

Elsie Justus (Burger)

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Elsie Jr. - But, Mom, you should start at the beginning of your life, right? Shouldn't...

MMS - Yeah.

Elsie Jr. - Her musical life?

MMS - Yeah, no, that's sort of the first question.

Elsie Sr. - Well, yeah.

Elsie Jr. - You're jumping all over the place here, mom.

MMS -The first question, I guess, is what were your early years as a young musician like?

Elsie Sr. - Well, we lived on a farm, and dad says, "My girl," I was 10 then. He says, "I wanna teach you the guitar chords." And he says, "So you can play with me." And he says, "When I go to dances or weddings." Usually, country school dances or dance hall ... country halls. And by the time I was 12, that's when I started actually accompanying him. And then when we'd practice at home every once in a while, he would give me the right chords, and which to use and when to change. And so one time I made a little slip. Used the wrong chord or hit the wrong cord. He tapped me on the shoulder with a fiddle bow, he says, "Smarten up." "Smarten up there." He'd say. He was always so kind and gentle, you know. So, anyway, we'd play at these Ukrainian weddings, sometimes three, four nights straight. And then in the meantime, well, you know spring work is going in the fields. And so, anyway, Dad, he'd never refuse. He loved all those people anyway and they sure liked him. And they'd come back at our place. Well, first of all, I mean, we'd get home maybe five o'clock in the morning. And we had this old '46 Ford pickup truck then, you know they're pretty narrow. And a loose wheel, and bad muddy roads. Either that or rough. And so he'd be half cut too, of course, and I'd be tired and sleepy. And he'd be driving away talking and I could barely hear him, you know 'cause he's swinging. And then he'd bump me on my shoulder every time he'd be turning that loose wheel. He'd say, "Well, my girl." He says, "Daylight in the swamp." He says, "Time to feed the pigs and milk the cows," and that after we got back home. Get only about two hours sleep and then in the evening they'd be back again. "August, you come play some more music for us? Lots to drink, lots to eat." So, that's was then, and ...

MMS - Where did you grow up? Where was your farm?

Elsie Sr. - High Prairie, Alberta. Do you know the Peace River area? Well, High Prairie was closer toward Edmonton, about 80 miles from Peace River. About 250 miles northwest of Edmonton, approximately.

MMS - And when you say you started playing at 10 and 12 years old, what years would those have been?

Elsie Jr. - She was born in 19....

Elsie Sr. - Well, I'm 57 now. 57, oh I wish I were. I'm 87 now.

Elsie Jr. - Well, you were born in 1931, weren't you?

Elsie Sr. - Yeah.

Elsie Jr. - So, 10 years old, 1941.

MMS - Yeah. '41 and ... mid '40s. The early, early to mid 1940s then.

Elsie Sr. - And then, you know as the other members of the family started growing up ... See, the youngest of the boys ... The oldest, I mean, of the boys was three years younger than me, so I was Dad's handyman, you know on the farm. But then, after they started getting a little older, they were all interested in music too, especially the fiddle and guitar. But my brother, Swede, was ... he was the singer. So, we had a five, six piece band going, you know. But sometimes, well, in order to give someone a break, well, there'd be just three at the time up on the stage, and then we'd change around again and get a chance to dance, and then Dad would call Casey. Casey was the oldest boy. "Here, you take the fiddle," he says, "I wanna dance." And he says, "Play a waltz." So he got Mom. Oh, gee, they used to dance so nice, you know. They even used to step dance too, the jigs. Boy, they were good. And my mom was quite a heavy woman, but, boy, she was light on her feet.

Elsie Jr. - So, mom's mom, was she half breed or full breed?

Elsie Sr. - Oh, she was just about full.

Elsie Jr. - Yeah, she was Cree, almost full-blooded Cree.

Elsie Sr. - Her grandfather came straight from Scotland and married a Cree, a full blooded Cree woman, which was my mother's grandma. And then, so forth and so on, well ...

Elsie Jr. - And so mom's dad was also Metis, French Metis, *Beaudry*...

MMS - That whole ... that's sort of the Canadian experience. I mean, that's sort of how we all came to be. Straight up from the east and ... I mean, when we go back into the lineage and stuff. So, was it your parents that settled in High River, in that area?

Elsie Sr. - High Prairie.

MMS - High Prairie, sorry. Or, was it your grandfather before him that settled there?

