

Angus Beaulieu

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MMS - When do you first remember hearing the fiddle, did you play something else before you started playing fiddle?

AB - No, not really, when I was growing up, there was a fiddle in the house and I wasn't allowed to touch it. My grandfather said not for me to touch it so, at that time I wasn't interested but my Grandmother's brother, *George Norn* used to come over and whenever he came over that fiddle was hanging on the wall and he would take it down and play us music. Then I used to go to a dance with my Grandfather and I used to listen to old *George Norn* playing fiddle and then I kinda got interested but I know I was told not to touch that fiddle so I didn't right away but when my Grandfather's not home, I took it down a couple times and try and squeak it. If I sit where the window in the direction my Grandfather would be coming from if he was coming home, if I saw him coming home I used to hang up the fiddle until one time he caught me playing it. He caught me with the fiddle in my hand and that, I got scared, I was trying to hang it up. He never said nothing, he didn't tell me I shouldn't be trying to play it or anything so ever since then I was trying and within one year I was playing for a dance. And the first song I learned was called "Rubber Dolly" and I was playing it with one finger only and then after I was playing the tune for a while, I started using the second finger then the third finger and then I played for many dances with three fingers and one was just sticking straight up and then they start butting in. Within a year, I remember I was fourteen years old when I was playing for my first dance. I was turning fourteen that summer.

MMS - So your grandfather when he caught you, never gave you heck or nothin' like that?

AB - No, he didn't.

MMS - So he let you play it from then on?

AB - From then, he didn't say nothing so whenever he's not home I played it, regardless when he came home I was still after it and he never said nothing to me. It wasn't a full size fiddle. It was a medium. So that was my first fiddle, I got my third fiddle. I bought it fifty years ago. I got it in the case there.

MMS - So, instruments at that time, when you were fourteen years old, how many fiddles were there around, were there lots of instruments around, lots of people playing?

AB - No, not really no. Well, there was fiddle players, the guitar, I remember when I was also growing up, my uncle had a guitar. Before that, before guitar, going back to old man *George Norn* again, his brother used to play a second, he would play the fiddle, he would chord on the fiddle for his brother. And I saw them playing for dances that way. Also the same time that George's brother, his name was *Sammy (Norn)*, he had a couple of sticks, just like Chinese chop sticks and he would hit the fiddle, just not far away from where you bow it, towards your fingers there, in time with the beat. It really gives a nice tune.

MMS - So he would be fretting the note and hitting it with the chop sticks at the same time? Would he be fretting the notes?

AB - Well, George would be playing the fiddle, his brother had a stick in each hand and just like drumming, he would be hitting it.

MMS - So they were both playing the same fiddle?

AB - Yeah, I saw that played for dances that way and also you chord with the fiddle too. Certain tunes he'll do it that way. They didn't do all the tunes that way.

MMS - When you started playing did you ever take any lessons or sit down or were you just watching the other fiddlers and picking stuff up?

AB - Well, I listened to, as I said, I go to a few dances with my Grandfather. In those days kids didn't stay up all hours of the night so my grandfather would take me to a dance for maybe an hour or something like that and then bring me home. Then he would go back to the dance. So I never had a chance to stay through the dance but after I start playing my fiddle, I used to try and memorize what I heard there and when we got home I would try and remember that particular song. I didn't know the name or anything but, try and memorize it in my mind and try it. I'm not too sure so the next time, the dance I go to again, I hope they play that tune before I go home..... It was pretty rough,.....

MMS - So that only happened for a year and then you were playing for the dances?

AB - I had one record, we had one of these record, winder, you wind the.... We had one fiddle song there but it was cracked. So I tried to follow it and just when it makes the turn around, maybe the first verse, it's OK, after that it'll jump. So I had to find somebody to put their hand on the head of that so the weight not make it jump but if I didn't have anybody I couldn't play it. And then just when we get going we have to rewind the player, you know. In those days we didn't have...you know, we had a radio, the same thing was on a radio too, if I heard a tune, I try to memorize it and stuff like that, you know. We didn't have tape recorders, we didn't have nothing, only a radio and we had a radio and those record players. It was only one song we had was fiddle song, the rest were all "*Jimmy Rogers*", that style of music, you know. So that's how I remember it.

MMS - What years would those have been?

AB - Well, I'm born 1934, so, that would be,

MMS - '48 or '50. You were getting radio up here then?

AB - Yeah

MMS - Where was the radio coming from?

AB - You would get all kinds of stations from the south, you could get many stations. We had to put an aerial about 300 feet or more. I think the longer your aerial is, you pick it up more. So we used to have, at least about 500 feet, I think we had our radio. We had a long pole and an aerial across to our house and then another pole and down the pole into their house and in those days, first radio, I remember my Grandfather had, it was huge. It was maybe I would say about 20 inch by about 2 feet tall and it had five batteries. No six batteries. The A battery was a wet battery, just like car battery, the size of a twelve volt car battery. Then the other one they called B batteries, well, those days they came separate, so there is one A and three Bs and two Cs. The two C batteries were smaller, they were about the size of a cigarette package, maybe that square but about 5 inches tall, there was two of those. The B batteries, I would say about maybe 5 by 10 by 7 or 8, that's the size of the batteries and my grandfather had to make a kind of a table with a solid second shelf below the top to hold the batteries, I remember that. That's the way our first radio....

MMS - It must have weighed a bit, those batteries must have weighed a lot?

AB - I remember there was lots of weight. Later on they came out with a combination, they called it. It was 3 Bs, no, the second time it came out, it was 2 Bs and an A on the end, it was a combination battery, I still got the old radio like that. So this B battery has a three prong plug in on it and the A battery has a two prong so you don't get them mixed up, I guess. That was a dry battery, those were maybe 16 by 8 by 8 maybe.

MMS - How did you keep a charge in them?

AB - They would last for, a good maybe, I can't remember exactly but depends how much you use it, I think it's about 6 months, that combination one. The one before, my Grandfather, I remember sometimes once the battery was getting low, during the day you can't get nothing, only at night you get something.

MMS - What did you make your antennae out of, were you using, what kind of wire were you using, whatever you could find?

AB - Well, I don't know where we got the wire from but we got a copper wire, it was wound a

little bit like a snare. I don't know if they had them in the stores but I think later on we got them in the stores but the first ones I don't know, My grandfather, I think we got the radio. There was a radio station in the community, a telegram radio station in the community and I think my Grandfather used to help them, to work around the place clean up or whatever and then I'm pretty sure that's where our first radio came from. In the community here I think there was maybe, there was very few radios. And hockey nights, people used to gather at my Grandfather's there, about 5 of them would be sitting right close to the radio there listening you know. Whoever is cheering for what, well they're just yelling there you know.....

MMS - When you say music stations from down south, what kind of music got played?

AB - Those days it was mostly country, it's all country. Very seldom you would hear a fiddle, there was certain stations, I forget what it's called a certain place we used to get fiddle music on there, certain station, I think it was Calgary, there was one station there, I think it was only on Saturdays, I forget what it was called, it's kind of a Saturday Ho down like or something like that.

MMS - There was maybe some Canadian people recording at that time but most of that music was coming out of the states and getting broadcast and relayed, right all the way up here. What are the names of some of the musicians you were listening to then? Do you remember the names of the country guys you were listening to?

AB - Well, *Wilf Carter* and *Jimmy Rogers*, I can't remember, but that was all those days, you know. And then later on it was *Hank Williams*, I used to listen to a lot of that, a lot of records used to be *Hank Williams*. Then after, *Elvis*.

MMS - So, would you sit down with the radio and play along or jam with the radio that way sometimes?

