

Ted Wesley

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MMS - If I could ask you, Ted, can you tell me about your early years as a young musician? How music came into your life?

TW - Well ... Being raised a Polak, Polaks are a kind of a community of their own. Because my family loved to sing and play. We always at Christmas time or birthdays, we always gathered together and everybody sang the old traditional Polish folk songs and stuff. Then I got involved in Polish theater. One of my roles was ... This was just before, actually, I met *Roy Orbison*. We opened up for him by doing a little skit. My job was to go through the audience ... I was a chimney sweep. I would be singing out the songs, selling my ... Going through the audience, I entered from the rear ... Through the audience, selling the chimney sweep. Then as I grew older, I picked up the guitar and I discovered that if I played music, I have a lot more girls. I started off in Discovery (Mine) and actually kind of stole my brother's guitar. He bought one but he never played it. When I went up to Discovery, I took it with me. I sat there and played myself and got to Yellowknife, met Leslie and we sang together quite a bit at home. Then there was a couple competitions, then *Andy Steen* came on the scene.

MMS - Can I just stop you there, before we get too far-

TW - Okay.

MMS - We're going pretty fast.

MMS - You're going back through the chimney sweep in Polish theater, *Roy Orbison*, opening for *Roy Orbison*...

TW - Yeah. He followed us because the Polish hall, at that point, in Edmonton was the biggest venue there was. This is before the Jubilee Auditorium and stuff like this.

MMS - What year would that have been?

TW - Oh, jeez. Okay. I was probably about 10, 11 years old, so that's ... '56, something like that. As soon as we finished, *Roy Orbison* came and did his concert.

MMS - Wow. Did you get to...

TW - It was quite something, watching him sing live. If I recall, there's only three pieces, three instruments with him. I think there was bass, I think there was a guitar and drums. Just him and the guitar and voice. And wow. Wow ... Wow.

MMS - As a young man, I wouldn't say, "In his prime," but he was-

TW - He was young. He sang so, so well.

TW - A lot of the Polish stuff that I do there goes into the falsetto. It goes up into the higher register. So I was really impressed because that was his full voice, right. It was totally impressive.

MMS - Did you get to meet him, at all?

TW - Oh, yeah. We chatted backstage quite a bit which is, at that point, when you're a kid at that age, like I mean, you're in your own little space. You don't realize what's gonna happen in the future. Just another musician on stage.

MMS - Just another night playing in the Polish hall in Edmonton, Alberta. That's amazing, amazing story of your brush with famous people, that way.

TW - It was a lot of fun.

MMS - Okay. Then, you hijacked your brother's guitar and you were up North.

TW - Yeah. That's basically where I got my start. When I started playing, we were still in Edmonton here. This one guy in mind, his name's *Ignazio Marino*, he's Italian kid. We both sat down and we played quite a bit. We started doing some song writing and we actually did pretty good. I left shortly after that for Discovery. He went back to Italy for some crazy (inaudible)

MMS - Go back to the homeland.

TW - Yeah ... yeah.

MMS - How did the job at Discovery come to you?

TW - I got a job during the summer for "J. Sullivan and Sons", which was as a painter, for painting towers, the communications towers. You remember those red and white towers that were 150 feet tall? And you had to climb up there, 'cause I was young and fit, a young buck in those days. And you had to carry all the paint that you were gonna use, climb up those towers ... because this is before helicopters and you gotta paint them, they get weathered. You climb way up to the top and start painting white. It's a beautiful day down below, you're standing on the ground and it's calm. You get 150 feet in the air and there's a 40 mile wind up there. As soon as you dip your brush into the paint, guess what? Guess where it goes? Not where you want it. I wore more paint than I actually applied to the towers. You run out of paint and you had to go back down and get so me more because it was, how you gonna do it? You're all by yourself. I

actually did pretty good for him so he gave me another job. Which was my buddy and I going to Calgary and labourer's helper ... We were doing the Foothills Hospital. Doing all the plastering on the outside of the building. This is before the forklifts and stuff. You had to build scaffolds and climb up the scaffolds and then you'd go down below and you mix the mud for the guy. Then you hoist it up, by rope, to the platform and keep them busy. That was our job and we did really well there. When that job finished, the guy gave us an option. My buddy and I, *Allen Feser* who's actually my best man at our wedding. This *Mr. Sullivan* there gave us a job, he says, "I can send you to Australia. I got workings in Australia. I like the way you guys work. Or I can send you to Discovery. He knew *Shorty Brown* and the "Precambrian (Mining)" he had some money invested in that, I guess.