Elsie Sr. - It's my grandfather, who was Dad's dad. They traveled by oxen cart in 1900 from ... Manitoba, I believe, was where they originated from. But Mom, Mom was raised in the Grouard Convent, right near High Prairie. Her parents were both dead.

Elsie Jr. - And I think, somehow, if I remember the family tree, we're related to *Gabriel Dumont* somehow, and also ...

Elsie Sr. - Oh, yeah. He's my fifth great uncle, *Gabriel Dumont*.

MMS - Wow.

Elsie Sr. - Yeah, it's *Louis Riel's* general. He was the smart one, you know. Old *Louis (Riel)*, well, he stuck it out and he eventually got hung. And then *Gabriel (Dumont)* went down to the States. He was smart.

MMS - So, yeah, you're about 12 years old and you're playing a lot of Ukrainian dances. So, it sounds like there's a lot of Ukrainians up in ...

Elsie Sr. - Poplar View is the area where mostly Canadians lived. And then, well, as we formed the bigger band, family band, well, we'd play at dance halls in High Prairie and bar jobs and so forth. And then, after I got married and we moved up with my ex-husband, we moved up to Fort Smith where he got a job. And then I joined a group there. Did you ever meet *Ward Lamoureux*? Great steel guitar player. Oh, boy. He was fantastic.

Elsie Jr. - He was from Fort Smith, Mom? *Ward Lamoureux*?

Elsie Sr. - He was then, yeah.

Elsie Jr. - For a while, yeah. Not originally from (Fort) Smith.

Elsie Sr. - Yeah, he was working for the forestry, and then he got transferred up to White Horse area. But, no, transferred to Fort Providence. He was transferred to Providence before we were, and we moved there...

Elsie Jr. - 1962.

Elsie Sr. - Yeah, I guess so. Dave was a baby. And then, he moved to White Horse after that. So, anyway, we formed a trio in (Fort) Providence and we used to go play music in Hay River. And one time, someone's son got married. No, their daughter got married. A close friend of ours, *McClures*. Did you ever meet the *McClures*?

MMS - Recognize the name. Yeah, for sure.

Elsie Sr. - Yeah. Anyway, they lived in Hay River and we were close friends with them, you know. And oh, heck, it was early winter and there was an awful storm going on. And then this Cessna 180 was the one that was transporting us, and that was owned by the son-in-law of *McClures*. So, he came and picked us up, but the bull fiddle wouldn't fit in there so they had to take the ... pull the handle off, right where it was glued onto the base of the fiddle.

Elsie Jr. - Oh, you're kidding!

Elsie Sr. - No. Yeah. And it was storming, and gee whiz, I'm telling you, I was nervous.

Elsie Jr. - So, the ...

Elsie Sr. - Yeah.

Elsie Jr. - They had to take the neck off the body?

Elsie Sr. - Yeah.

Elsie Jr. - Phew. That's pretty scary.

Elsie Sr. - And then they had to ... you know, they only had a few hours in order to have it set in again, so in the meantime they were practicing and I couldn't do anything until dance time.

Elsie Jr. - So, this was going from Fort Providence to Hay River?

Elsie Sr. - Yeah.

Elsie Jr. - In a little plane?

Elsie Sr. - Yeah.

Elsie Jr. - Okay.

Elsie Sr. - Yeah. See, the passage on the river was just in between ferry and ice bridge time. We weren't using that. I mean, it had to be planes or nothing.

MMS - Takes me back to the early years in High Prairie. I guess one of the questions that I ask is how did you get your instruments? How did you get a bull fiddle in the mid 1940s? Do you know how you got that instrument there?

Elsie Jr. - Like, where you bought it, you mean? Or ...

Elsie Sr. - My brother, *Casey*. *Casey* was the top fiddler of the three boys. Gee whiz, I don't remember now how he got hold of it. But then, anyway, he sold it to me for ... I don't remember, \$50.00 or something like that. He paid lots more for it. And I was really happy to have it. Well, I mean, he preferred playing the fiddle anyway.

MMS - I'm always really interested in how the instruments came to be in these really quite remote places. And oftentimes, that's even a story unto itself how it made its way across the ocean or however that is. But, anyways, you had a bull fiddle and you took it all the way to Fort Smith with you, and then all the way to Hay River as well and kept playing it.

Elsie Sr. - Fort Smith first, yeah, and then to Providence and used it there.

Elsie Jr. - And then you must have bought a new one somewhere in there too?

Elsie Sr. - Yeah, I traded that in one time when your dad and I went to Edmonton and got a newer one.