AB - Not too much that way, I would listen to it and try to memorize it. That's the way I was... Only after into tape recorders, I done it. I would say in the late '60s, something like that, only about then, I would try and follow it but before that we never had our fiddle tuned to 440. Our fiddles were never tuned that high, it was always tuned low. Another way we used to play when I first started playing for dances we used two guitars but one was tuned for a D chord and the other one was tuned for C. We thought the sound was good but I don't know, we never recorded ourselves so I don't know. But that's the way we had two guitars not both tuned the same.

MMS - So when you went to tune up, I guess it would sort of depend on, if you were playing with an accordion or something like that or a piano, you would have to tune to them but otherwise you would tune....

AB - Any old way.

MMS - But it was lower?

AB - It seemed to be lower, I think it was much lower.

MMS - You started playing your Grandfathers fiddle and then within a year you had learned how many tunes before you played your first dance?

AB - I would say about maybe 8 or 10 tunes. Some waltzes and some square dance and maybe I should tell you about my first square dance. After I was playing, in my mind I thought I could play for dances and that. Those days we didn't have community halls, it was just one of the houses, with a one room house and my uncle lived right down below, just down below here and especially in the spring, after everybody has come back from the hunt and they would gather and dance just about every night sometimes there would be a fiddle dance that was the only thing that we had. Later on sometimes. All the communities around this lake used to gather in Fort Res for treaty days and so there would be a drum dance at one end of the community here and then there would be a fiddle dance. The Metis would have their dance and the Treaties would have their drum dance, you know and there's mix. But that's how I....So I went to this....When I first....This dance here I went to, I didn't know how to go about, I wanted to play. I was afraid to ask. Very seldom, the fiddler takes a break either but sometimes their square dances are long and that. I remember everybody was hot, I guess everybody went out. Not only that, they just had wooden floors once they were dancing like that it gets dusty, you know, they were tracking mud in and that, it gets dusty. So everybody would go out and get kind of a fresh air and I remember the fiddler went out and at that time it was *Sam Norn* playing for this dance. He went out, so everybody started coming in and I grabbed that fiddle and the guitar player was *Frank Fabien*, I think at the time. He's not around, he's gone since. So everybody got on the floor so I started playing a square dance tune, everybody start dancing. I didn't realize how long, even though I been at many dances, I didn't get very far and my arms are tired. I was slowing down, slowing down, finally I couldn't go any further so I stopped. They told me, "it's not over yet, some more, some more." I tried, I couldn't. I got so embarrassed, everybody was looking at me, I put the fiddle down and I ran home. I was right across the road here so I just ran across the road and I went home, I was embarrassed, I felt like crying. I don't know, I thought I'm never going to touch that fiddle again, all kinds of things went through my mind. Next day I was thinking I gotta try and pull through this some way so I got an old alarm clock, put it beside myself there and I started playing and tried to play a little longer and a little longer and eventually I was gaining a little bit, little bit finally I can play without, about 20 minutes without a stop. Again another dance like that I tried and I pulled through and I'm still playing.

AB - I told this story before but I can tell you a story, this is a true story there's still a few people alive that can witness this. When I go, we go to Hay River every spring after there is enough room for the ice along the shore. And I used to bring my fiddle with me and I get to hear, people see me around the old town, the old village. They would get ready for a dance and I would just play for a dance. In those days, they never paid no money, money wasn't for paying whoever was going to play for a dance, you know. After I done this for a few years, I was in Hay River. It takes us with a small motor from here to Hay River, a day and a half if there's no ice. A little

five horse kicker, a big boat, fairly big boat, 20 foot skiff, you know and a five horse pushing it, you know. The days are long but it still would take us a day and a half to Hay River and after we got half way, I told Grandpa, I said I forgot my fiddle. We're not turning back he told me..... we're not turning back he told me. We got to Hay River and its normal, as soon as they see me around they arrange for a dance. So here when somebody said they're waiting for you. They used to have their dances at this guy's place whose name is *Johnny Lamalice*. One big room house and then a kitchen added to the back. So when I got there everybody was sitting in chairs and benches all the way around, they were waiting for me. I told them I didn't have my fiddle. Well, then they started looking around for a fiddle for me. They found a fiddle but the bow was just a few hairs. There was somebody else that had a fiddle his name was *Frank Lepine*. He hasn't come back from the bush from the spring hunt. He plays fiddle also himself, so he wasn't back so it took them awhile to find me a fiddle and the bow, there wasn't enough hair on there to play. So we couldn't find a bow and then somebody said that *Johnny Lamalice*, where the dance is, they got a horse that had a sore foot so they shot that horse that morning I guess. So, somebody was talking about it so they went in the bush and got that horse tail and brought me the horse tail and I try and find the longest, it was a brown horse too. I cut the longest part of the hair. I guess when they shot it that hair was just full of poop... This old lady washed it for me, people are sitting around here for a dance,... She washed it really good for me and she give some sinew and I tied one end really good before she washed it, I tied one end really good knot in it and then she washed it and combed, one of these fine combs, combed it with it after she washed it and combed it nicely. Then we had to hang it up above the kitchen wood stove. We still had to wait for it to dry, you know. This is a really true, there's no bullshit story. When that happened, now, I was ready, there was no rosin though. We never even thought of this rosin in the meantime, you know, all this. So now I told them, spruce gum would work. I don't know all the bush country there so somebody else said I know where there's some good spruce gum so somebody went and got me spruce gum. So after all this, I remember I was still playing for a dance five o'clock in the morning, people are still just having a good time and there's still *Pat Buggins* today who's alive, that one time I was playing for a dance in Hay River with all our equipment and that and he came to me and said "You remember "he said, "You remember you came here and we had to go through all that horse tail and wood gum and all that, you remember that?" I said yeah, I never forgot that, I told him. I told that story to somebody else, I said they don't believe me. He said, "You tell them to come to me and I'll tell them, you know". I traveled also with dog team from here to Hay River to play for a dance and it depends on what time of year if it's in December it takes, you know, sometimes two and a half days. Two days and then, in March you can make it in one day. But February, like you know, a day and a half or two days. I used to carry my fiddle with me like that.

MMS - So you were playing mostly here in Fort Res, how often would you go and play these other places?

AB - Well, not very often, this was just because I happened to be in Hay River. I always carried my fiddle. My Grandfather actually raised me on the Slave River Delta here and this is where I was raised and I always had my fiddle with me in the bush there. Wherever I went I carried my fiddle with me. Even though sometimes I didn't play it. See if I went to Hay River, I used to

take my fiddle along with me.

MMS - Was there even a road then?

AB - No, I mean this is going on the ice to Hay River. Dog team, eh?

MMS - There wasn't even a road here then to get you to Hay River.

AB - Nobody even thought of a road. And then we don't even carry a tent, you know. Where ever it gets dark we try and find where there's a lot of firewood and if it's north wind you have to try and get away from the wind off the shore, shelter, little bit shelter and just scrape the snow right down to the ground and spruce boughs down and little caribou mattress and that's it. Never even think it's cold. We didn't have skidoo suits those days, or skidoo boots or anything, just a little canvas parka you know and moccasins, never even think its cold out there and we used to be a hell of a lot colder than it is now, those days. It used to go up to 60 below.

MMS - Exactly, you never thought that was a hardship or anything like that?

AB - No, nobody will ever catch me out there anymore. This is true stories. I used to play for a dance here when the pay start coming in when I can't play for dance. Later on I went south I saw bands, oh boy. So I got myself one amplifier and there's four of us plugged into one amplifier...just for the fiddle, there's three guitars and a fiddle with a little Silvertone amp, eh. I used to charge eight dollars to play for a dance. I give everybody 2 dollars and take 2 dollars for myself. We play a whole night for 8 dollars.

