so busy and bustly and you know with "YK Photo" with *Gerry Rieman*. They'd have *Bob Wilson*, they always were hiring young kids locally. Like *Pat Monaghan* was working at "YK Radio". The *Williams*, they always had these young people employed doing all these things. All guys, come to think of it. What was up with that? I guess the other thing that, I know you have heard from so many people, was just the work that *Wilf (Schidlowsky)* did to nurture young musicians too. I remember this being very much a thing when I was in high school, was that the boys were able to go and learn how to play guitar with *Wilf*. There never was a girl in that group and it was almost something that you understood. I never questioned it at the time. I do now. But at the time, it was just like the boys did shop and we did home ec. It's just, that was something that was available to the guys but that's where *John* and *Gary (Tees)* and a lot of the other guys got their start, was *Wilf* on his own time.

MMS - Not even as a music teacher in school. It was extracurricular.

PB - Not even as a music teacher but just something he wanted to share with these guys. It was great because look what came out of that.

MMS - Yeah. And still, the *Vince Gauthiers'* the *Norm Glowachs'*, *John* and *Gary Tees*.

PB - Yeah, it's pretty cool.

MMS - And it's like, okay how many years later, 50 plus?

PB - Yeah, we all owe a lot.

MMS - Yeah. Exactly, to those guys.

PB - Oh, I'll tell you a really funny story of something that happened once. Oh my God. This was with *Alex (Czarnecki)* and *Wilf (Schidlowsky)* in the band and we were playing a dance at "The Elks". I don't know what kind of dance it was but I have two funny stories. So one is, for some reason whoever was sponsoring this thing decided it would be entertaining to have a stripper at the intermission. So there was a stripper. I remember this beautiful young woman who had to have been in her early 20s, did this full on strip tease in the middle of the dance floor and I didn't know that that was going to happen. So I used to be in the habit, I'd bring my book to these things because I'd get bored at halftime. So I was sitting on the floor behind my keyboard with this big Leslie speaker so I had this nice little cave back there.

MMS - Safety.

PB - I was sitting back there reading my book and I'm looking up and I'm realizing, God this woman's taking off, oh my God. She's got this creepy looking guy who's with her who's playing the cassette player and it's the boom ba kind of music that you would associate with that and I realize, holy crap she's taking off her clothes. Well doesn't she, as she strips off everything and come and deposit it in my lap. So I can't move. I'm kind of trapped there with this growing mound of her clothing growing in my lap and my most strong memory is how heavily perfumed it was. The scent of this cheap perfume coming off all this stuff. And then she's pretty much stark naked and comes over and says, "thank you" and takes up all her clothes and runs into the lady's washroom and gets dressed and they leave. That was the evening's entertainment. Unbelievable. Then my other really funny memory, oh my God. I shouldn't name names so I'll tell you off the tape who it was because this person's very well known. But it was the age of the streaker. We're playing again in the same venue but a different dance. And out of the men's bathroom comes a quite prominent member of our community, stark naked, streaks from one end out of the men's bathroom up to the front of the bar, all around the dance floor once and back into the men's bathroom. I just remember his wife getting up and leaving and we're all going, oh man he's going to be in the dog house for such ... Apparently he was for quite a while. It was kind of, you know, it was wild back then. But I remember at the time just going, huh. This is what's happening.

MMS - Yeah. Well it's not necessarily clean fun but nobody went to hospital, nobody went to jail.

PB - Yeah. No harm really I guess.

MMS - But here we are.

PB - But you would never see it now, in these politically correct times. You would never see that kind of thing.

MMS – But I was going to say we're still talking about it 50 years later so it's gone on in the history that way.



PB - We did get a gig to go play the grad in Inuvik which was really fun, with "The Stained Glass Illusion".

MMS - Wow.

PB - So we went up one June. It would've had to have been '70 maybe, 1970. Maybe '71. And they flew us up to Inuvik and I remember because *Tom Zubko* and his younger brother *Kenny* met us at the airport. We were billeted out different places and I was staying with *Peggy Mercereau*. We knew the *Mercereaus'* from Fort Smith and they were another family that had ended up in Inuvik. We played their high school grad which was really fun. So it was really fun just to get out to another town.

MMS - Yeah, exciting for sure.

PB - Yeah, it was great. We had a blast. We had so much fun that weekend. Oh my goodness.

MMS - Wow, Inuvik, 1970.

PB - Yeah, yeah, yeah. They had a pretty good party scene going on there too, for sure.

MMS - That would've been start of the oil, probably the oil....