So, Alex and I looked at each other. Well shit, we were only 15, 16 years old. Still need mother a little bit ... Didn't wanna go too far away from home so we both chose Discovery. He lasted about two weeks and he couldn't stand the north, so he left but I stayed. Then I went from Discovery to Giant (Mine) in Yellowknife. I landed in Yellowknife and started looking for a job. Of course, I had no experience in the mines but I met up with another dude there. For the life of me I can't remember what he looks like, or his name or anything. We lived for about two months together, inside ... What was the name of that ...

LW - Traveler's Lodge?

TW - Traveler's Rest. Which is right next door to the "The Gold Range". It was a little motel kind of thing. We both shared the room. He was a guy from Saskatchewan, that's all I remember. He's looking for a job and I heard somewhere through the grapevine ... I think it was *Bob Olexin* that told me that if I played hockey, I could get a job anywhere, if you were any good. So I ran into *George Taylor* from Giant, he said, "Come on out. Try out." I made the team but my buddy there didn't, so I got a job at Giant. My very first paycheck, this other guy didn't have much luck, he had family outside. Every day we'd come in, I'd buy him lunch. He'd come to Giant to feed him. My very first paycheck, I gave it to him. "Here. I got a job ..." He took the paycheck and went back home to Saskatchewan. But I stayed and basically the rest is kind of history. We started, you know, I met *Leslie (Wesley)* while I was at Giant. We got together, we got married, started singing, started "The Tundra Folk", the Original Tundra Folk.

MMS - What year would that have been?

LW - We traveled in '67, on the barge, so it would've been late '66, early '67 because by summertime we were on the barge with *Andy Steen*.

MMS - Oh, wow.

LW - Yeah.

TW - We did a couple gigs I think ... Did we?

LW - Not before the barge. After, quite a few after. The barge was our first paying gig.

TW - She's got a better memory than I do.

LW - We actually got paid.

MMS - How did you get the gig on the barge?

LW - Through *Jim Welly*.

TW - There was a talent show at Sir John, not Sir John ... Public School.

MMS - A talent show?

TW - A talent show. It was Northwest Territories Talent Show. "The Centennaires" were there competing and *Rick Williams* was there competing. He played the organ.

TW - Three of the groups from that particular show got invited to play on the barge, Centennial Barge. Which was designed to... Down South here, they had the Centennial caravan, the Centennial train. We didn't have any trains, we didn't have any roads but we had good water system.

MMS - Do you remember who else was in that talent show, that night? I guess, do you remember any of the other Northern performers that would've been there? Or the bands?

TW - Besides "The Centennaires"?

MMS - Yeah, beside the three of you.

TW - I can't remember that far back.

LW - I don't know, were "The Tradewinds" in there? No?

TW - "Tradewinds" came out shortly after that.

LW - Yeah, I don't remember either.

TW - We already had "The Tundra Folk" formed-

MMS - Was there a good crowd there?

TW - Oh, yeah. The place was packed.

LW - Yeah.

MMS - I would imagine so.

TW - Yeah. So anyway, they were looking for three different categories. *Rick Williams* won as a single performer. We won as a vocal group. Then “The Centennaires” were more of a dance band. So we got invited and the way it worked out for the Centennial Barge, *Rick (Williams)* would be playing the organ, basically entertaining the people having fun on the barge, on the Ferris wheel, eating cotton candy. As the barge approached, we had the Ferris wheel running, 'cause you were floating in. He was rebroadcasting all the sound, blasting it out. There are several moments, several villages, several little settlements that we stopped at where people are freaking out. They see this thing coming down the river, all these weird noises coming out, then they're gonna pull up the dock. I remember, I think it was Fort Wrigley-

LW - It was Jean Marie River, we were-

TW - Was it Jean Marie River?

LW - Yeah. Jean Marie River.