Elsie Jr. - So, *Casey*-

Elsie Sr. - But it still didn't have near as good a sound as the old one.

Elsie Jr. - So, *Casey*, the guy that bought the fiddle to begin with, would have probably bought it in Edmonton.

MMS - Yeah, I'm sure.

Elsie Jr. - It was a major trading area.

Elsie Sr. - Yeah, no doubt.

MMS - Would that bass have had gut strings? You would have been using gut strings?

Elsie Sr. - Oh, yeah. The old one.

Elsie Jr. - She started lead guitar when she was 64, or 60, or so.

Elsie Sr. - Yeah. There was a close friend of mine, he was a great musician. And he's a very good teacher too, teaching me bar chords and ... I had an awful time with bar chords though, at first. And then he said it's much easier if you wanna play some instrumentals. He says, "You gotta have those bar chords." So, anyway, about the time he figured that I'd be good enough to go on my own, then he says, "Well," he says, "I think you're ready," he says, "To teach yourself." He says, "I know you have a good ear for music." 'Cause I'd always listen to the instrumentals that I really liked, like "Panic Button". Oh, you'll hear a lot of mistakes on this. But, I was stubborn.

Elsie Sr. - I always had this strong desire to learn to play instrumentals, like, you know the '60s and '50s. That kind of instrument. *The Fireballs*, and *Dwayne Eddy*, and ...

MMS - *Chet Atkins*

Elsie Sr. - *The Ventures*, "Walk Don't Run". I have some of them. Actually, I have more instrumentals than vocals on any of my CDs, I always had. I don't know why, I always figured. Supposing I can't play the guitar anymore, so I wanted to learn to play a whole lot of them.

Elsie Sr. - And then, we had a Winnebago motor home in Merit. And Al usually liked to watch TV, so I'd take my guitar and ... 'Cause I had an electric guitar then, and also had a Martin Classic, and I have a story to tell you later about that. Anyhow, and then this big Sony recorder, A side and B side. So, on the A side I'd do a, my intros on the guitar, and sing. And then next time, well, I'd play a rhythm, and runs, and so forth. And then, when we moved out here, I found out about a guy that was recording for singers and different musicians but he turned out to be a crook. But anyway he knew quite a bit about recording and that, and so I hired him to accompany along with this young fellow. This was a native fellow that played a bass guitar, and he was good. So, anyway, I put that onto my CDs and ...

MMS - When would you have recorded those?

Elsie Jr. - The original ones are from 1994.

MMS - 1994, okay.

Elsie Jr. - And then she hired this band to do backup, and then she dubbed it and harmonized on top of her original recordings. I think originally she used it ... we had it on a tape, cassette tape, and then we digitized it, and then ... I can't remember the whole story, but...

Elsie Sr. - But then you're asking about when I had the backup?

Pat Braden - Yeah.

Elsie Jr. - So, about 10 years after the recording, yeah.

Elsie Sr. - Well, it-

Elsie Jr. - And you were still working on recording here in Klemmer, weren't you? You were still adding stuff to it, no?

Elsie Sr. - No. The only recording ... I used to steal from the internet, you know, and play all kinds of the good old rock and roll stuff.

Elsie Jr. - She injured her arm, and that's why she quit playing. And so, I think when she moved to Klemmer, you had already pretty well quit playing, eh?

Elsie Sr. - No, I did. 'Cause *Kathy Dirksen* that lived across, she says, "Oh, I came over and heard you play" she said. She said we had a party down in the basement in Klemmer. We had a pool table down there too. Used to have lots of fun down there, I just loved the place and I didn't want to leave it. But, anyway, Kathy said, "You were playing the guitar then." And then it took ... I guess it took, maybe, a couple years for it to have effect on my fingers, control. A rock hit

me here. Al was scratching up the lawn back in Merit. There was a big lawn. We had this little mischievous half poodle dog and he'd go around carrying rocks and drop them in the lawn. And we had just rebuilt this home, and there was a nice, big picture window there and I could hear the rocks hitting the house so I ran outside and covered my face like that and one got me right here. Just like a bullet. And then, well, a couple years or so after that, I couldn't play. When they had the memorial for (*Kole*) *Crook*, fiddler.

MMS - *Crook*, yeah.

Elsie Sr. - *Kole*, yeah. And, course, they called me up there to have a little say about him and ... 'cause I used to play a bit of music with him, and so I said, "I'll have to borrow one of you guys' guitars." So, they handed it to me and I was gonna do something on the key of C and I couldn't. I couldn't play the C. Boy, was I ever embarrassed, and shocked. So, I just had to...do away with that, after that night.

