

RICHARD LAFFERTY

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MMS - Yeah we're ready to go. I'm sitting here with Richard Lafferty, September 30. 2014, at the Ptarmigan Inn. Thanks so much for doing this Richard. If I could just ask you the first question here maybe you could just say where you were born and maybe go through some of the early years where you are living and how music sort of came into your life and how you got a fiddle into your hand?

RL - Well, I was born in Fort Providence, 1944. That's where the family's been there for years and years. And actually I grew up in a very musical family because all the way up to my granddad and uncles, they all played the Métis style of fiddling and guitar or whatever music there was around. So from the time I was in diapers there was music around my ears. Put it that way, you know. And eventually I started following them around. As I got older I followed and that's how I started with my music. But back in those days everything was all acoustic. We didn't have an electric light in the house until 1960 we didn't know what that was. But it was interesting and nice to see how people function and enjoyed themselves. They made their own music. There was times when they used to go to the neighbour's house and they would take the stove right out of the front room floor and put a pillow in the pipe, put it outside and they'd have a square dance.

MMS - They would take the stove right out of the house.

RL - That's a real good old traditional stuff.

MMS - That's amazing.

RL - It's a good thing the pillow didn't come out of the pipe you might've got your hair dyed anyway. You know they created their own fun, eh?

MMS - This was so, you were growing up, you were born in '44, this is before the highway was even there, before electricity?

RL - Yes. The highway came in there they were working on it in '58 I think, yeah. (Fort) Providence was just a small isolated community and mostly access was to waterways and air in those days. And the music really came down through waterways from different settlers and people that come up north. You know, the Scotch. the French, whoever, they brought that music up here and the locals pick up whatever they could pick up in their ears and eventually we had music.

MMS - So that is how you got those songs, obviously your uncle and your grandparents and... who already played, they already knew a bunch of tunes but there would be different nationalities coming up through the river systems, like, in those days?

RL - Yes, there was always people coming and the local when I say a boat would stop in a community well someone off the boat, they would go ashore to spend the night, they had a social evening such as old time dances whatever took place.

MMS - In talking with *Tony Buggins* about Fort Resolution he talks about Fort Resolution before the road came in and how the road totally changed everything in the community once there was access through the road that way. Did you experience that as well in Fort Providence?

RL - Well I don't know how much change that really created, definitely it did bring some newcomers into town, you know and if we are referring only to the music but myself, I think it's good. It's good, because you see, you hear different things, you hear different styles of music and you learn there too and they learned from both ways, eh, it works. I don't see where it created any harm when referring to music. I think local talent and stuff brought it in.

MMS - So you went to school in Fort Providence as well to the mission school there?

RL - I went to the school, yeah, it's a local mission school there but I wasn't in the residential. I was living at home you see. I used to walk to school.

MMS - Okay.

RL - The only time I left was in 1959 when they first opened the Inuvik residential school we went down there for a year.

MMS - Just for a year?

RL - 1959. Because the schools were all full up here and there was no room so they put us into school in Inuvik for a year. And we landed in Fort Simpson, we picked up quite a few. In fact some of the musicians that played in our band with us, one was *Nick Sibbeston* and all them guys. They picked four or five of us from Fort Providence, we landed in Simpson, got a few there, Norman Wells and then we ended up in Inuvik in September. And there was no phone to phone home either so you had to write a letter home. In those days. From the school but I stayed there one winter and the following year. In 1960, I transferred to Yellowknife. Sir John, Akaitcho Hall. And that's that was my first year there and then I left there in '63. I was done with my school. Heavy equipment operator. I went into vocational training.

MMS - When you were making the trip up to Inuvik was that by boat or by airplane?

RL - No we flew Wardair in those days.

MMS - Do you remember what kind of plane it was?

RL - It was a single otter.

MMS - A single otter. Noisy ones.

RL - Anyway, yes, and when we got to Akaitcho Hall in 1960 well, the boys we all somebody had a guitar here and there and whatever up in the dorm so eventually the supervisor who was *John Radcliffe* in those days. Maybe you remember him. He purchased different instruments. He got mandolin, guitars, fiddle and stuff and just put it out in the common room for the boys to try it out. So we had fun with our trying to learn. Exchanging amongst ourselves. *Alfred Lockhart*, all them guys were in school then.