MMS - So you talked about going down south when did you first get down south to the city?

AB - The city, I would say, in the '50s, I went from Hay River, my Dad owned a store in Hay River and he was hauling somebody's freight from Edmonton so I went with him to Edmonton from Hay River when they first opened up the road to Hay River there. I can't remember exactly the year but I went with him south a couple times. That's the first time I saw the city and then I saw some electric instruments. The first band I saw was in Hay River, it was called "*Happy Russell*". *Happy Russell* was playing his, *Alfie Myers* was just a young guy playing fiddle for *Happy Russell*. He had two fiddlers, and they were playing in Hay River. One of my uncles told me there was a band playing in Hay River, I don't know how he picked it up. On January 6. And he wanted to go down to Hay River. I went to Hay River right from here by dog team to watch that band. They had a little power plant, a small little power plant and they played at the show hall one night and then the second night was at the Indian village. They were playing there and they had one little bulb in the middle instead of a gas lamp because they had a little power plant and then they had their equipment plugged in and they were playing for a dance there and that was the first time I saw a live band in my life. When I went south I bought myself a small amplifier and it must have been a tough amplifier because we used plug everything we owned into that thing.

MMS - So when you came back up you had a power plant that you used?

AB - No, when NCPC first built here in Fort Res, 1962, I think. I think it's then that I bought myself an electric when they put power in Fort Res. The first time I saw a live band was in the '50s.

MMS - Did you ever get to see any shows down in Edmonton when you were, did you get to see any big names or any other bands?

AB - Not big names, just the local bands around there I guess that were playing. Even before they put a highway into Fort Res here, after Dorothy and I got married, we got married 1959 I guess. After '59, or the early '60s we used to ship by boat, barge, there was no highway into Fort Res here so, whenever the first barge comes into Fort Res here is about the middle of June so we shipped our vehicle, we had a vehicle then, so, we shipped our vehicle to Hay River on the first boat that's going. We take our Holidays in July, I was working at school then. So we go south, then we come back to Hay River, we go by boat from here to Hay River and then we leave our truck in Hay River and then the next boat that's coming this way would bring our vehicle back here. Whenever we went south we used to go to these bars listen to music, different bands, we go to different bars.

MMS - All country music?

AB - All country, never heard any rocks at all. Maybe the young dance but the bars were all country. And we would drive to Edmonton and we used to fly to Vancouver and other places. There too, any evening I would look for where there was music.

MMS - Anything you remember that really stands out?

AB - Well, old *Jimmy Orge*, *Hank Smith*, I think in Edmonton, I liked them. I don't remember any of the big bands at all. *Franky Rogers*, fiddling there, I used to see them in Edmonton there.

MMS - As far as the music that you learned, the traditional fiddle tunes and everything that you learned and played up here when you went south and heard the fiddlers there was there a huge difference or could you connect to what they were doing and the music they were playing as well?

AB - Some were close, you know. Some songs I would say, its close.

MMS - Coming from almost the same kind of place that way but just play it a little differently?

AB - Yeah.

MMS - Just sort of trying to get a scope of your range you were playing some in Hay River, did you ever get down into Fort Chip or northern Alberta or any of those places or was that not until

later on?

AB - Those days no, not until later on but “The Native Cousins”, after well, the first, myself, many players went through me, *George Mandeville* also played in my group, we played for dances just in Fort Res though. A lot of these young players I didn’t show them how to play but playing for dances and that, they’ll join me and next thing they’re playing with me for all the dances and all that. It was not a matter of me going and asking them to play with me or something like that you know. It seemed like they all come to me like, you know. Like, *George Mandeville*, we played for many dances here and then *Isadore Tourangeau* and then *James Fabien* was one of my singer and original player and now he had a stroke, back years, I would say about 15 years ago and he’s still in hospital in Hay River and he just don’t seem to know anything. I think I have one of his songs singing. I got reel to reel in the early ‘60s. I got myself a tape recorder and I recorded myself a bit at that time but I never, I might have little parts of it. Then, *Peter Lafferty*, I don’t know if you met *Peter Lafferty* which is *Morris (Lafferty)* and *Eddie Lafferty*’s brother, eh? He lives in Whitehorse.

MMS - I’ve heard about him.

AB - Peter, when they were building the power plant here, he worked here. We didn’t have power yet at our house but where I was working at the school there was power there so I got a tape recorder so we used to go over there and record just a flat top with the fiddle. And I had some of that tapes too, I might have little parts of it. After he went back home to (Fort) Simpson, he sent me a reel to reel tape of all the family, the sisters, *Morris* used to play really, really good fiddling too, *Morris Lafferty* from Fort Simpson. And on a tape *Morris, Eddie, Peter* and their sisters singing. Even *Jim Villeneuve* was playing in a band too, he used to play rhythm and sing too. *Jim Villeneuve* lives in Fort Res now. So, here he sent me one reel to reel and then about that same year he sent me three 7 inch reel to reels and then after that when *Nick Sibbeston* was going to school in Akaitcho Hall in Yellowknife, he came home for Christmas, they’d done recording at home, eh, and that too I got that reel to reel. But I put it on cassette, I think I got some of them here, *Peter (Lafferty)*, I transfer them over a couple of years ago. I just took an ordinary tape recorder and it turned out not too bad but it could be better. Because they are so brittle, it was breaking into pieces with me, so I didn’t know what to do with it so I just try and save as much as I can. Out of that *Morris* and *Peter*, that family, I’ve put it onto 3 cassettes. That room there is very, very cold in the winter. From the corner of the building it’s really cold so I keep, I got a box like that reel to reels.

MMS - I asked you earlier about the radio stations you would listen to, like you said there was no technology, there wasn’t any tape recorders, you had your one phonograph, was there just the one record did you have or did anybody else a record player, did you use 78s, was that what was played?

AB - That’s the only records that were around. I got some of those yet.

MMS - I see especially up here, starting when you started to play and there was very little of that

technology and you've taken me up to now the early '60s and you already have a reel to reel and you're recording and so you're being able to hear yourself back that is changing the way you are playing because you get a chance to hear yourself back. You get an amplifier and there changes the way you play because you can play louder in different places. I find it really interesting how the technology or the tape recorders or the turntables or the reel to reel tape recorders, the guitar amplifiers all came along, in your lifetime when you started there was the fiddle on the wall, that's all there was. And how that's come along and trying to put that into an order and also into a perspective on how or if that changed things for you. Just in your music. I guess I'll just ask how did having a turntable or having your recording, your little reel to reel, did that change anything or was it just something else to do?.....Was it just another toy?

AB - It was kind of interesting to see just how it would work, or something, you know, something different you know, you would just want to try it.

MMS - Just having a chance to be able to record and hear yourself back. Do you remember the first time you heard yourself back, what did you think?