Elsie Jr. - So, you would have been trying to play rhythm? Yeah.

Elsie Sr. - Yeah. That's an awful shock, I'm telling you, when you've been with music since you were ... 10 years old when I first started. And always crazy about the music. And then, as I got older, well, I got interested in a lot of the old rock stuff. That is really good stuff, them days.

MMS - Yeah. For sure it was, yeah.

Elsie Jr. - So, you're missing a whole bunch. So, the last place you were at, you were in High Prairie, and then Fort Smith, and then Fort Providence. And then from Fort Providence, you said you had that trio, right? There was *Ward Lamoureux*, you said? You, and who else?

Elsie Sr. - Hmm. *Ward Lamoureux*, and me, and ... what the heck? There's someone that was ... some of their family member. He was a rhythm guitarist.

Elsie Jr. - *Lamoureux* family.

Elsie Sr. - No, not the *Lamoureux* family. *McClures*. It was a young fellow anyway, from Fort Providence. It wasn't *Richard Lafferty*.

MMS - Talking the early '60s here? There's a picture of a group that Richard was with at Akaitcho Hall called "The Arctic Ramblers". And now that I remember *Richard's (Lafferty)* interview, he mentions a *McClure* in there. And so, maybe that's his name. But, anyways, I'll check that up. We'll talk some more, we'll get back and forth here, but ... So, with that trio you would play Hay River. Would you go as far as Yellowknife or Fort Simpson, or did you just stay mostly around Hay River?

Elsie Sr. - No, just in the general area.

MMS - In Providence there.

Elsie Sr. - Hay River was the farthest we went.

MMS - Yeah, for sure. If I could just backtrack here, just a bit. Well ... I'm interested in what kind of music you were playing when you started playing with your father, and then how...

Elsie Sr. - Old time.

MMS - Old time, so the titles of some of those songs that you would be playing?

Elsie Sr. - Oh, gee whiz.

MMS - There would be jigs, and reels, and...

Elsie Sr. - Most, yeah. Most of them. I don't think Dad even knew the titles of a lot of them that he played.

Elsie Jr. - Well, "Red River Jig", I remember that.

Elsie Sr. - Oh, definitely, yeah.

Elsie Jr. - "Red River Jig".

Elsie Sr. - And "Red River Waltz", and lots of foxtrots too, because people like to swing, especially the younger generation.

Elsie Sr. - In High Prairie. After the war we were still living in High Prairie, until 1959 was when we moved to Fort Smith. I definitely remember that year. And then, when we moved to Fort Providence, it was two and a half years after that. '52, I guess, we moved to Fort Providence.

Elsie Jr. - '62.

Elsie Sr. - Or '62, yeah. And in '65, Pine Point.

Elsie Jr. - So, when you were in Smith, did you play music when you were in Smith?

Elsie Sr. - Yeah, I was potbellied too with ...

Elsie Jr. - Pregnant.

Elsie Jr. - Do you remember who you played with in Fort Smith?

Elsie Sr. - Yeah. *Ward Lamoureux* and *Jean Plamondon*. He was from somewhere in Saskatchewan, I know that much. Probably northern Saskatchewan. Maybe Meadow Lake. Yeah, I think it was Meadow Lake.

MMS - The name is familiar to me because probably Jean's son Archie played with *Tom Hudson* and that whole group, "The Centennaires", that went on the Centennial barge in 1967. *Archie Plamondon* was a piano player and he was a part of that tour.

Elsie Sr. - Oh. I never...

MMS - Yeah, so I'm pretty sure. Just because Archie would have been 16, 17 at that time.

Elsie Jr. - And from (Fort) Smith.

MMS - And from (Fort) Smith, yeah. So, that name rings a bell in there. Fort Smith at that time too, this was before ... I remember the competition between Yellowknife and Fort Smith, which one was gonna be the capital city, right? And all the rest of that stuff, Fort Smith was still ... was probably a pretty vibrant little town back, back then, when you moved there?

Elsie Sr. - Yeah, fairly. But no road out. Except the winter road and fly, or buy a boat down the Slave River.

Elsie Jr. - Fort Smith didn't have a road?

Elsie Sr. - Not then, no. Just a winter road.

Elsie Jr. - Oh.