MMS - *Alfred Lockhart*?

RL - *Alfred Lockhart* from Snowdrift was there also. *Dolphus Hardisty* from Fort Simpson, *Harvey McClure* from here. All them guys were around, yeah. And eventually we started playing a few tunes amongst ourselves, exchanging in the common room and then the supervisor actually formed... we formed a band called "The Arctic Ramblers". You remember that eh, Pat? Yeah, yeah, yeah. We had fun with that. We played for our local dances in the residence at Akaitcho Hall, Sir John Franklin School. Eventually we ended up playing downtown in the Elks. Every once in a while they would get us down there, "The Arctic Ramblers". So we would play for a dance there, we would play their till about 1:30 or 2 o'clock in the morning and then that was it after that. We were at...the China men fed us some food and we went home. The Gold Range, eh? And I guess the funding that was brought in from us playing down at the Elks Hall just went towards purchasing more equipment for the students also.

MMS - Beautiful.

RL - And that's how they accumulated, you see.

MMS - I was going to ask you about that because 19, 1960 then, Akaitcho, that must've been one of the first if not the first year that it was opened? Was Akaitcho there before then? Do you remember?

RL - If I recall, I don't know, it might've been opened before I don't know.

MMS - Okay, I will have to check on that because those early years...

RL - I think Akaitcho Hall might've went a year before, I don't know.

MMS - So you already had a fiddle in your hand, when do you remember say playing your first gig, playing for your first dance?

RL - At Akaitcho Hall you mean?

MMS - Just whenever.

RL - Oh actually there was a lot of old time fiddling done in Fort Providence. Especially in our family. Guitars, fiddles. And the odd handsaw you saw there, scrub boards and stuff. They had all that good stuff going you know amongst themselves. And that's in the house, here and there. I started off trying the fiddle which I am still trying to learn but anyway. So and then I ended up with guitar for a while. I used to hang around them guitar players because all the fiddle players, my uncles they interchange their tunes amongst themselves, you see. They'd play a tune say for example like the "Red River Jig". They would play it their way and the next guy would say no, no

it's this way. You see, so they exchange, eh? But after when the party gets going good and the dance and stuff it's interesting because when there was a guitar around I always hung onto that. And I picked up, I picked up on the guitar.

MMS - You had a fiddle in your hand, what six years old, eight years old?

RL - Well maybe a little later than that because they protected their instruments too. They didn't just leave them laying there because they were scarce to find.

MMS - That was going to be sort of my next question I guess. How did instruments come into the community and strings and bows?

RL - And the only place where you could buy fiddle and bow would be through the HBC, Hudson Bay Company brought a few around I believe in those days. And Simpson Sears and Roebuck the old catalogues there. We used to order Black Diamond strings and whatever I remember. In fact I got a set at home. From way back, they're still in the pack. I think the "E" string was ten cents, the A string was fifteen the D was twenty five and the G was about fifty cents. I go downtown to buy myself a set of strings today for my violin and it sixty nine to eighty five dollars for four. They're the old Black Diamond strings and I thought that's something that should be kept.

MMS - How about the bows in the hair on your bows. Did you get them re-haired, did you re-hair them yourself?

RL - Some of them did. They did re-hair, you know, maybe they'd get it from the Mission. They had horses or whatever but I've never really seen too much of that.

MMS - So how did you get your first instrument then? Passed on from the family?

RL - My own instrument, I learned right off one of my uncle's fiddle. And the guitars were in the house so that's how I learned but it was practically on my own. And he used to keep his fiddle away so it wouldn't get broken but when he would go across the river to check his fishnets there I would take it out and he knew because it wasn't in tune when he come back. And it was a challenge for me. But anyway eventually I started playing back and forth with him. Really, to be honest with you I never owned a fiddle until 1981 but there was always one in the house. My own personal instrument.

MMS - Until 1981.