PB - Yes. I remember being struck at just how busy it was up there. There was a real energy in the town and a lot of young people. The other cute thing I remembered, it really was the air because it happened too, was driving around with the *Zubko* boys and how everybody in Inuvik was flashing each other the peace sign as you'd pass another vehicle. It was all that flower power, summer of love kind of time. It was still permeating up here too. It was kind of cool.

MMS – A question just out of the blue. How much were you exposed at that time to the traditional musics up here, either the fiddle music or the drum dancing and stuff like that?

PB - Yeah, not at all.

MMS - Not at all?

PB - Not at all. When I was going to school, you wouldn't have even known that that existed, even though I was going to the catholic school where a lot of indigenous, local indigenous kids were going to St. Pats. Akaitcho Hall was mostly for indigenous kids out of town but we had all the *Erasmus* kids were in our class. *Phillip Mercredi*, the *LeMouels'* were all going to St. Pats. But it didn't happen. It wasn't really until later when my late husband *Mike (Ballantyne)* was the MLA for Yellowknife North and we started going to community events in Dettah and Ndilq and going to drum dances and things like that. When I was working, especially for the housing corporation, I had a gig for a couple years where I went to almost every community in the NWT and Nunavut to do the first housing needs surveys. Often because of the way the flights worked and everything, you'd be in communities for a couple weeks at a time. So I was lucky enough to catch some community events where there would be dances. That's where I would hear whoever it was who played locally. I just remember, that's where I have those memories of how cool those community events were in terms of people showing up and having such a nice time and dancing.

There was no drinking. Communities were dry and it was such a nice vibe and I remember thinking how different it was to the gigs I had been playing when I was younger in Yellowknife that were so alcohol soaked. Often a lot of drugs too and how out in the communities it was just, felt so pure. It's like it was just the music and the people. And all generations which again was something very different than what I had experienced here where it was everybody in town was coming out. So you could be in Pangnirtung and there'd be a square dance with a squeeze box and a fiddle. And I remember there were guitars or you would be in Aklavik and there would be something going on there. You'd go and listen and there'd be fiddles. But I just remember being struck at just how much more I liked the community stuff and how much more comfortable I felt because you could just really relax and be there. There wasn't all this stuff going on around the edge.

MMS - This would have been in late '70s, early '80s.

PB - Yeah. Late '70s.

MMS - And even then that you can talk about the communities being isolated from the rest of that stuff and pre Nunavut separating.

PB - Yeah, mid to late '70s. Yeah. Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. No, I mean it was very alive. And it was really good. It was really, really good. It was a real privilege to be able to be there.

MMS - You would have caught that generation of old timer, those people that had been playing since the '30s and the '40s and the '50s. The *Wally Firths'* or the *Morris Laffertys'* or any one of those guys that way.

PB - Yeah. And I also remember because when I traveled I'd always connect with people my own age in the communities. That's how I met *Rassi Nashalik*, I was working for St. John ambulance and showed up in Pangnirtung and I'd look for somebody my own age to help me translate little hand written posters to say how there's first aid at the high school on Friday night, come on down. But you'd go to people's houses because hospitality was huge in the community so you'd always be invited to come over to somebody's house. Then granny would be sitting on the floor on a mattress in the corner and she'd have the little squeeze box and she'd just be playing some Scottish reel. It was just part of the ... Nobody thought anything of it. It was just what people did. I feel really lucky to have had just the tiny glimpses I did. But I remember how it felt and just how warm and pure it just really felt that it was just people coming together and the music being what was knitting it all. Really cool.

MMS - As you've said before, a very brief time that you were here but there was so much going on and I'm just sort of trying to get a snapshot of that kind of interaction from yourself. But I mean, you obviously had lots of experience living in Frobisher Bay, living in Fort Smith...

PB - Oh, yeah, yeah.

MMS - It wasn't as if you'd just moved up here from Ottawa...

PB - Not at all. No, no. No. I felt weird when I went south. That was the adjusting for me was going south. But no, I always felt really comfortable in the little communities because I've grown up in really small places. I was really used to being one of the few non indigenous people in a community I grew up

with that. So I never felt weird about ... Because I'd always felt very welcomed, all my friends were indigenous because there wasn't anybody else to be friends with.

MMS - Yeah. Exactly.

PB - So I always felt really comfortable and at home in communities.

MMS - And vice versa, for them. They'd get a vibe off of Qallunaat or a white guy or whatever. And it's just like okay no this guy's not cool or all right this girl's cool. Cool. Come on over for dinner and stuff like that because they know you get it, right? Because that's been your experience. I think for those of us who have grown up here, it's a bit of a gift.