AB - Well, I guess it wasn't too bad I thought but, there's something else maybe I should mention this. Before my amplifiers, before that, going back to battery radio and that. Back to that, I got a record player that got kind of.....after those big heads eh? OK this one here, I got one downstairs, it's a combination like the record player on top and then it's a radio. This head here has more kind of a needle the same, a little cartridge type that when it plays up here but it's still a single record, eh, you still have to wind it, the top part but I got one downstairs. So winding and it works off the battery, the sound goes through that battery head I guess, whatever you want to call it, goes through there and comes out of there. I don't know how I got the idea of this here. I found a cartridge or something off that. I don't think I took that one out of there, I think I had another just a single player, you have to hook it onto a battery thing for the sound because this one here didn't have a horn. I think I got another one, I don't know where I even got it from. I took that little cartridge and I put it on the fiddle. Just like a pickup, you know. I'm moving it around the fiddle and ringing it, you know, 'til I found a spot where it picks it up real good and what I done is the radio, I'm playing here and listening to myself on the radio right, it's not an amplifier but it's doing that, eh? At that time I was working in the saw mill. Now they had a different kind of radio, a good size one that had a 12 volt or 6 volt, I don't know whether it was a 12 or a 6 volt, it was a big battery it was one of those battery on charge, their machinery there that the battery off the sawmill, they had this radio in the office there. So, I'm always going to the office, listening to this. So to keep me out of the office maybe, they gave me that radio to put in my little bunkhouse. So I put that in there and I used to put that little thing I told you, that uh, and I used to listen to myself. Then after that, what I got to do in the evening, people just had ordinary radios eh? So I run wires to the next bunkhouse and the next bunkhouse there. I run wires and then those radios didn't have a plug in for anything to pick it up so I had to use real tiny wires towards the radios there. I would lift the tube up a little bit, you know the prongs like this eh? I would touch a prong, you know, which one would be the sound when it get there. From the way on this big radio there where I had it, it didn't have any plug in under it anyway and I found a place so, I try and look for that power tube or whatever it is and I just

looped that little snare wire and I just pulled the tube and put it back on with it. So I would be playing in my bunkhouse here and the guys that were working there would gather in the other bunkhouse. I had more people in the other bunkhouses than where I was... Just like I'm on the radio, eh, but I'm not playing in front of them here, you know. They would peek at me and then go back over there... I remember there's a guy who's still alive, *Grant Beck*, he's old now, older than me. He's kinda, he really likes to dance, eh, he really, really likes to dance. He didn't have his family in the sawmill there so he come to my bunkhouse. In the evening I would play, I would play there, since I would listen to myself, I liked it better that way so I would do that just about every night I would be playing there. He would come over and grab my jeans laying on the floor there, after I got off work or something there and he would grab my jeans and just dance. He said, "You can hear it in these two bunkhouses" on the radio so he thinks that Fort Res., this is up Slave River, 60 miles from here, eh? "Do you think my wife can hear you playing on the radio". I said "yeah". If you talk in the fiddle there you can hear it eh? If you talk in here your wife can hear you in Fort Res and he believed me, eh? He talked to his wife he said, "I'm doing real fine here, I'm just dancing for Angus here", just talking and they can pick it up on this radio and also hear it too eh? Holy smokes! So that was my kind of first experience before the amplifier.

MMS - You just took radios and modified it and spread the music around. That's Great!

AB - That was a lot of fun that. So when I got home after, I figured this out when I was working the saw mill. So when I came home we had a radio at home too so I, that little cartridge where ever I got it from, that was my pick up on my fiddle.

MMS - You could take that anywhere and amplify yourself.

AB - I don't know how I never burnt anything.

MMS - Or electrocuted yourself.

AB - Or burn a tube out or something.

MMS - Exactly, I was going to say you couldn't really electrocute yourself with a battery but.. That's genius to be able to do that, that's amazing. So, yeah, I mean for that part of it anyways, you say the technology, you were using and modifying the technology even then when it was first just coming out.

AB - I never saw anybody do it, you know, I picked it up from this radio combination thing and I think how I done this is one time I lift that head up and put it on my fiddle, you know and I was ringing the strings and it was coming through that radio. And I didn't know where to hook it on and I think that where I lift the tube up and going from one prong to another...To think of it today, I think it's crazy, you know. So that's how I guess I kinda started. Many players played with me. There was many guitar players in Fort Res here.

MMS - So this was even before "The Native Cousins"?

AB - Oh yeah. I had different groups playing with me before "Native Cousins". At that time, before "Native Cousins", Pine Point started up 1965, I played in Pine Point, Hay River with a different group. I played for a few weddings in Hay River and also another little experience here. The highway wasn't completed. They got a winter road in and they worked on part of the road, this end and then there was 3 miles, there was swamp and you name it. I had a call from Hay River here that they wanted me to play for a dance in Hay River. And I was still in one amplifier time then. So I said sure. Well there's no highway really but from Pine Point all through Dawson Landing, there's all mining and drilling roads and that and they finally made it into a winter road up to Buffalo River and then winter road into here that winter but then I think the second year or something they done some work from this end out, you can drive out 10 miles and there's 3 miles and then there's Buffalo river there. So they'll drive with 4X4s up to Buffalo River and it was this time of year, I couldn't go by boat to Buffalo River. So I had to go as far as I can go and from there with a wheel barrow. So I was wheeling the instruments and the boys were carrying guitars. *James Fabien, Isadore Tourangeau*, Isadore is still around Fort Smith there, I got a picture of it too. So here, 3 miles I had to wheel, good thing I didn't have a whole band equipment just a Silver Tone amp, a few cords and whatever few things there. Dorothy took a picture of me and Dorothy used to play in the band with me. She's pretty good rhythm player and she's a singer too. She used to play in the band with me. So anyway when I was looking at these pictures not too long ago here I said "Dorothy, I thought you used to play in the band with us, where are you? She said, "well, who would take the picture?"....

MMS - However you could get to the gig by dog team or by boat or by wheel barrow.

AB - I like to show you that picture there. We got to a wash out, eh? After a winter road there is always a washout, can't jump across so we put a couple of logs there and one got one end of the wheel barrow and we were carrying it across, you know, there was lots of water flowing through about half a dozen places we had to go through that and when we got to Paulette Creek there they had no culvert there, of course it was just the first year of the winter road, eh? So Paulette Creek there, 4X4s had to find a spot there. Good thing it is all gravel country over there. In the spring, some puddles were pretty deep but 4X4 eh? So I remember Paulette Creek there, it was right up to the floor boards. They found the shallowest spot to cross. I guess it was tough because they flew us back.... and what you call him was one of the drivers, *Keith Broadhead*, he died in a car accident there. He was one of the drivers to come out and pick us up. They weren't too sure if one 4X4 to come through this so two came.

MMS - If one got stuck the other one could suck him out. But they flew you back, eh?..

AB - I didn't find it tough but it must have been tough for them.

MMS - They didn't want to lose a 4X4 in the bush

AB - So they flew us back. Where we played in Hay River was, there was a garage there right

beside the bridge in Hay River there I think that's the place. One time I think Keith when he was still alive. He said, do you remember that trip? I said, yeah. So Buffalo River there was no bridge so we had to find a boat there to haul our stuff across. It was just this time of year because we couldn't go by boat to little Buffalo River. Otherwise we could have went by boat. But with a wheel barrow.....

MMS - Was that for 8 dollars a night or was that for no pay?

AB - No, they paid us a little bit, I can't remember...

MMS - Just for the love of playing, you gotta do it, you gotta get there.

AB - When I think of it today, I was kinda crazy like, you know. To do things like that. Just trying to think of some crazy things. I also played over the phone for a dance in Fort Norman. *Freddy Clement* phoned me up, he said, friend of mine got married, he said, they want you to play a jig for them on the radio, on the phone. I said this is impossible. Sure he said we can do it. So anyway we got an amplifier set up here, we set a mic up and everything he said. We want you to play. I said how am I going to do this anyway? So anyway, *Gene Norn* happened to be here and he used to play guitar for me, it was just around Christmas or New Years, I forget what it was anyway, in the evening there. So, the wife was holding the phone for me, Gene with a flat top guitar and me with a fiddle there and we played. Here she's holding the telephone here and he was playing guitar there and I was fiddling right here. Someday if you ever run across *Freddy Clement* in Fort Norman, he often talks about it. And then after I played that, the wife was listening I guess, they said it was great. After that they wanted me to play a square dance, I thought it was crazy but I played, you know and apparently they danced to it. I'm just trying to think of some crazy things, you know.