RL - 1981. But when I went to Akaitcho Hall in '60 there was a fiddle there and there was a mandolin there and guitars. From '60 to '63 that's three seasons, we had all those. So I picked up on the mandolin pretty quick too. And the mandolin is tuned the same as a fiddle. That gave me a boost to get going on the fiddle you see. You can learn by picking faster than you can play the...because when you are a fiddler your arm is doing the talking and your fingers. So I'd pick a tune on the mandolin up there in the dorm when we were jamming and try it out on the fiddle. I picked up quite a few tunes like that. Mandolin's got eight strings but they are all tuned to say E, A, D, G.

MMS - As a fiddle, I never knew that. So that would be a good instrument to sort of like you say learn the notes on and there you got your left hand.

RL - And it's got frets, eh?

MMS - It's probably pretty close to the same scale to maybe it is a little bit different but not as drastic as a guitar. Or anything else.

RL - There was a few of us that played fiddle with "The Arctic Ramblers". There was three of us altogether. Over the years, there were always newcomers.

MMS - Who was in the Arctic ramblers?

RL - Well if I remember correctly there was myself, *Harvey McClure* from Hay River and *Dolphus Hardisty* from Fort Simpson and *Frank Lafferty* from Fort Res. Well there was a lot of boys they would change every once in a while. *Leon Sanderson* which was a *Thomas* at that time from here. That's how we formed our own little band and every once in a while somebody wouldn't make it and another guy would step in. And *Dolphus* would play the fiddle so I picked the mandolin. We end up changing see. And *Alfred Lockhart* and those guys they were on guitars. With us all. We had our little six or seven in our group. And we interchange. And I used to pick polkas and stuff like that on the mandolin which was good. Or I tried to anyway but it worked.

MMS - Just backup a little bit more quick question about Inuvik, was there music up in Inuvik when you first went there just for that one year?

RL - In the residence there, there was a few guitars some of the boys brought their own like *Ken Hudson* from Norman Wells and *Nick Sibbeston* also. He was from Fort Simpson. And I think he obtained a guitar from *Peter Lafferty* in those days. He had that in the residence and *Felix Moses*, *Happy Moses* they called him from Aklavik he had a fiddle there too.

MMS - *Happy Moses*.

RL - Yes. So anyway he is living in Calgary now. So we used to have, we always had something around. There was something around to entertain ourselves with.

MMS - When you went to Yellowknife, were you glad to be going to Yellowknife to Akaitcho Hall there or was it?

RL - Yes, I looked forward to it because what I wanted to do was I wanted to go into the vocational trade. I wanted to end up a little bit a mechanic and into heavy equipment work. And that's what I accomplished out of there so I went in with a goal more or less.

MMS - How often would you be playing like when we were talking about going and playing in the Elks Club and the Legion and those different places how often would that happen?

RL - It wasn't every weekend. It was always arranged through the supervisor I guess, *John Radcliffe* or whatever was happening. Like at carnival time we would play and different, two or three or four different times of year. They arranged that for us and we would just go downtown and then one time in the spring of the year we made a tour. At Easter break. School had a break.

So he arranged a trip and we had a resident who had a travel-all, like a panel so we put all our instruments in the trailer and we headed out to Fort Rae. There was no Edzo in those days. We played in Edzo. It was spring of the year, we knew it was going to be soft down there but still we tried. He said maybe at night we would make it. No. And we played in (Fort) Providence. And the river, there was too much water on the ice. The ice was still there but it wasn't passible in places. We had an interesting crossing there because we unloaded all our instruments in the sleigh and we pulled it across. The Mackenzie (River)

MMS - Get out of here.

RL - Six of us and the supervisors. We pull our instruments across on the ice and the DPW or somebody sent a panel, the school, from there on the south side of the shore and they loaded us all up in there and brought us to Hay River.

MMS - You guys are crazy.

RL - But anyway, yeah we did, we crossed in the spring of the year and we played in the old school down the old town, it's not standing there anymore. It was called St. Paul. We had old time country dance going in there Friday and Saturday and Sunday we went back that way and pulled them back across and we made it back.

MMS - You're pulling the sled across...

RL - On the ice.

MMS - On the ice and there is water,

RL - It was a little water here and there. Whatever. We didn't soak anything. It wasn't total water shore to shore. It was like a spring thaw. It was an interesting year.