PB - Oh it's such a gift. It's such a privilege. Because I got to go to every community and I think there were like 56 of them at the time and I'd spend at least a month in each one of them over a period of a couple of years that I was doing that work. You get these, "do you want to come on the boat, we're going sailing or we're going to go see my grandma's camp." So I have vivid memories of being in Grise Fiord in July and the ice is still out in the ocean and going out at 2:00 in the morning. Like having somebody knock on the door where I was staying and saying, "hey we're going to grandma's camp, do you want to come?"

And saying, "yeah sure." Getting up and the sun is shining in the sky and the ocean is this gorgeous turquoise and you're going in and out of the ice that's all chunky and floating. And you end up on this gravel beach where there's some tent frames and Grandma's cooking up the baby seal that somebody caught and it's the most delicious thing you ate in your life. You just have these magical, magical experiences that stay with you forever and you just get to have a glimpse of how people lived so in tune with their environment. And just how cool they are, just welcoming, calm, just really happy with everything they have and just deeply connected to their environment. It's just such a gift.

MMS - Yeah, for sure. The generation thing too is something that I keep getting pinged by. The time when we were growing up and having those experiences and the experiences that you were talking about with those elders again. It just sort of goes back and they're basically carrying on the same way that they have carried on for hundreds, if not-

PB - Mm-hmm (affirmative). Thousands. Yeah.

MMS - ... thousands of years, right?

PB - Absolutely.

MMS - So there you are being able to experience that.

PB - Yeah, I remember when TV was introduced and I was traveling in communities at that time and I remember arriving in Arviat in February and going into the co-op hotel and all the staff were gathered around these big projection TVs and they were watching "All My Children". And they're like, "your lunch is in the oven, we're busy, we're watching". Like they couldn't tear them... and I remember thinking, oh my God. This is what indigenous people in the north are going to think white people are like in the south, that they're like these soap operas because that's what we're showing them. That's what's on TV.

That's what they're being exposed to. But TV also brought music too because I can remember and you lived just down the street, you guys were probably watching the same stuff we were watching a few doors up because there was a "*Don Messer's Jubilee*" and "*Singalong Jubilee*" and things like the "*Sonny and Cher*" show. Things that were also bringing music into northern households and different music than we had been hearing. But just the exposure. Guys like *Gene MacLellan* and *Anne Murray* who was singing on "*Don Messer's Jubilee*" at that time and just... Oh God, I remember seeing *Bruce Cockburn* on TV, on some CBC thing. The first time I'd ever been exposed to anything by *Bruce Cockburn* and he was playing the piano. I remember he had this curly afro and he was playing a tune called "*Musical Friends*". And I mean it was just a catchy and great little song. But yeah, just starting to get these outside influences coming in.

MMS - Yeah. Coming in through television. Coming back to Yellowknife, part of what I've come to realize over the years here as well is just with the gold mining activities and between Con and Giant. I've always described Yellowknife to people as like really cosmopolitan. It's like we have these cultures from all over the world that are here in this very small town.

PB - True.

MMS - So even at that time and that age, we had this diversity of people because these guys were hard rock miners from Europe or from wherever in the world and they were here.

PB - Absolutely.

MMS - So they were bringing their families and they were bringing their cultures and their foods and their musics and stuff. Did you ever get to witness any of that?

PB - No. Not any of the music, certainly the culture. One of my best friends in high school was Italian and I think our cultural exposure was limited to asking her dad if we could have a bottle of wine to bring over to my parents which my parents never saw and found out years later that we did this over about a two year period almost every weekend. And being absolutely mortified that they had never reciprocated or thanked her parents for all this wine that she and I had pilfered from the family wine cellar. But we would be bringing it to parties of course. You know through my friend, I do remember just I mean that was where I first ate a pizza was over at her house and the food was amazing. I remember when the old (Hudson) Bay used to have food at the grocery section and it was all Italian ladies working in there. You could get fresh basil and things way back in the '60s that then you didn't see after that closed down, you didn't see for another 30 years in Yellowknife because they were canning the tomatoes and they had good cheese and things but again you didn't see.

MMS - More exposed to the food and wine.

PB - Yeah.

MMS – than to the music.

PB - I actually don't remember being exposed to any of the music, sadly. I'm sure it existed.

MMS - Yeah. Well first off, like I say, the wine was probably really good.

PB - Yeah, it was good.