MMS - So, when you went up there, you went by ... did you actually fly there, or take the winter road, or did you take the waterway to Fort Smith when you went from High Prairie?

Elsie Sr. - *Dan* was already up there for a couple or three months, maybe, and then he finally found a place that we could rent. And then we flew. And we had a '55 Bel-Air Chev. It was a good car, in spite of the way Chevrolet developed a bad name there for a few years, it was a really good car then. It was kind of a dusty pink with a gray top. It was a pretty looking car. But, anyway, the old man called and he says, "Well, Load up the kids." And he says, "Just come on up here." So the spare that I had in that car wasn't very good. You couldn't rely on it. So, I went to one of the local garages there and asked for a good used spare for the car. And, well, one of them said, "We've got a re-vulcanized tire here" he says. He says, "It's good shape." So, anyway, I loaded that up and just packed up the car. The trunk was just packed right full and so was in between the front and the back seat and I had four kids. So, they'd take turns, you know laying ... I'd put blankets spread on the ... on top of the boxes that were in between the two seats so if one or two of them would lay up there and ... and then, Dad says ... he says, "I'll come with you," he said, "As far as ... " Peace River, I think he said, or Manning. I don't remember which now. He says, "My girl," he said, "Gee, you're sure taking an awful chance traveling with those little kids like that." And then he says, "That car," he says, "It's not a very good car." I said, "Yes, Dad, it's good." I said, "I just needed a good spare and I got one." So, anyway, gee whiz. He had tears in his eyes when I left him. And then, well, he says, "Don't travel at night." "No," I said. So, anyway, I wanted to find out how many miles it was from Manning to Keg River Cabins. That's the place I stayed. Anyway, I stopped at this restaurant and ... with these four kids, and it was

after dark. So this cop come over and he says, "Are you traveling alone, ma'am?" I says, "Yeah." He says, "Where are you going?" I said, "To Hay River." "My," he says, "You're sure taking an awful chance." "Well," I said, "My husband's working in Fort Smith." And I said, "I'm moving up there." And so I says, "But, I'm looking for a place to stay tonight." Anyway, he escorted me over to these rooming houses, fairly high rooming houses. They had two floors.

So, next morning, the boys needed haircuts. So, I was clipping, you know those hand clippers, eh? Giving them haircuts first before we moved on. And then, past High Level on up there was no graveled roads, there was all dirt. And then, especially ... whereabouts was that? Somewhere ... I think it was between the border and Hay River. It was really sandy roads and not very wide and then this great big transport truck just come barreling. And he wasn't giving me any road 'cause I guess he was afraid to pull over because he'd run into the ditch there with his ... So then I ended up ... fortunately, I managed to drive out. I ended up, you know half over the bank into the ditch and made it out anyhow. And then, we had some friends from High Prairie, school chums that lived up there. So, they had me stay at their place and then we had to leave our car there, and they kept it in their yard. And then, we went by plane.

So, anyway, plane time came. The stewardess. She came to me and she says, "You're traveling with four kids, eh?" I said, "Yeah." And she says, "Okay, you wait 'til everybody else gets off the plane and then I'll help you." So, anyway, out the window I could see *Dan* standing out there, and just as we were getting to the exit of the plane, and the steps, well, he was turning away. I guess he gave up. He didn't think I was on that flight. And then, one of the kids hollered, "Daddy!" And he spun around. But we made it anyhow. And the weather was nice.

MMS - So, you were in Fort Smith and your husband was working for forestry, yeah? Or, no, highways.

Elsie Sr. - No, no. He was a grader operator.

MMS - Grader operator, okay.

Elsie Jr. - In Fort Smith?

Elsie Sr. - In Fort Smith, yeah. And also, he got a transfer to Fort Providence as a grader operator up on the Yellowknife highway.

MMS - Mm-hmm (affirmative). I was just gonna say just that 'cause they were punching the highway all the way up to Yellowknife that time.

Elsie Sr. - Yeah. So, anyway, when ... See, we were still ... I was moving to Fort Providence from Hay River, and when we got to *Arychuck's* Garage there and he walks over to me there, a big grin on his face, and he says, "What the hell do you want?" And I said, "Well, I'd like some gas please?" And, so, anyway, and then I said, "I have a message for you." I said, "It's from a friend of yours in Fort Smith." Her name was *Marlys Townsend*, to say hello, and that's all. Then he said, "Yeah." And I tell him some more. "Yeah. Well, I'm gonna turn around and give you

some gas here." That was his saying, "I'll turn around and do this." And, "Turn around and do that." He used to call me Mama Berger.