MMS - That's incredible that you would go to that length just to go on tour because I can't even imagine what the road was like back then. Much less dragging your equipment across the Mackenzie River on the ice.

RL - The roads were gravel but it was still passable.

MMS - Do you remember what year that would have been?

RL - It had to be in '62.

MMS - '62.

RL - I would say '61 or '62. Because in '63 I left in March, I went to work for transportation and I never left there for 43 years.

MMS - Okay, so did *John Radcliffe* come with you on that trip?

RL - Yes. Yeah *John Radcliffe* the supervisor was always with us. Yeah because we were students.

MMS - Responsible adult all of that stuff.

RL - They arranged all of that. We had places to stay here.

MMS - Good on him for pulling all of all that together for you guys. That's amazing. I can see it. I don't know if anybody else can but I can see it.

RL - You can see it, okay.

MMS - In those years in Yellowknife I know you were in Akaitcho Hall. Were you interacting at all with the other musicians that were in Yellowknife at that time? I call them musicians but I understand that everybody was working their job and the music happened in the speakeasies or it happened in the Legions or the Elks or the Rec Halls, in the mining camps and stuff like that. Did you get to meet any of the other local players in the time that you spent at Akaitcho Hall in the early 1960s?

RL - Yes we did.

MMS - Do you remember the people that you met there?

RL - It's kind of hard to remember their names because they interchange all the time you know. You had the opportunity to play maybe here and there. Not so we never went out so much to different functions.

MMS - Of course, you're underage.

RL - That's right.

MMS - Like I say I just sort of wondering if there were things like the carnivals where you might be playing right after another band or something like that so you got a chance to meet them and hang around them. In talking with people like *Archie Loutitt* and also just sort of recognizing with the, two mining camps that were there and I remember spending time in the mining camps and it was a lot of European people coming over from after the war and settling down and all the rest of that stuff, but they not only came over to work they brought their families with them, they brought their food, their traditional foods with them. You know the Italians making their own wine, their grappa and you know growing their grapes and all the rest of that stuff and but they also brought their music and so that's sort of one thing Archie was sort of talking about was just how much different music there was in Yellowknife for such a small mining town because these people came from all over the world and they brought their musics with them.

RL - That, having said that, that refers exactly to what we spoke of earlier. How the music come in by water.

MMS - There you go.

RL - Exactly. And vice versa.

MMS - Vice versa for sure. You graduated like you s at the end of '63.

RL - Yeah.

MMS - Did you start working for Highways?

RL - I was pretty lucky because they were looking for an operator at the time and I was finishing my heavy equipment operating course at the end of June. And the principal for vocational training was I believe *Mr. Black* at that time and *Ed Jeske* was the instructor. Now he just passed away here a couple of years ago I would visit him all the time. But everybody knows him. Knew him. But so he called me one day at the end of March and he said they are looking for an operator if you are interested. He said there's an opening for you, you can let me go a month earlier. So they did. They released me. They released me and that's when I started for transportation.

MMS - Wow.

RL - Yeah. And I was lucky I managed to get that position right at home.

MMS - Right at home. So that was in Yellowknife or out of Fort Providence?

RL - Fort Providence. That's where I was from. I was to go to work at Stagg River but somehow between, within the three week period, by the time I was released and everything, another casual had been hired so they said there is one in Providence if you want that one. I said that's better that's home for me so it turned out okay. Real good.

MMS - I would say those guys were amazing that they would kind of go, here's a chance for a job we'll let you out of school early here, time to go to work and away you go. As opposed to, no, you've got to finish your school, you've got to finish your grade 12, it was like... There was some good men around like you say, *Ed Jeske*, those older guys were probably instrumental not only in helping you in your lives and to get work that way but for so many others, you know, over the years. *Ed Jeske* was still teaching when I was there in '79 and he taught beyond there too as well, so...

RL - He came in from Inuvik. He built the airstrip in Inuvik.

MMS - Is that Right?

RL - And then from there when they opened Sir John, he went down there. As the instructor. So he was fairly new around the place at that time. He was running the heavy equipment training course. We used to practice out toward Giant on Vee Lake Road there. We had the equipment out there, an old cat, D6, dump truck and old grader there and we would go out there and that's where we had our experience.