- (looking through photo albums)

AB - I told Dorothy, I said, "If it wasn't for this finger I wouldn't see a lot of places..... Here, we're playing for the opening of the Hay River Caribou Lounge, here. *Here's Lloyd, Leandre, Tony Buggins*, myself and here's *Gladys (Beaulieu)*, that's *Donny Morin's* wife. So, also Gladys' Grandfather and my Grandfather, also brothers. So, that's where...and Leandre's Grandfather and my Grandfather were brothers too

So here, I won (a talent contest) with a coat hanger there, in 1977 in Aklavik. About 5 years ago I was down there to play there and I entered the talent show and I didn't come out with nothing.....

They usually have unusual talent in (Fort) Simpson and this year I brought this, I played fiddle with my boxing gloves on.....

MMS - With your boxing gloves on?

AB - Yeah, so I got one side there and one side's over there. And I used this, boxing gloves and a coat hanger. So, I was going to enter this unusual talent but they dropped it this year...

MMS - So you missed out on it.

MMS - At any point in time in your playing, did you ever consider going down south and playing in any of the bands down there and doing any of the touring around or playing as a professional musician making your living at it?

AB - Not really, I don't think that ever but then after I got into this "Native Cousins" group, our group there, when I hear some of the groups from the south and compare ourselves to them, you know, I'm not saying I was better, like *Leandre Beaulieu* was a pretty good guitar player. He was a good guitar picker. I was very pleased with the boys that were playing with me. We got along a hundred percent. The reason why I wouldn't go to cities and that is.... We go out for holidays, first we used to go out for 2 weeks holidays or something and maybe 3 weeks before, in the beginning, I'd never saw a city before, not very often and that. That started coming down and coming down. Now we go out for, the last few years, we don't miss going to Lac St. Anne, where they have that gathering every year. We've been going to that the last 15 years. So, sometimes we just go to Edmonton for the day and it was going down and down that maybe a couple of days in the city is more than enough for me. I just don't know how to explain myself but the feeling in there, I don't feel comfortable. I feel comfortable when I'm back in the north here. So I don't think I could have got to play. The boys went out for one year, "The Native Cousins", they went on the road for one year in the south. They played in mostly just Alberta and Saskatchewan. They started, we played in (Fort) Simpson in the spring and then from there played in Hay River, from there they went to High Level, Manning, Peace River from there they went High Prairie, Slave Lake and Vermillion, not Fort Vermillion, Elk Point, all in that area back and forth. They weren't going through a booking agency, just when you play well, they ask you again. That's what they done for one year. But now, all the band have fairly big families and they all got jobs. Like *Lloyd (Cardinal)* is running a business now he has his own plumbing company here and then *Leandre Beaulieu* is a teacher at the school and *Allan (Cardinal)* was a mechanic in Fort Smith but he moved to Yellowknife now. So, it's not the easiest to get away to play.

MMS - We're coming up to "Native Cousins" time, where you guys had your band and you guys did a lot of traveling and a lot of playing in the north so you weren't professional musicians in making a living at it but you were making money and doing lots of playing. How did that "Native Cousins" start? Who did it start with? Did it start with the "Longest Bar"?

AB - Not really. We played all the Mackenzie up and down, the Longest Bar was a one year thing, carnival.

MMS - How long was that gig for?

AB - It was just for three days, Thursday, Friday, Saturday. But the boys, the year that they went

south, they came back and we done the same, they left that weekend open so I went over there. When they come as far as High Prairie, I go from here over there and play with them for say Thursday, Friday, Saturday. I'll take a couple of days off here and go over there and play with them there or if they're in Slave Lake area I drive from here out there, when they get to Manning or High Level I meet them there. But it's not through a booking agency so it's kind of hard sometimes they jump from one end down to this end and then not going to in a line, your jumping all over the place, eh? But then that's the way. Yellowknife, they played for a week and a half that time and then they went back south again. They done real good, I left *Lloyd (Cardinal)* in charge. Now I leave Lloyd in charge for booking. I thought I was going to get out of it, I was hoping some young fiddler would come up and I was going to step down. That was about 10 years or more ago but I'm still playing a bit.

MMS - So the "Native Cousins" then came to....

AB - Well, '75, we went to pick a name and I came up with a name. I said all our Grandfathers are brothers and we're cousins and we're natives, we're all Metis. And everybody agreed to that name.

MMS - The "Longest Bar", that was Caribou Carnival right, in Yellowknife, you did that for how many years?

AB - 22 years.

MMS - 22 consecutive years?

AB - Yeah, never missed one year. That's many years, eh? And then, I don't know how long it would have went on if they didn't renovate the Yellowknife Inn.

MMS - One thing that came up with this fellow I was talking with in Yellowknife was the different nationalities of people and that's probably because the gold mines were there. So there was a lot of European people that were coming through Yellowknife and working in the mines, Italians, Germans, people from the States and so there was quite an influx of different nationalities and of course they would bring their music with them and much the same as what you're talking about having house parties here and that's what those people would do. So there would sort of be a cross.... They would be bringing their music from their country and the Metis people would be having their music but they would all be in the same room and providing the entertainment for the night. Was there the same thing happening here? I know Fort Res used to be a lot bigger, like it used to be a bigger community and it was more or less a hub of transportation and so was that same sort of thing happening here?

AB - Not during my remembering days but going back to the old man, *George Norn* again, his days, my grandfather was telling me one time he said, nothing in different type of music but just in fiddle, the fiddle itself, he said, one time there was three brothers, fiddlers that came to Fort Res. And some way or another heard about *George Norn*. So they wanted to compete with *George Norn*. He said everybody gathered just down the hill here, my Grandfather loaned a part

of the property out to a guy named, this was before me but I remember names as I said, his name was *Jim Mason*. I think that's where it was held, they had a little coffee shop just down below here. They used to have dances there and he said people gathered there and these three brothers wanted to compete with him with the fiddling. So he brought his old fiddle there with a little silk hanky wrapped in, he had no case for it. Well, he said, you're the one who wanted to compete so you play your tune first and me I'll play my tune. So one of these guys played a tune and he played that same tune this guy played and just put that guy to shame, you know, the way that song? So he asked that guy to play another tune and I don't know how many tunes they played and each song this person played, he just made the song sound awful. And he never in his life ever played some of those songs these three brothers are playing, you know. And he put the three of them to shame.

MMS - So, he would ask them to play a song and then he would play it way better.

AB - And he done that. That's the way he done it. He said you came here to me to compete with you and you play the first song and I'll play that song. But I'm pretty sure he didn't know every tune that those guys played. But he said he just played those tunes so much better. And that's the kind of fiddler he was, this *George Norn*. That's what Grandpa was telling me but I've never heard of other different kind of music. But what else different can you play up here but the fiddle. The fiddle those days and then there's no guitars 'til later on, you know and accordion. I remember there was a white trapper when I was growing up he used to come through here he had a steel guitar. And he used to stay at our place here. He used to go just before freeze up he used to come through here and then go out to Fort Reliance and then from there go on the land I guess. And then I don't see him again all at once, I don't know how many years after again, or seemed like a long time, Then again he had a steel guitar but it was just a hollow body I think. He used to play it for us, boy it was ever nice.

MMS - Not many more other instruments coming through other than the fiddle and guitar, whatever could be played acoustically.

AB - Except my Grandmother used to have one of these push pulls, but I never saw her playing it for a dance.....

MMS - Mostly in church?