MMS - You were spoiled right off the bat because of that. It probably had a pretty good punch to it there too.

PB - Oh yeah. Yeah.

MMS - The town in those years that you're talking about with the indigenous people here and mixed blood people that were here, people that were coming in from all over the world here and here we are and when we moved here in '64 it was like 4,000 people. Maybe in the time that we're talking about it was around eight or 10. So everybody still knew each other and so there was this interaction, going to the grocery store, getting your hair done, haircut, whatever. Working or whatever. So there was this interaction. Even *Alex (Czarnecki)* sort of talks about that at the Commissioner's Balls and you're dancing away and there's the Commissioner and all of these ministers. And there's the guy who pumps up your-

PB - Your sewage, yeah.

MMS - ... your sewage every day and you're dancing and there was no, it was just this level playing field that was there. Again, we'll rewind. Going back to the very late 1960s because the other part that I sort of recognized with the people that I've known in my life and through that time, they came up here as young people to pay off the student loan. Correct me if I'm wrong but my take on it was OK, so the government had moved in here in '67 and so then for the next three or five years it was like we need office space, we need housing, we need. So there was all of these young tradespeople or not tradespeople but just, there was work up here. They in turn brought their musics up with them and their musical experiences. I'm thinking of the *Sandy Wilson's* and the *John Telgens'* and those guys and they had already played down south for a while so they came up here and they were pretty shit hot so that kind of changes everything. But just the influx of young people, players or not players, musicians, non-musicians. But again, pre Anik satellite, pre any kind of technology, the meeting places was in the bars and "The Elks" hall dances and if you could get somebody to sign you in, into the club room and stuff like that.

PB - That's right. Oh God yeah. It was so relaxed back then. I mean you wouldn't have had a 15 year old person playing in a licensed establishment now but nobody thought anything of it, at all. But yeah, you make a good point about it isn't just the musicians but it's the people who come who support music and love music. So they will go to the concerts and they'll go to the venues. Nowadays they would buy to download the music or they understand how it works, that are just as important too.

MMS - Again, even that age demographic that came up here to take advantage of that employment that was happening and people were just coming out of their universities or colleges and the government was looking for people. So I can just sort of see a town, mining town and these generations of people that go back to whenever the mines kicked up after the second World War and then in the late '60s all of a sudden there's all these young people, all these hippies.

PB - All these hippies arrived. Oh God, yeah.

MMS - And the pot smoking.

PB - Yeah, yeah, yeah.

MMS - All that stuff and-

PB - For sure.

MMS - ... how threatening I guess.

PB - I guess the thing was, is because Yellowknife I think has always been a place, *Mike (Ballantyne)* used to say the north attracts people that are really comfortable being on the fringe. If you really need your manicured house and your gated community, you're not going to like it here. But people who are like, I can really be myself here and I can do my own thing here, these are people that love the north. The Yukon was very much the same. It attracts people that really want to be somewhere really different than where they come from. For us who grew up here, it's just home but for other people, they're like wow this is wild. Up here you can have a house boat. You can live on Jolliffe Island. You can go put a TV out on the Burwash Point. Nobody's going to bother you which is what it was like in the '60s and early '70s here.

I remember being on Jolliffe Island, there used to be a bunch of old oil drums up there. So people would party over there and then everybody would be beating on the oil drums. And then *Charlie Sanders*, you would hear him yelling going, "Joliffe Island, shut the fuck up." People are trying to sleep and the sound carries over the water. And everybody goes, "oh. We woke up *Charlie*, party's over". Time to do something else. But there was an upright piano that was sitting out on the dock all summer on Joliffe Island that had a tarp that somebody remembered, go and put the tarp over if it rained but you could just sit out there and play the piano. It was beautiful, it was fabulous.

I guess the other thing is, the impact that all that music in the '60s in particular really had on what was going on socially, like with the Vietnam War and the whole protest movement and the idea that music could be a force for social change, that was such a huge impact on the '60s culturally in North America and Europe. I think those kids who had grown up in the south at that time who were coming up in the '60s and the '70s were bringing that kind of really deep commitment to music with them because young people were really into, it was the music of our time. It was telling us about the age we were living in. Whether it was *Bob Dylan* and *Joan Baez* singing protest songs about the war. If you listen to that whole genre now, "Country Joe and the Fish", there were so many anti-war songs and music was such a huge part of the anti-war movement. That was a huge part of all young people that were really mobilized around an issue which then was the Vietnam War. Sometimes you think, wow if we could just get that same kind of energy behind climate change, maybe it's there and I'm not hearing it, maybe you know of it.