MMS - Get your training on it out there.

RL - Training on one of the roads there. We would grade and hall and repair and do things and we got our practice that way too. But the way it went is when I went to... the first year when I went I came home and then that fall I went back and I started in September and then springtime when everybody went for school, they kept us there, so we could get our summer training working with dirt roads so the training heavy equipment course, all six or eight of us that were in it we stayed in Akaitcho Hall all summer. We would go out and train through the summer and we went back into school in September and I was lucky to get out and go to work the following March or April. And in summer of course there was only six or eight of us in school but everything was applied there for us and we had a lot more freedom of course because there was only three of us and we were

allowed, I was allowed to use, take the canoe and go up the Yellowknife River on weekends and stuff. They had an outboard for us to do things.

MMS - Nice.

RL - Yeah, it was okay.

MMS - It would have been a pretty small town in those years still. Very neat, wow. So you are out of Yellowknife, you've got a job and I imagine the McKenzie Highway kept you busy in those days.

RL - Well when there are roads around the country, don't matter what type of roads there is no end to maintaining them. There's no end.

MMS - So you are living in Fort Providence and you're working for highways during the day. How often... how did you get your music and keep it going that way. You had "The Arctic Ramblers" when you were in Akaitcho Hall and then who were you playing with when you went to Fort Providence after you finished your school?

RL - In Fort Providence there was always locals that played, so you know, just the local boys we'd get together and form a dance or do something. There was always music around, different places in town.

MMS - So basically picked up with the community feasts and dances and just carried on like that.

RL - There was a lot of musicians there. We made our own music in those days, eh? You know?

MMS - So more or less the same group of musicians that you had before, can you remember some of the names of some of the people that you came through in those years say through the '60s that you played with?

RL - Well there is, in fact here the locals, some of them are still there you know. The locals that were there all the way through and maybe the odd new different people come into town to find a different job then there'd be newcomers coming but the originals were always there right up until the end.

MMS - And that would be people like *Albert Canadian* was...?

RL - *Albert Canadien* yes, *Albert Canadien* was, when he was in the Arctic ramblers with us too, eh. *Albert Canadian*, *Alfred Lockhart* and then (*John*) *Radcliffe* formed a band after he left Akaitcho Hall and they went playing down south with them for a while.

MMS - So that would be "The Chieftones" is that right?

RL - That's it. "The Chieftones".

MMS - I got most of that story from *Albert*. It's quite the story.

RL - Anyway and so you know like *Albert* was back in Providence and there is local, there's *David Bonnetrouge* who is well into his 80s today but... and my uncles and it was all different people.

They interchanged. You go to an old time dance or any type of local dance in town like I said where they made their own, they found a place to dance and that's what they did, they didn't have no community halls or anything in those days. And people would interchange right at the dance. One guy would play guitar for a while and another fiddler would take over and so on. That's how it carried on. And it was good. It's a learning process. You're passing your music on, you know. Picking up different things.

MMS - Was that the only way that you picked up songs or you were listening to radio probably records were starting to become more available?

RL - Yeah, records were always around.

MMS - Okay.

RL - And I remember when I was the smallest. There was a local radio station on the air out of Edmonton. It was a French station. CHFI Edmonton they called it. They would be half an hour, straight old Time fiddle the French music. And they would never miss that. They had the old battery on the stand there in the house and the radio there with the antenna outside, that was a local radio station here you could catch on there and they had this French station and they would all sit around there whoever was there, three or four of them, to listen to that fiddling music.

MMS - That one half-hour show.

RL - One half-hour show. Every Saturday.

MMS - I was going to ask you whether it was every day. Or just once a week.

RL - So anyway, whoever was there they would listen. You know I guess they picked up whatever they could out of there. This is where your Métis music comes in because you pick up by ear, it's going to be different right?

MMS - Yeah, yeah for sure. Wow, beautiful, beautiful that you could paint a picture of that for me. I just love that. You know three or four guys sitting around an old radio and just having a listen. So radio and...

RL - And the local travellers.

MMS - I imagine the records in those days, was there very much if any at all traditional sort of music being put out.