MMS - Playing in Fort Providence and you were still playing with *Ward Lamoureux*?

Elsie Sr. - *Ward Lamoureux*.

MMS - Yeah. And do you remember any of the other musicians around?

Elsie Sr. - Not yet.

MMS - Not yet? Okay. That's fine. I'm just thinking of the *Richard Laffertys*, and the different *Lafferty* boys, and ... Gosh, who else would have been...

Elsie Sr. - Well, it could have been one of the *Laffertys* visiting from (Fort) Simpson. He was a good guitar player. I mean, rhythm. There was a horn player and a pianist that we were to join for that wedding in Hay River and I don't remember their names. And, we'd never played with them before.

Elsie Jr. - That's when you had to pull your bass fiddle apart?

Elsie Sr. - That's the time, yeah.

MMS - When you moved to Pine Point, how much of the town ... how much was it developed or established?

Elsie Sr. - Then? Maybe 150 or something like that. But eventually, it became more like 250. A lot of Saskatchewan people moved up there. Some were electricians and some were ... you know, trained. And also welders, and ...

Elsie Jr. - Yeah, and then they have ... those drill rigs would come up, Connor's. You've probably heard a few stories about those bad boys at Connor's Drilling.

MMS - Yeah, different-

Elsie Jr. - And then they had bunkhouses and a mess hall.

Elsie Sr. - Connor's Drilling?

Elsie Jr. - That's where the boys worked when they were younger, yeah.

Elsie Sr. - Yeah, but I mean, they all had their meals in just that one mess hall in Pine Point, but there are bunk houses there.

MMS - So, you were playing music in Pine Point there as well?

Elsie Sr. - Yeah.

MMS - Where would you have been playing in Pine Point?

Elsie Sr. - The bar. And, there was a dance hall in there too, the mess hall. They'd have dances in there, like New Year's dance. Holy, all the ladies, everybody would be just in long gowns and all dressed up in suits. So, I made myself a long gown too. I did a lot of sewing and I was playing music. *And Irene O'Neil*, she was an accordion player. And then, there was a young drummer that was from Hay River. He wasn't a very good drummer though. I sure had a lot better one after that one. And then, I had my bass fiddle and ... Who the heck played rhythm guitar? I can't remember now. But, anyway, we formed that band and used it, I suppose ... maybe stayed together for a couple of years or something like that. And then, *Irene* decided that she didn't wanna play anymore. So, some young fellows, there's *Leon Blais*, he was an organist and he also played an accordion once in a while.

Elsie Jr. - He was from Saskatchewan originally, I think, eh?

Elsie Sr. - Yeah, from Debden. And, see, there were the *Schroeder* brothers. *Lloyd*, he was our lead singer. And I did a lot of the singing too, and then also sang harmony to him. And his younger brother, he was only 17. That was ...

Elsie Jr. - *Tim (Schroeder)*?

Elsie Sr. - *Timmy*, yeah. I always used to call him my little *Timmy*. He was really a nice kid too, and a good drummer. Boy, could he ever drum. He used to do "Time is Tight" and he'd do lots of drum soloing in some of the tunes. And then, lead guitarist was *Bob Fontaine*.

Elsie Jr. - Yeah, that's the guy I was thinking of.

Elsie Sr. - All those boys were from ... Doomtoun, they called it, Debden. But *Bob (Fontaine)* was a really gentleman, really. Every time *Leon (Blais)* went to talk to him about anything he'd always speak in French and *Bob* would answer back in English because I was there. You know, in respect to me. And they're all just like my boys in ages and that. The oldest was 24. That was *Leon*. And *Bob* was 20, I think, and *Lloyd* was about 19, I guess. *Timmy*, the drummer, was 17. And we were called "The Pine Tones".

MMS - So, you were almost like a ...

Elsie Jr. - She was the leader of the band.

MMS - Leader of the band as far as the...

Elsie Sr. - How about ownership of equipment too? Yeah.

MMS - The responsible one.

Elsie Sr. - Yeah. I owned my own bass, I owned three guitars, and ... See, when they first started they'd have to use my guitars. So, as time progressed, well, they made a little bit of money and ... 'cause some were working in the mine. And then, they bought their own guitars then. But the amplifiers, PA system, everything. Microphones, that was all mine. And great big bass amp, yeah. Because I started off with a bass fiddle, and I found that pretty rough to do some of the kind of tunes we were doing. So, I decided to turn it in for a bass guitar and amp. Bassman amp is what it was. When I pulled out, I loaded the ... I had a van that I had paid for myself from my job there, and the van was just loaded with musical equipment. There was three guitars laying on the bed there and, of course, a big Bassman amp and all the rest of the stuff and I'd sleep with my guitars.