TW - We pulled in there, the place is deserted. The barge pulls in there, we basically had to jump onto the dock and tie ourselves up because there's nobody to help us. Then we look around and there's people staring from behind the buildings. Then as soon as we dock they realized we were human. If you can visualize an organ playing out there, being broadcast and echoing off the trees and just filling up the whole valley. Finally, they came out there and ... everybody had fun. During the evening, we'd open up, “The Tundra Folk”, we'd sit there, sing songs and we were pretty strict in those days. We wanted to do Canadiana.

LW - Yeah.

TW - That's what we were gearing ourselves but most of the songs that were ever written or composed were from the east coast and they were basically the songs that they used to sing in Ireland and Scotland. It came across in the sailing ships and stuff. They were like sea shanties and stuff. We'd research and try and find songs about the rest of Canada which we had difficult time. We did manage to do that. We were still really short of songs, so we thought OK, "What is Canada?" Canada is a mish-mash of all the different cultures, all different ... Anything from Native to Scotts to Irish to Polish. I'm a Polak so I knew a few Polish songs so I sang. *Leslie* is of German descent so she did a few songs in German and *Andy Steen* wound up doing some traditional type stuff. That's how we were. That's how we started, basically. Then we got invited after that to play for Like *Robbie Burns* Night or something. We discovered that *Robbie Burns* actually wrote songs not just poetry. We learned a couple of them. If we were gonna play for somebody else like the Irish or something, we dug deep and we found deep Irish songs that meant something to those Irish people. Something, not just the commercial kind of fluff that you might hear, right?

MMS - Where did that barge tour start and how long did it go for?

TW - Started off, I think we were actually in, I think it was (Fort) Reliance. It started off and then went to Hay River. (Fort) Reliance was the very first, it was a practice run before Hay River because Hay River was a little bigger center. So we basically made our tour on the southern part

of the lake. Then we stopped at (Fort) Providence, and (Fort) Simpson and made our way downstream. By the time we hit Inuvik, the barge had to come back but we hadn't done the Great Slave... around the Great Slave, like Yellowknife for example. They wanted Yellowknife to be the final stop. While the barge is coming back everybody was sent home except for "The Tundra Folk" because we were mobile enough and there was three of us so we could fit into a small airplane. They decided to send us ... We were in a Cessna 185 on floats, and *Dominique Prinnet* was our pilot. We flew across the rest of the Arctic wherever we could land we stopped and performed for the people.

MMS - What kind of communities ... Can you name off a few of the communities?

TW - There's only two settlements we couldn't get into.

LW - We went to Hall Beach, didn't we? We went to Igloolik

TW - We went to Igloolik, Frobisher (Bay), Cambridge Bay...

MMS - You went all the way over there from...

TW - Coppermine...

MMS - ... to Frobisher (Bay) in a Cessna 185...

TW - ... Tuk (Tuktoyaktuk), Holman Island, Pangnirtung, Gjoa Haven, Baker Lake, Rankin Inlet ... You basically name 'em. There's only a couple settlements that we couldn't get into 'cause-

MMS - How long did it take you to do that tour?

TW - About two weeks ... Two and a half weeks.

LW - Yeah.

TW - That's the length of time it took for the barge to make it back upstream.

MMS - To Yellowknife.

TW - If you're going by the ramparts in Fort Good Hope, you get up in the morning, you look, OK, here's these ramparts are right there, right beside you. You went to bed, you only made it halfway up. By next morning, you were just through the ramparts. You were basically standing still.

MMS - Almost, yeah.

TW - The engines were working overtime trying to push you through the ...

MMS - That's an incredible tour that you guys did...

LW - It was amazing.

MMS - ... in the airplane for that day, and the amount of...I've flown over those places. Like we've said to a lot of people, North is just like... it's vast and that's an understatement and you guys are in a 185.

TW - Oh, yeah. *Dominique (Prinet)* was such a tremendous, tremendous pilot. He went on, I believe it was "Nordair" that he ... wound up managing all of "Nordair". He did pretty well for himself.