But I'm not seeing the same kind of musical kind of alignment behind an issue the way there was about the war in Vietnam, where musicians were so politicized about that issue and brought their musical influence to bear. Music is so influential with young people, as we saw with Vietnam and the anti-war movement. When is that going to happen around climate change and the environment because music is even more available now, right? Everybody's got music on their phone and in their pocket and it's with them all the time. But where's the protest? Where's the realization of just what an incredible political instrument music can be.

MMS - That's a really good point. Very good point. Again, that's the magic of that time up here. Everything that you've espoused about what was happening here was also happening in the Yukon. It was wild. It was wide open, a very magical time that was up there. And as you describe, sort of musically as well, that would've been the same thing happening there as would've been happening here. That younger generation coming in from the south.

PB - If anything, I remember when I went there thinking that wow, this is on steroids over here because it was so much more, so many more musicians, so many more opportunities to play, so many more venues because they already had "Farrago (Music Festival)" which was well established. They also had "Frostbite" (Festival). But I just remember that you could go and hear at so many different venues, bars, "The Kopper King" out on the highway just had an amazing house band that were so good with *Brian McCutcheon* and *George McConkey* and *John Stein* was playing up in Dawson.

It was so rich. There were so many, many, many, many musicians and they were all good and every house party had people playing music. It was rare to go anywhere where there wasn't music which it was not the way it was here for me, at least, in the circles I frequented. Music was at dances or in bars but I don't remember a lot of instances of just being over hanging out with people. Whereas the Yukon, rarely was there music playing on a record player. It was people sitting around playing music and a lot of spontaneous music like that. So I found it way richer than what was going on in Yellowknife at the time. And also too, I think because you had the road so people could drive up really easily all the way there and because people were squatting all over the place and so everybody was living out their fantasy of living in a log cabin in the woods there. There was a real sense of community and people were sharing what was pretty primitive technologies around like how to make sure your wood stove doesn't go out at 40 below and where do you get your wood. People were keeping dog teams. That was certainly happening here too but on a, just a much smaller scale where my impression being there for three years was like, this is just wow. People were starting bakeries and having little restaurants and it was just so active, active, active. People were just so into all of those things. Maybe it's because I was coming from outside, maybe that's how it was feeling for people coming from outside coming to Yellowknife. Whereas for me, I knew it all, well from, I just grew up with all of it so it's like you never really take it seriously perhaps what's going on in your own backyard at the time but my impression going to the Yukon was there's just so much more of everything here and just how dynamic it was. There just seemed to be way more cross fertilization whereas in Yellowknife my experience was if I played with "The Stained Glass Illusion", I wasn't jamming with the guys from "UM<sup>2</sup>". That wasn't happening. Whereas there, everybody was playing with everybody else it seemed. There just seemed to be more opportunities, organic kind of opportunities. Not stuff that you would have to set up or organize. But of course I was older then too. Here I was in high school so I still had homework and I was living at home. Whereas when I was in the Yukon I was also living in a log cabin in the woods and doing my own thing as a young adult.

MMS - But still, like you say, just the numbers of players and the musics. Maybe an unfair, for me, observation but I've always seen Yellowknife as sort of being a working class mentality that way and the hard-core country music and all the rest of that stuff. You get over to the Yukon and there's the whole west coast vibe that transfers up from BC and also Alaska...

PB - Alaska too, for sure.

MMS - ... is the next door neighbor there. And those musics have sort of come back and forth and even still today, the number of musicians who are looking at stepping out and just getting somewhere really different. They'll go up to Whitehorse today and find that.

PB - Find that. I think that's a really astute observation that it is a west coast kind of influence because the other thing I can remember there is how many different genres of music there were. There were people that were just playing bluegrass. Whereas here the only person I can remember seriously playing bluegrass was *Grizzly Frank* learning how to play the claw hammer banjo which he actually learned to play quite well and now apparently does elsewhere. But a lot of people doing original music and really good original music as opposed to covering other people's music. And young people doing jazz singing and having little jazz trios and they'd be in their 20s. But often they were really good musicians, like solid musicians that had come from somewhere else and they'd arrive in the Yukon. There just seemed to be room for a lot more diversity.

MMS – No, all good observations. It's sort of putting yourself in the chronology of what was happening in the place and the time that you were at and piecing it together. Again, just sort of getting a snapshot so I appreciate yours, yes indeed.

PB - Oh you're welcome, it's fun. Thank you, Pat.