AB - No she played at home but my Grandfather used to tell me she played it for dances with her brother but that was before me, I don't remember that. But now and then she used to take it out and play. She had two of them. The old one she'd let me fool around with but not the newer one, that one she had, she kept it in her trunk, she had a big trunk there. She kept it in her trunk, nobody else touch it. And I don't even remember what happened to that after my Grandmother died. When Yellowknife started up, it was in the later years, in the late '30s and '40s. So there was a lot of people. People here, what was happening here, people in Yellowknife, people came to Yellowknife to work there but Fort Res was more like a gate so who ever came here maybe stopped here but it was on the way down the Mackenzie or something but not like Yellowknife.

They came there and stayed there. So it's a different way. Fort Res was never, I can go back, 1911, Fort Res was 767 people here and now it's 500 and something.

MMS- There used to be a lot of people here, even if you were saying, there was that many priests here?

AB - It was kind of a training, new priests were coming in and learning the languages here and then there's some extra priests, that young priest that taught the Chipewyan Language here.

MMS - Then they would go out to the communities?

AB - They go Lutsle Ke, Fort Lutsle Ke down that way. And people used gather here, Christmas, you know, people come from all around this lake for church. Christmas was very, very, very important to the people way back. They come, that church here used to be full, full, full, full at Christmas time. People, some of them, when they, sometimes just before masses, just after communion sometimes they would come in. Big fur parkas, just ice, coming in, going down the aisle there. The father there sometimes had put the communion away, he'll take it out and give communion. I remember when we were coming out of church, there was dog teams all over that are late coming in, but still went to church. The singing and everything was so, you know, it was a big, big, big thing. But that changed to today, it's more like a competition, lights, I mean, some of them have a hundred set of lights out. I go to church on Sundays, I'm not myself, even though Dorothy is a very religious person, myself I go to church on big days, I believe in the Lord but I very seldom go to church. Now I go to church on Christmas just like it's on any other day, I don't have that spirit, whatever, it's not the same. Before, you go in that church, I mean you feel, you were in a special place, your feelings, your whole thing. Now you go in the church and there's no other, just like the spirit's not there. Just like any other day. But Christmas I remember people come from all over the place. Dogs, they're all dressed up. In those days, people come in gloves, moccasins, I mean beautiful. I remember people sewing, all the communities I go to Rocher River there and small little communities all the way going there. Not communities, people, a couple houses here and there. Don't matter where you stop ladies are sewing, eh? Little candle light and the beautiful work they do and nowadays I mean, you put a light on. I remember you go to a place where there was a gas lamp, go in like this you know, (covers eyes) it's too bright you know.... Our eyes, our ears, you know, change a lot. My Grandfather's house used to be right here I said. And the arena on that corner, a little further than that, that's where the old NT building used to be, big white house there, that's where they used to have all their dances. In the winter, I used to stand outside and listen to the music and I can hear the fiddle just clear. That same building that was standing there I was thinking here, if I go in there with my fiddle, play my fiddle, and I put somebody here they'll never hear me, you know. With the doors and windows closed and I used to listen to music, I used to hear it clear. In those days there was no power plants, trucks running around, skidoos and that you know, seemed like the sound traveled more than today. But I was just saying Christmas was, Easter, same thing, people come from long ways. So much strongly believed in the Catholic, you know. And that's just going away.

MMS - I wanted to ask you about the trip you took to Ottawa?

AB - OK, I don't know how I got chosen to go from all the fiddlers in the Northwest Territories but I got a letter that I was asked to take part in the Canada Day on Parliament Hill there. As I said first I was really happy to go and then the last couple of days I thought well, why me, you know? Why not get somebody else to go, why me? I can't read music. The last week I wasn't sure, I wasn't too sure and then the wife said it's a once in a lifetime you're gonna go, that's it, there's no two ways about it. That morning I had to catch a plane in Hay River she just shoved me out the door and there I went. The first day I felt like hiding, I didn't feel like being around, there's all these top fiddlers but then after the second day I started to feel a little better and then by the evening of the second day I was right in there. At first I felt like I was so low, I felt all these top players way up there and then here me, coming from the north, can't read the music and all this and that, everything was going through my mind but after I found out that a lot of these players didn't read music. After the evening of the second day I was real happy to be there. So it went on, we played about four days getting prepared for the Canada Day which is on just a few minutes but we spent a whole 4 days rehearsing for that little few minutes. And in the meantime when we played we broke into groups and then we played and talked and played and get all back together. So we done a lot of playing in groups and we broke into not the same groups stay together and we mix up again. The two players I had tapes of them was *Graham Thompson* and *Ed Landry*. *Graham Thompson* I got to play on his fiddle and he played on my old fiddle. Before going I bought myself a fiddle case, I had just an ordinary little, one sitting over there. Well gee, I thought all these top players going out there, my fiddle would look a little cheap little case so I bought myself an expensive box there. When I got there some of these top fiddlers had their fiddle case taped together with grey tape and everything you know. I felt stupid again there with a brand new case I was the only one there that had a brand new case. Everything like that you know. So I got to really talk a lot with *Ned Landry* and *Graham Thompson*, I talked to those two more than the rest of them. There's a triplets there too that play fiddle, I can't remember their name right off hand. Two of them I guess they been in the top world championship. One won two years and the other one won a year, something like that. I talked to them quite a bit. I can't remember their names right off hand. I was really happy I went.

MMS - They were playing tunes that were not much different from what you were playing?

AB - They played more eastern style but out of that, some of the tunes, "Rag Time Annie" and there's some that are very close, "St. Anne's Reel" Just about every one of them played it within the four days there and it's very, very close. It's just maybe the style, that's a bit different.

MMS - What year was that?

AB - I think it was '96. The only ones from the north was *Dusty*, her name is *Dusty* from Yukon. So there was one from the Yukon and I was from the NWT. So out of that the rest of them were all from the south.

MMS - And you took along your old fiddle, is that the fiddle that's a hundred years old?

AB - Yeah, I had that with me.

MMS - How did you get that fiddle? What's the story behind the instrument there?

AB - OK, first, maybe going back about 20 years, I had this fiddle about 8 years. But anyway, we're still in my old house there next door. And in the spring or summer we were playing fiddle outside, it was nice outside, so we were playing a couple guitars we were just playing outside there. This guy brought me a fiddle with no pegs, no strings just the body, eh? And he told me it's an old fiddle that I found up in my Grandfather's attic, you know. So, anyway, I had some other old fiddles so it didn't even hit my mind at all, you know. After we were finished playing, it started to rain I think so we quit and that was it and I didn't even know he left that fiddle behind. About 20 years later we were living in this house here and I was looking for something in the old house and I ran across this fiddle here. And I was looking at it, looking at it, looking at it and I don't remember nothing about that fiddle so I brought it in the house and I asked the wife I said, where did this come from? Well, she said, remember this guy brought it over and he wanted to give it to you but you never, he just left it. Just left it here so when you guys came in the house, it was raining so I brought it in. Ok I said, I don't know nothing about fiddle, I can play it a bit but I don't know anything about the wood or anything at all. I just looked at it. I thought maybe I'll try and fix it up, it had a couple of cracks in it so I brought it to the school, where I work. In my spare time there, a couple of cracks in front there. I tried to put ordinary glue, I guess you're not supposed to use ordinary wood glue on it. But I didn't know so I put a little bit of wood glue in there and put a big clamp on it I didn't have a small clamp so I put one of these carpenter big, long clamps on it and I put it on the shelf. I think it was just during the time there was no school, school was out or something like that. I don't know how it fell off the shelf, of course I had a big long clamp on it may be the balance or whatever and I found it on the floor. It was in nine pieces. I just grabbed a small box and put it all in the box and I got a cupboard there I keep my own belongings in there so I put it in there. And then that went on another year or whatever, you know, and then my helper that's working with me at the school, we're spring cleaning, doing garbage, I was burning garbage then. Good thing I had my gloves on. When I threw the garbage in the, I noticed a piece of that fiddle fell out of that box into the fire there so I reached in there and grabbed that box that some of the pieces fell out of that box, so I grabbed it, even right in the flame I grabbed, I guess there's one piece, there's a block inside of it that I missed out I guess, I didn't know, I thought I had all the pieces. And then it sat in the shelter for a while until *Cole Crook* he was showing me his fiddle that *Alfie Myers* repaired. A mouse, one of his uncle way back he had an old fiddle there, a mouse made a hole in it and Alfie patched it up and he was showing me this. I was telling him I got an old fiddle that I was trying to fix and it fell apart on me, in nine pieces and he (Cole) said send it out to Alfie, Alfie will fix it for you. So I put it in the box and I sent it to Edmonton to *Alfie Myers* there. Later on he phoned me up, he says it's a very good fiddle, it's going to cost you a lot of money, it's going to cost you \$700 and some dollars to get it fixed. So I wasn't sure, so I said I'll talk to the wife first. I talked to Dorothy and said what do you want me to do with this old fiddle? And that's the time I didn't even know the fiddle was over a hundred years old yet, I didn't know and I didn't quite know where the fiddle came from yet at this time. So I told Dorothy I wasn't going