LW - I'm trying to think ... We were in one community, Pat, where, I think it was Hall Beach and for some reason or other, the next community, *Dominique* had to go ahead and take our equipment, our guitars and stuff. And take our suitcases and come back for us, for some reason or other. And he was a long time coming back 'cause the weather started to sock in. So years later when *Ted (Wesley)* recorded "Bush Plane", that was so moving to me, when the line that says, "I see you now, that pretty Beachcraft, looking for a hole to fly on through." *Dominique* was a Cessna but it was the same feeling. I'll never forget that plane coming through the clouds. "Oh, my God!" I mean, we were from the big city of Yellowknife. It's kinda like we're stuck way out here, all alone. There was nobody out there because the natives had all gone hunting and the only person there was a Hudson Bay Manager. A young guy, who they had sent over. He wasn't any older than us. He might've even been younger. We were like 21 or something, 22. I'll never forget him because he had on these polished shoes and he had on these dress pants and this little jacket. And he didn't speak hardly at all and I thought, "There's something wrong with this guy. He's not quite with it." Then, I thought, "He's stuck here in Hall Beach, completely away from England, from his family and everything he knows, in a community where he can't relate. It was actually quite freaky because at that time I mean, I was really young. *Ted* was out exploring the land and I'm in this little place all by myself with this guy that was just not quite right. And there were guns everywhere at that time. So when *Dominique* came through those clouds to pick *Ted* and I up, *Ted* was fine, it was me.

TW - If I remember that story, he had to fly ahead because the weather was poor ... and the very short runway and the wind was blowing almost the wrong direction for him so he couldn't come in there with a full load.

LW - That's right, yeah.

TW - ... He took the stuff and lightened this load where we just came with the three of us...

LW - The weather socked in so we had to wait hours for him to come back.

MMS - I was gonna say, at that time we're talking the end of August here? We're talking August-

LW - The end of the summer, yeah.

MMS - ... High north, sort of summer, high north summer, the storms and the fog from the ocean and everything like that. You can get socked in for days, if not a week

LW - He was just a great guy, and a very skilled pilot.

TW - In those days, you fly by the seat of your pants kind of thing. You had to fly visual because there was no communications towers, there's no satellite to help guide you through. You fly by the seat of your pants kind of thing. Had to know your stuff. That was quite the few memories.

MMS - Well received in the communities, though? People were...

TW - Oh, yes. Totally loved it. At the same time, this is when I was ... because we performed and the community gathered. We came across other musicians that played but they were stuck in their little communities. Everybody was different. There was no cross-reference with anybody. It wasn't like social media where one guy writes the song of a certain style and two weeks later, everybody's recording in the same ... beat, same chord pattern, same everything. So I started remembering people and taking names down. This is actually the beginning of the "Folk on the Rocks".

MMS - That's right. You would've met all of those guys out there.

TW - I had a chance later on, to go fly with the Commissioner (*Stuart Hodgson*) across the Arctic. He was going from town to town doing his speech. I went along with him. We made contact with those musicians again and see how much they had progressed because they heard me play and I heard them play. Now they got a purpose, so they practice and practice and come up with more original stuff.

MMS - Who would some of those musicians have been?

TW - *Charlie Panigoniak* just to name one, for example. Throat singers, as well. I first heard them in Cambridge Bay, never heard of them before. Then we got them invited to, as well as a few other performers, to come to Yellowknife for the July 1st celebrations when CBC closed with us. This is the real beginnings of the "Folk on the Rocks".

MMS - We're beyond 1967, then? That July 1st thing you were talking about?

TW - It's a whole progression, a whole progression because it started off with Centennial. So we were actually put on the map because of the barge. It got quite a bit of play from the outside. Then I got invited to play ... There was an Armed Forces tour that was traveling right across, to all of the Armed Forces bases. I played with *Carol Baker*...

LW - Not *Carol Baker*, with *Shirley Eikhard*.

TW - *Shirley Eikhard* ... *Carol Baker* was there, too.

LW - *Robert Paquette*-

TW - *Robert Paquette*.

LW - ... from Quebec. Who else was there? I can't remember.

TW - What the heck was her name? Another big country singer from the east.

TW - Anyway, we traveled. We went around. That's when I went to Alert and that was just quite an experience there, too.

MMS - High Arctic. This was an Arctic tour...

TW - Yeah ... Yeah. It was basically the DEW line sites-

MMS - Ah, of course.

TW - ... Basically the DEW line sites.

MMS - That was right after '67 that you did that?

LW - That was ... early '70s.

MMS - Early '70s. Okay.

LW - That was before "Farrago", right. Before the "Faro Folk Festival". That was in the early '70s.