RL - There was records, yeah. There was records around you know but don't forget those were the old record player is back in those days. I called them old now but they were the record of the day. You know the old 78s that you would crank in there and you had a big old record player in the house size of this cabinet here. Once in a while they would pull that next door to listen to music but they had their 78s under their arms you know what I mean? Country music can (finger snap) and a lot of fiddle records also.

MMS - So the fiddle music, the traditional sort of Métis songs had been coming to you through the family and through the travelers and everything like that. I keep trying to put myself back into

that time but I mean I was just born and three years old. So I don't have much of a clue. But there would've been the fiddle music that say would've been coming out of say the popular country music, *Don Messer* those different kinds of people.

RL - *Don Messer, Ward Allen, Ned Landry*, all the old traditional fiddlers from down east. Their music was on record. Okay, so you could buy a record and bring it home and that is how they picked a lot of it. I had lots of *Ward Allen* too. *Graham Townsend*, those top fiddlers. They had stacks of records.

MMS - And so that would sorta give you more of a broader scope I guess of styles of music to play. And at that time the popular music of the day, right of..?

RL - That's when the records started coming into the country and the cassettes.

MMS - Its computers and everything like that. Yeah I guess sort of the one question when I was talking with different people they talk about so the records were there and you know *Johnny (Landry)* even talks about playing gigs, thinking Fort Smith because that's where he went to school and they would play gigs and they would take the money or their manager would take the money and go buy more records of new songs so that they could learn them so that they could play so that they could go buy more records. It was pretty neat how it turned out how you get your music but also how the technologies changed how you got your music. And in some ways yes with the electric guitar, amplification, PA systems and all the rest of that stuff, it changed the way you presented your music as well.

RL - Prior to that it was all acoustic.

MMS - It was all acoustic. So what was your first run in with a... say an electric guitar or a PA system?

RL - Actually it was in the '60s when I went to Akaitcho Hall. That's where I ran into some electrical.

MMS - Okay so you would put a microphone on your fiddle or on the mandolin or...?

RL - No, I, the mandolin I just play direct to the mic but the electric guitars....they had a system

MMS - As far as recording anything that you guys ever did in those early days was there ever any recording done on old reel to reel's or I remember they used to make the record players where you can actually cut a record?

RL - Well, there might've been some done at Akaitcho Hall at the school, at Sir John Franklin, I don't know where they'd be. That was on, they would be on a reel to reel.

MMS - So there was some recording that was done.

RL - I believe so. CBC might even have some. John's brother *Peter (Radcliffe)* was a CBC tech.

MMS - That's right too.

RL - Yeah, I went and chat with him a couple of times at CBC with my mandolin and stuff like that. So they are somewhere. If you dig deep enough.

MMS - So between *John* and *Peter Radcliffe* the two brothers there, there would be somewhere...

RL - I would say.

MMS - ...Some recordings.

RL - Because even when we played for our dances or say graduation at Sir John, that kind of stuff somebody must have it. Somebody.

MMS - In the time that you were working through the '60s and you were living in Providence, you would get a chance to go and play in other communities was that just a given that you would jump on the road on a Friday afternoon and drive to Hay River, who knows, Fort Smith or whatever to play different dances. Was that something that you did and if so how often would you done that?

RL - Yes I did a few of those. I could play here many times and in Fort resolution also and surrounding communities, eh, but it wasn't something that I did every weekend. Until 1983 I believe when we decided that we should have a local dance group to promote the traditional Métis dancing. And that's when we formed the "NWT Métis Reelers". 1983. And that was a group out of Yellowknife. There was *Harry and Eliza Lawrence*, my sister *Lena Peterson*, *Minnie Carmichael* in those days and a few us, *George Mandeville*. They formed a dance group and I was the fiddler for them and we had *Cecile Lafferty* and *George* on guitar once in a while, whoever came along. We started the dance group. So then I used to drive from (Fort) Providence on the weekends. There was times that we made little tours after a while. We played in (Fort) Providence and stuff, the only thing we never drug are instruments across, like in the '60s.

MMS - Thank God.