to pay \$700 for it because I don't even know if the fiddle is going to be any good or what. She said well take a chance on it I'll pay for it if you don't want to pay for it. So I phoned Alfie back and I said go ahead. That was in the month of January I think. I sent it out in December. We were going out to Lac St. Anne the same time we sometimes go to Edmonton so I pick up the mail on our way out, cause we're leaving town and we're going along the wife is opening the mail, there was a bill for that fiddle was all finished. So after we went to Lac St. Anne we went to Edmonton picked it up and it looked like brand spankin' new and I thought well, maybe, I didn't know Alfie then that well and I know I ordered strings from him I met him before but I never knew what kind of person he was or anything. So I thought maybe another fiddle, just give me another old fiddle for that because when I close looked at it, I noticed where the old cracks were and I recognized it. So the wife paid for it and it happened to be really, I really liked the sound. The same time I was there I asked him how old that fiddle would be? He said from the last time it was played at least a hundred years. When I got home I start asking about this fiddle now. I tracked it back to my Grandfather's father, *Pierre Beaulieu*. His brother was *Suzie King Beaulieu*, that was his fiddle.

MMS- Is that the *King Beaulieu* I keep hearing about?

AB - Yeah, *King Beaulieu's* fiddle.

MMS - Holy smokes!

AB - So that's how, but first I didn't pay anything for it, it was just given to me and I don't know how it came about. I don't know why this guy brought it to me. I just don't understand how this, since like I told you, I got three things from old *Francois (Beaulieu)*, four things, a clock, a chair, axe and a bear trap, Four things this old Man Beaulieu and that's his son, his fiddle, eh? So that's Francois, his sons' fiddle.

MMS - and it came around to you?

AB - It came to me, it could have been, I don't know about Francois if Francois ever played fiddle. I don't know if it has any connection there I don't know. But as far as I can track it back is to *King Beaulieu*. It just happened.

MMS - One of those things, but a good thing it did happen that way as close as having to reach into the fire to pull all the pieces out....

AB - And then going through all that you know, you know if I wasn't watching, that fiddle might have been gone and I wouldn't have thought nothing of it because I didn't know where it come from. And there was a piece missing so Al (*Alfie Meyers*) had to put a new piece inside. It's a block I think where that little peg in the back that holds the tailpiece, there's a block of wood there I think, you need something solid there of course to hold that little peg that goes in the back there. And there's a block inside, I think it is something about that size and that's the piece I was missing. I remember he told me that he had to put a piece in. But the body, everything, nothing

changed. But after I got it, I think it was three years ago, the fingerboard was the same one, Alfie didn't change that, I guess he didn't want to change anything on it. So he didn't change it and then there's a place when I put my finger there the string would kinda, depends on how hard I put my finger over that hole, would make it sound like it was out of tune. So I put a new fingerboard, I asked Alfie but Alfie was too busy. This was the fingerboard.....

MMS - Oh yeah, I can see those grooves in there, looks like it was played a lot.

AB - So I got a fingerboard from Alfie, he told it's a big job putting it in. So I didn't want to send it out, I was in Edmonton a couple of times, when I was in Edmonton I brought it to him he said he was so busy I couldn't get him to do it in the short time that I was without, course I didn't phone ahead of time, eh? So I changed it myself but I found out it was a big job, it looks so simple, it wasn't as simple as I thought. When I put one in there it was thick and my strings were high because it tapered thick over on this side. So I took it out and I put sandpaper and tried to bring it down so this wouldn't be too high. I got it down to about the height this one was. I never liked the high bridges, I never liked high bridges. So there, that's the story of this *King Beaulieu's* fiddle.

MMS - And you put the new fret board on yourself?

AB - Yeah, I did that.

MMS - Is that your main fiddle?

AB - Yeah, it's my main fiddle but now I have altogether 7 fiddle I think, about 7 I think I got. I got one from *Richard Lafferty*, he sold it to me for \$500 because he got a new fiddle back maybe 10 years ago, something like that. I got some other fiddles, I tried them when I go to cities and that, I'm always around music shops when I go to cities and try up to 4 or 5,000 dollar fiddles, you know and I don't like the sound of it. Sometimes I run across a cheap fiddle that I would like the sound better than those 4,000 dollar fiddles, you know? So I got the odd fiddle from the music shop but maybe nothing within about 6 or 700 dollar fiddle but I never paid anything more than that. This fiddle I got it second hand, I think 1,100 dollars, the one I got painted here. But after I got it I thought I liked it but I didn't like it. So I didn't use it. I like a blue fiddle, I like, *Reg Buvette*, he had a blue fiddle there, I really like the color of it and Reg been gone and I thought, just for something different, you know, maybe sometimes I do some shows. So I got it painted, after I got it painted, I got it back, the next day I went to High Level, I entered the talent show in High Level, I came out first with it. And I been playing it ever since. So I end up using this blue fiddle more than any other fiddle, the old one I was kind of stingy with it anyway, when you travel sometimes you can lose your baggage and all that too. So I was a little afraid of it getting damaged or something in travel so I'm happy I got used to this blue fiddle, this one I don't mind if I lost it. So I'm using the old one around home more and using this one for traveling.

MMS - That's an amazing story. I'll ask you about the *Native Cousins* again and also some of

the other players you played with. You were playing and you had different bands up until?

AB - 1975

MMS - 1975 and then the *Native Cousins* were formed.

AB - Actually they been playing with me before, I think, I would say 1970 at least or even before. Actually the name came about only in 1975, that's what happened there.

MMS - The band was together before that?

AB - Yeah, before that.

MMS - But the lineup has pretty much stayed the same since then, since '75?