Elsie Sr. - I'd really like to see you write a book about...

MMS - I don't know where I want this to go. All I know is that I wanna get it done because I started this 15 years ago and so I just wanna see it done. I wanna see your stories, and the music that you played, and the time that you played it, and in one place. And, that like we were saying before, people can start to go, well, in Akaitcho Hall this happened here. In Fort Providence, well, Elsie was here and so was *Richard Lafferty*, so was all of these other people. And so the story of Pine Point is like ... I mean, it's gone. I mean, it's not there anymore. But, also, the musical story of Pine Point as well. So, that's why I'm here today, Elsie, is to ... just to get that story in there. 'Cause I know *Tony Buggins* talks about playing with you there, and he would go for a summer job and work but he would also play with you.

Elsie Sr. - What a musician, what a guitar picker. Oh, boy. He was fantastic. I couldn't even come close to him. Far from it. He's a great musician.

Elsie Jr. - Just talking, I remember school dances, I remember *Tommy Hudson* and *Tony Buggins*. I remember them playing at our dances in Hay River, 'cause I went to school there because of having to bus from Pine Point, school bus.

Elsie Sr. - I loved *Tommy's* singing. He used to sing some of "Bread's" songs, eh? Gee whiz, there's another one that really sticks with me. But he was great. He didn't play any instrument but, boy, he made up for it in his singing.

MMS - Was Tony even old enough to be in the bar when he was playing with you?

Elsie Sr. - *Tony Buggins*?

MMS - Yeah.

Elsie Sr. - Oh, yeah. Well, it was only jams that I played with *Tony*. I mean, not as a band or anything like that. Just-

Elsie Jr. - They'd come up and play, I guess.

Elsie Sr. - Just not the right connections. Not being the right place or at the right time.

MMS - I'm thinking of questions here, just sort of ricocheting around in the time that you've been playing. When you first started playing, it was all acoustic instruments. There was no electricity, probably, in High Prairie...?

Elsie Sr. - No.

MMS - So, when the electric guitar came along, do you remember the first time that you heard or saw an electric guitar? And who would have been playing it?

Elsie Sr. - *Dwayne Eddy*, maybe? No, no. The first group would be *The Fireballs*. Them, and ... oh, I can't think of the names. Different groups that...

MMS - But in the north and locally, do you remember who would have...

Elsie Jr. - The people around you. So, I guess what he's trying to figure out is when did you yourself personally see the transition from strictly no electricity to mics and...

MMS - PA systems probably as well would have been ... you know, microphone, and if you wanted the guitar louder you held the guitar closer to the microphone.

Elsie Sr. - Well, *Casey*, *Uncle Casey* had electrical equipment, my brother. Microphone. He had cancer pretty bad and he was in a University Hospital in Edmonton. From there on, back and forth to the High Prairie Hospital. And when he was in High Prairie Hospital, he wanted to go spend a few days out at the ranch. And then, in the meantime, he had an IV going on him. He had to have that on him all the time, and no electricity out there. So, I said, "Well, how did you manage," I says, "With your IV," I said, "Out there?" "Oh," he says, "I hung it on a mic stand." And then when he started really getting sick, well, he'd go back to High Prairie Hospital again.

And then it wasn't him that told me about this, but I know it for a fact that he and his group. They were a three piece band, I think then and they were playing basically from the High Prairie and surrounding area and Guy and Donnelly, and all those places. So, anyway, I guess at Donnelly one night ... No, they played three nights straight there. Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. So, anyway, that night after the job's all finished, well, they'd go in there room and order this drink, beer, or whatever and I guess they'd party among themselves, you know? 'Til it was time to get up in the morning. And then, when the time come to collect their money, he owed them \$25.00.

MMS - Too much drinking going on.

Elsie Jr. - Too much food and too much drinks.

Elsie Sr. - Oh, yeah. They'd order a grub too, don't worry. Because Casey had a big gut. Seems he was always eating.

MMS - Always eating. But you say he had a PA system himself, like an electronic PA system.

Elsie Sr. - Yeah, he did.

MMS - Would this have been going back as far as the late '40s, or the '50s that he would have had that?