RL - Yeah, we had fun with that dance group for what we were doing is, we brought, they brought a square dance caller from Alberta and he did a few dances, square dances in Yellowknife and then from there they learned how to call. Just a demo sort of. And *Art Berg* was the fiddler and then from there we went on our own. So, it turned out okay. We did a lot of functions you know, we played all over the place in fact in 1985 we were invited to the Canada Summer games. We spent there, two weeks. Nine days. The following year we did Expo (Vancouver, 1986). We circulated around. It was good.

MMS - No I remember that group. And *Harry and Eliza (Lawrence)* for sure. They were instrumental in putting all of that together.

RL - They're in Grand Prairie now.

MMS - Anything between '63 and '83? We will pick it up in '83 but is there anything between... were you in (Fort) Providence for those, let's say '63 to '83, that 20 years were you in (Fort) Providence all that time and working for highways out of (Fort) Providence?

RL - In '86 I moved to Hay River.

MMS - In '86 you moved to Hay River.

RL - I was transferred here and I retired here.

MMS - That whole time for those 20 years between '63 and '83 you are at home in Fort Providence.

RL - Yeah.

MMS - Beautiful. And you transferred to Hay River for a change or was it just...

RL - I was given a different position. I ended up being retired as a regional manager for the South. Looking after all the area of Fort Simpson and whatever even went towards to Tulita. They got me around to a few communities.

MMS - Yeah I bet.

RL - It was interesting, nice. I enjoyed that work. That's why I stayed so long. You got to see everybody along the road too as you were working you know?

MMS - How much of your playing changed when you moved to Hay River then? You were playing with your family and with people in Providence and stuff and so it is a whole new crew here right? Who were you playing with when you first came to town here?

RL - There is local bands here. Just amongst ourselves. Like across the river they have their own band, their own little locals and stuff. Just local among ourselves here. And then eventually it started to spread a little more and more and I did quite a bit of travelling all along the locals here all the way up in Northern Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba. We did a big one here this spring they celebrated a hundred and seventy five years for the Métis in Alberta at Paddle Prairie, that's the first Métis settlement that was open. I don't know hundred and seventy five years ago or something. So they phoned on that and I went down there and we had three beautiful nights of full house I tell you. All the Alberta communities were there. They had the regular meetings through the day but they wanted entertainment in the evening so I went. The group, they knew me, one of the guitar players so he called me, see if I go up and have, and I did and I enjoyed that.

MMS - When you were living here you were going into the northern parts of Alberta and playing there as well?

RL - Yes Grand Prairie also. And like Grand Prairie for the last maybe eight or ten years I go there on an annual basis. It's for the museum society over there. They have an annual show but there's no money involved you donate your time for that. I got involved in there when my daughter and son-in-law were living there. I found that, I didn't know about it until I heard and then I joined them. What I like about that is, you meet a lot of fiddlers. And they are not newcomers either. Everybody, they come out of the bush, out in their farms, out in the country and sometimes there's twenty some or thirty of us standing there. They exchanging. And they put on a show for the people but they raise money for the museum and seniors society. So I drive it over there every April it's held. It's on a Sunday afternoon. You hear all kinds of homemade variations there too. From people from Fort St. John all around.

MMS - Northern BC, Northern Alberta and northern Saskatchewan. Right across. Lots of Métis people. Yeah, like you say just the different players, a lot of these people living out in the middle of God knows where, the middle of nowhere and, but they all come in for that one carnival or that one jamboree or that one event.

RL - And they look forward to it too, eh.

MMS - But I am also thinking that they are just with that isolation if they are even in the mid-'60s but they grew up learning how to play fiddle going way back...

RL - Some of them are in their 80s, playing the old tunes ...

MMS - I guess what I was thinking that these people that you meet when you go down to these things in Grand Prairie, they're playing in relative isolation it's not as if their style of playing or the songs that they're playing are new songs and so they're almost like preserving that style of fiddling that they learned. Do you understand what I'm trying to say? It's not as if they are learning new songs and playing different styles of music. They play that one style of music and that's the way they learned that song back when they were sixteen years old and there they are at eighty or eighty six and they're still playing it the same way. But what it is, is if it's almost again, a snapshot of that time when they learned that song and it sort of remains relatively unchanged throughout their whole lives so that when they do come in and mix it up with everybody else that way, there is a whole bunch of other people, other fiddlers, that are doing the same thing. I'm just sort of trying to... think about how... different circumstances that those musicians live in, how they've chosen to live their lifestyle in relative isolation and how that sort of keeps that style of music that they learned to play, back in the day, quite pure and quite unchanged you know, throughout their whole lives.