AB - Well, I think I can go beyond, well. *Native Cousins* I think goes in to '60s, late '60s I would say. From that time, they were all the same players. I know *Leandre (Beaulieu)* started with me, the lead player he was 14 years old. None of the players that played in my band, I never showed them to play the guitar. Some of the players before when to chord for fiddle music I would tell them G chord or I had to show them the changes and that, some of the ones way back when I first started playing with the guitar and that. Some of the songs, not all of the songs. When it came down to the boys that played, the ones that are the *Native Cousins* they been playing... Well, *Leandre*, he picked up an old guitar from his brother *Herbie (Beaulieu)*, when *Herbie* left home there was an old guitar dragging around that had only two strings on it and that's how *Leandre* started with a two string and then from there on his Mom bought him a little guitar from the Northern store, been in the store so long that the neck was warped and that for nine dollars and that's the guitar that he started on and when he was the age of 14 years old he played for a first dance with me in Hay River. And that's in the '60s, Late '60s and he was just playing rhythm at the time and I guess I never tell him what chord. He done very well in rhythm and ever since then *Leandre's* been playing, he picked all the picking, he's a very fancy picker in the *Buck Owen's* picking style. Any kind of picking, I thought he was one of the top in the north. Before him was *Tony Buggins*, was playing in my group and he was already picking guitar so I had two, *Tony* and *Leandre*. And *Leandre* started picking and they both, they done picking together when we played for dances, they played double leads so that really came out good. Before the "Native Cousins", those days it was just fiddle and guitar. I played for a lot of dances just fiddle and guitar but sometimes never the same guitar players. But maybe I should name some of the guitar players that played with me. *Isadore Tourangeau*, who lives in Fort Smith now and he played in my group there before the *Native Cousins*. *George Mandeville* from Yellowknife, also played for dances here with me for quite a few years. *James Fabien*, he's still alive, he had a stroke he's in Hay River hospital he's still alive but he's not doing that well and *Sonny Collins* also played in my band. He lives in Hay River, he used to be my lead singer and the rhythm guitar player, he lives in Hay River but he used to be from Fort Resolution. There I named just four right there. There was *Henry Edjericon* who used to play that used to play guitar for me dances too, he's gone. *Mickey Lafferty* also played guitar, he's gone too. Just for fiddle,

guitar dances. *Frank Fabien*, you know, so there's many, many guitar players that played with me for dances in Fort Res. Just about every person used to play guitar, the ones that didn't play fiddle played guitar. When I was growing up there was also a lady fiddler, her name was *Florence Houle*. She used to play fiddle for dances and there was a lady used to be her guitar player, her name was also Florence. *Florence Beaulieu*, so, those two were kind of a group, played for dances also as I said when I was growing up there was *George Norn*, fiddler and *Johnny Beaulieu*, one of the top fiddlers too. *Sam Norn*, so those are the main ones, some other ones played a little bit.

(MMS; the following paragraph is not included in the audio interview)

The late Joseph King Sr. also played with me. Joseph played the fiddle too. He used to drive for us. He had many trips with us. And Joseph and I, we played fiddle and guitar at the same time. Like, I played the fiddle and Joseph would bow the fiddle. He played the guitar and I strummed the guitar strings. We used to practice a lot like that. We did a show many times when he came with us. The late Herbie Lafferty. He was a Bass guitar player. Herbie played for me for about a year. Also, I have played with Lee Mandeville and the late Kole Crook many times. We played for dances at Yellowknife, Hay River and many places. I have played with many other bands.

MMS - If you can remember, this is an off the cuff question, your most memorable....what gig do you remember the most or what was your favorite gig? Do you have one? Or do you have a favorite place that you like to play or a favorite event?

AB - Yes, I guess, actually that Yellowknife, that carnival, (Caribou Carnival) the longest bar, I think a lot of people came from all over Mackenzie and we get to meet a lot of people there. Once a year but that seemed to be outstanding more, that Longest Bar. Actually the boys, when we were playing every weekend, back in the '70s and that, the wife used to do the booking. We were booked about 3 months ahead. (Fort) Providence was the boys favorite place there, mostly just close around here, Pine Point, Fort Smith, Hay River, Fort Providence, Fort Simpson, those were the places we kind of just rotate. Yellowknife was kind of a, we played the odd time in Yellowknife besides the Carnival but that's where our playing used to be. Quite a bit in Pine Point.

MMS - So, the Longest Bar was the gig?

AB - Seemed to be, you know, when I think about it now. The other places we would play, we would play alright but then not a yearly thing like, maybe we played this place more often than the Yellowknife Inn there but still, everybody kind of looks forward to this same thing. For 22 years, you done something on a certain date for 22 years, it's a thing. But if you do it here now and then now and then, it's not a rotated thing, even though we played more other places but still, it's something that falls in place.

MMS - You play it one year and you know that you're going to be playing there the next year

too and get, probably a real good gathering place, like you say people from all over the Mackenzie would come into Yellowknife when the Carnival was a lot bigger and get to see lots of people that you probably, in one place. So everybody would be together so I can imagine it would be a heck of a good time, for sure. .

AB - Those places it was mostly, Dene people, Yellowknife Inn, You get the odd not Dene there. They used to line up right from the Gold Range corner. I felt stupid. I think you're only allowed to have 250 people, and there's about 500 people there, trying to get in and they're trying to tell me get me in, get me in but I had no control over who I get in , it was just first come first serve. So sometimes they used to line up from 5 O'clock, we don't start til 8 o'clock, you know. Three hours in line, I felt so stupid, actually I should have maybe carried on some way or another, found another place.

MMS - the following not included in audio recording

Also, July 1, 1979, Canada Day Celebration, "The Native Cousins" and myself were on TV across Canada and also with Joe Loutchan.

MMS - One thing you mentioned yesterday how you were going to retire but you were waiting for a younger player to come and take your place, take the torch, so to speak or to carry on with the tradition of Metis fiddling? Can you talk a bit more about that, I don't have anything....?

AB - That's what I was thinking back when I turned the booking over to *Lloyd (Cardinall)*, I think it's about 15 years ago, that time I was thinking about maybe..... I still get quite a few calls and I turn it over to *Lloyd* to deal with it when it comes to the full band. I'm not even up to date money wise, how much to charge, *Lloyd's* up in there so. But in a way, one thing I would say is, my Grandfather that raised me, not very long before he passed away, he said to me, when he was in the sick bed there, you know. He said music, is the most wonderful thing, music, he said. He said, even something happens to me, if I'm gone, well those days, if you lose somebody in the family, some people wouldn't play music for a year or more, something like that. That's our tradition, somebody dies we don't play music, that's the way it used to be but then he said to me, he said, I know you play for a lot of dances for people, you travel, he was still with us, I told you he was gone in 1969, so I was playing for quite a few dances out of town and playing quite a bit, just about every weekend. He said to me, if something happens to me, if they ask you to play for a dance, even short after I'm gone, he said, don't turn it down, you just play. Music is the most wonderful thing, he said, you were given a gift to make people happy, he said, music makes people happy and you carry that on as long as your fingers can do it. I remember playing for a dance maybe about 2 months after my Grandfather passed away and somebody was saying, oh, look at that guy, he doesn't even think of his Grandfather there, he's playing music. But I didn't do it on my own, like he told me to carry on. Because, usually we always listen to our people that passed away, there's some message sometimes, you know, you gotta follow. When a person sometimes last word, it wasn't his last word but it was getting close to there when he talked to me about music, he said, not everybody is given a gift to play music and he said you're given a gift and he said I want you to carry on. So when I thought of that too, when I was thinking about

retiring, again when I thought of my Grandfather there, I thought, well, maybe I should just carry on until there's somebody could do the fiddling.

MMS - You're still playing fiddle at, how old are you now, 69?

AB - Yeah.

MMS - Do you have any musical plans or hopes, what would you like to do in the future?

AB - I think what I'll do is still play with the "Native Cousins" and I get a few calls also to play with other bands so I'll probably carry on as I'm doing now. As I said my Grandfather wanted me to carry on with music as long as I could, so my fingers are OK yet, except, well I'm going for this operation and hope after that things will be better. Depends on my health too, my health seems to be OK.

MMS - So just keep doing what you're doing, just keep playing?

AB - I think I'll just keep on playing.

MMS - Right on, thank you very much for all your time and hospitality.

AB - You're very welcome.