Elsie Sr. - I suppose maybe the early '50s.

Elsie Jr. - So, when you used to play with your dad when you were 10, was there electricity at that time?

Elsie Sr. - No. Oh, no. Heck, no. None at the schools or the halls. I mean there were electric lights but I mean, not electrical musical equipment.

Elsie Jr. - PA systems.

Elsie Sr. - We used to play at the North End Hall, and Nine Mile Corner Hall, and bar jobs.

Elsie Jr. - So your real first introduction to the more modern guitar was probably in Fort Providence, and Hay River, and Pine Point there, eh? Because I'm thinking of her family, they were all mainly acoustic guitar rhythm playing. Nobody really played the lead. Mom was the only one that really started that.

Elsie Sr. - Gee, Dad and I were playing at a job just the two of us that time and then while I was using ... you know when you're playing the key of G instead of going way up and you play more or less like a ... sort of a bar chord mixture and then I'd give some fancy sounds and Dad turned around and he says, "My god," he says, "I sure like that chip-chip." We were playing a good foxtrot that day and, "Gee, it makes me feel good," he said. Of course, he was half cut too. See there was no such thing as drinking during a dance or in the hall. But you know the young guys, "Come on, *Uncle August*," he says, "Come on out with us."

Elsie Jr. - Go outside.

Elsie Sr. - So they'd get him loaded out there and just raring to go again when it was time to start up again. He was quite a man. I sure loved him a lot. We were so close because we worked together since I was 10, actually. Out in the yards, heck, we had livestock and chickens, turkeys and field work. We had three quarter sections, plus a 12 river lot, 12 acre, they called it a river lot, besides the three quarter section. Lots of rock picking too. Stone boat and pulled by the horses.

MMS - And then playing music together. Yeah, playing lots of music together. *Dan*

Elsie Sr. - Yeah. Oh, heck. We had ... gee whiz, I ran across that but I didn't put it in this pile here. We had a big lot house that they built in 1916, his dad and his two brothers, and then Dad. And it was key shape. There was this part of the building like this, and then there was a T that went in the back. But this was the front side here, and there was a big veranda full length of the house. Oh, we'd have barrels of water there, you know, sitting there and ... but that's where we'd go and play music, out on this veranda, we called it. So, anyway, Mom, she was really strong in the Catholic Church. And, well, Dad, he was always cool headed. He had music in his head more

than anything else. Just like me, I guess. Anyway, this one Sunday a friend of ours, neighbor came by and he says, "Well, August, how much seeding did you do today?" And Dad says, "Oh, I went to church this morning," he said, "I like to hear the nuns sing." And then one New Year's Eve night, we ... no, Christmas Eve. Midnight mass. Dan's brother *Charlie* came over and he liked Dad too. And he came over with a bottle of rye. He knew that we'd be going to midnight mass and he said, "August," he says, "What are you gonna do tonight?" "Oh," Dad says, "We gotta go to church." "Well," he says, "I'll come with you." I guess he had a mickey on him too, besides and *Charlie* was a heavy smoker too. And then, anyway, oh, these nuns were really singing well, I'm telling you. So, they were always in the back there. So, Dad, he had this prayer book, I guess and he went back there and stood behind these nuns and he was just waving 'cause he was loaded too. And then one would solo and then Dad would tap her on the shoulder. He said, "Okay, your turn. Take it," he'd say. And then Uncle *Ambrose Jobin* he wasn't really a close uncle. Maybe second or third, or something like that. But we loved him like our own uncle but he was quite a card. And then, he was sitting across the aisle from where *Charlie* was and *Charlie* was sitting like this, like there's rows of pews up here in the aisle here. And he was sitting like that and Uncle Ambrose was sitting across the aisle from him and he saw this mickey sticking out of *Charlie's* pocket. So, he whipped a prayer book page off there and went and covered up that mickey. Oh, boy. A lot of crazy stuff. It's pretty hard to forget some of them.

MMS - Oh, for sure. Like I say, the teasing and the practical jokes, not mean spirited by any means but just keeping each other entertained and all the rest of that stuff too, for sure. Characters, yeah. I appreciate you taking the time and your story and the photographs too are just ... yeah, magical. But as I was saying to you before, just that time in Pine Point 'cause it was Fort Smith, and Fort Resolution so I'm getting all kinds of those stories and stuff. But nothing really what happened in Pine Point. This has been great, Elsie, for sure.

Elsie Sr. - Well, I sure enjoyed talking to you too.