RL - Absolutely, absolutely. That's their style of music and that's the type of music that they play so you are interchanging music you see? I refer back to the anthology, the variations.

MMS - The variations are right there. Who made the biggest impression on you like as far as fiddlers like within the territory over the time that we are talking about when you were growing up and you are in Akaitcho Hall and you are working in (Fort) Providence and stuff like that. Because I've heard the names of certain fiddlers that were, that were incredible fiddlers. Do you remember seeing any of those guys play?

RL - I grew up with one. His name was *Danny Bouvier* and that was my uncle. He died 80 years of age and he didn't play in public.

MMS - *Danny Bouvier*.

RL - Yeah. Fort Providence.

MMS - He never played in public?

RL - No. Very, very few, maybe a few dances downtown that was it. And yet that man could play fiddle. I refer to him as the *Graham Townsend* number two. He knew all of the traditional Métis tunes, old-time tunes and they were, his timing was unreal. He was a self-taught musician, I guess

learned from different fiddlers through the years but he played by himself most of the time and I was fortunate enough to play guitar for him once in a while. And he was also very fussy about it so when you make your mistake, he would correct you right away and that was nice. That's what was nice about it. You are learning.

MMS - Yeah for sure.

RL - And only ones that did any recording on that man was way back in the '60s was *Wally Firth* when he was with CBC in Yellowknife. He had made a tour up here and he recorded them. And *Danny* played for CBC at that time at the house, I was playing guitar for him.

MMS - Ah, OK, so that is another one of the treasures that is in the CBC vaults.

RL - I rate him as number one. I've heard a lot of fiddlers, I've listened right from coast to coast, he was good. This is not bragging, that's right on. He was good. Yeah.

MMS - Lucky for you he was your uncle and you got to play with him.

RL - That's what I say you know there is a lot, probably a lot of good musicians like that out in the country. You know, they are not exposed to the public, they don't want to be in the public but they enjoy it. And you could hear him fiddling upstairs by himself. Figuring it out. Kept his fiddle by his bed there on a nail hangin' there and that was it. Bow behind it.

MMS - Okay we'll pick it up in '86 you are playing with "The Métis Reelers" and doing some travelling across the country and you're living in Hay River and playing here. What did you go on to do through the '80s, musically?

RL - I've been around. Let's put it this way. Northern Alberta. I travel all over. It's not an everyday thing but three or four times a year I go to these big functions you know? That I enjoy because there's some pretty big festivals going on right now. Every year. *John Arcand* for example got one in Saskatoon. But it's strictly traditional Métis focus. And there are thousands of people that go there. And I met *John* doing that anthology for "GDI" (Gabriel Dumont Institute), I go there. Last two years I haven't gone but it's an annual thing. It's a three or four day thing, he's got a nice set up out there. It's called "Windy Acres" and he's all set up, you bring your camper and you can camp there but he built a big place so you can entertain inside eh? And there is Batoche right next to it, prior to that.

MMS - Do they sort of try and time the functions so that you can go down south and you can hit one the next weekend there is another one.

RL - You know if you want to follow these functions I only refer to the old-time traditional dancing, that's my thing. I go to other ones too but I like taken part in those things. To me it reminds me of horseracing. You can start in the spring of the year you will come home in October if you want to. I can show you a list that goes on all day.

MMS - You can travel all the way across the country and just keep going.

RL - You can go, you can go. People go there because that's their music and that is what they want to hear. You know they come in there and fill the place for three or four days, they bring their campers and their... whatever it takes. Some of them follow it for a while and then they leave it.

MMS - Right now, I guess I am just sort of trying to find out where you are at right now, your music, you are able to go to these different functions and events....

RL - Yeah, I'd like to, where it is today actually the way I sit is, I can, you know, now that I am a retired person I have more time to do that. So if I select a place where we can go then my wife and I will go over there and we will enjoy ourselves. You know? In other words I have time.