MMS - Okay. We'll back it up, then. After the Centennial tour and you guys got back ... You got to make it back to Yellowknife for that final show for the Centennial...

TW - Of course. Yeah. We had to close. We were flying high boy, I tell you. Oh yeah, by that time, everybody had got ... they'd been singing, everybody got tighter and tighter and tighter and tighter. Things became easier so when we go to Yellowknife, we were already pretty accomplished, a pretty confident bunch.

LW - I think "The Centennaires" ended up with a big dance...

TW - Oh, yeah. Of course.

LW - ... I remember the dance was packed.

MMS - I was gonna ask, where did the venue happen? That would've been the end of August. Was it outside? Was it inside?

LW - It was inside.

TW - *Rick Williams* ... We actually...it was Sir John (Franklin High School) I think...We played at Sir John.

LW - Yeah.

TW - But you know, we had celebrations there at the barge dock. There was a big carnival type thing and Yellowknife was a lot bigger. You know, we set up at Sir John-

LW - It was Sir John Franklin.

MMS - Oh, okay.

TW - Then, *Rick (Williams)* came and played his organ there for a little bit. We came and did our thing and then "The Centennaires", the chairs were cleared ...

LW - Big dance-

TW - ... A big dance.

LW - They were such a good band.

TW - *Tommy Hudson* was just...

LW - He was awesome.

MMS - Yeah ... Really good players in that band. And again, that's a whole chapter of or an event, that I talk to people about, it's like, they're going, "What?!" They can't even imagine something like that happening.

TW - It was all brand new. Who'd heard of a dance band before that?

MMS - Or a barge going all the way up the Mackenzie River with a Ferris wheel on it. Popcorn, cotton candy and three bands.

LW - It was amazing.

TW - You got such a cross-culture of the different ... wherever we stopped ... Who knows the polka? You start playing something like that and people respond in different fashions and it's beautiful.

MMS - Beautiful for them to experience the music that you guys are bringing to them at that time. It's probably pretty much brand new to them. The thing for me that I'm envious of, for one thing, is that you got to those communities at that time when they were still traditional communities...

TW - Totally traditional.

MMS - ... and got a snapshot and especially in the high Arctic ones where you guys were ... Oh my God, they hadn't really change very much in decades.

LW - There was one ... Where was the community where the natives took us out whale hunting?

LW - I still got pictures of that.

TW - That was Gjoa Haven.

LW - Gjoa Haven. They took us out on their whaling. I mean, that was incredible.

TW - Went for beluga.

LW - Very exciting.

TW - Yeah. That was an experience. I remember that.

LW - Did you know that the Captain of the tug boat that pulled the barge was a cousin of *Farley Mowat's*.

MMS - Whoa.

LW - Yeah.

MMS - He was a tugboat Captain on the Mackenzie?

LW - Yeah.

MMS - Wow. I'll have to try and dig his name up there-.

LW - Dig his name out, yeah. I'm sure he was...

TW - He was a *Mowat*, for sure.

LW - ... His first cousin, I think. At least, Pat, that's the story we were told. Who knows? He might be a legend in his own mind. I'm not sure.

MMS - We are talking the '60s here.

LW - Yeah, exactly. Good luck finding that on the Internet.

MMS - OK, well, you never know.

LW - Anyway.

MMS - So, OK. You wrapped up the Centennial tour-

TW - The name of the barge is the "C.D. Howe", by the way.

MMS - Okay. After the final concert, you're back in Yellowknife, like you say, flying high and playing really well. Where did you go onto, next?

LW - The Abe Miller Fundraiser, right? Right after that.

TW - Yeah. *Jack Adderley* started the Abe Miller School. We were doing a bunch of fundraising to try and raise funds to help make the school happen.

MMS - For the sake of the interview, what's Abe Miller? What was Abe Miller School?

TW - "Abe Miller School" ... school for the-

LW - At that time, politically incorrect but in this we're talking the '60s, it was called the "Abe Miller School for Retarded Children". And *Jack Adderley* had a down syndrome son. He, with a few other people decided that they needed a better place of education for these children. So it was a passion of *Jack's*, and I think (*Jack*) *Sigvaldason* was also ... I'm trying to think, 'cause it wasn't just *Jack Adderley*. When you talk to Jack, he'll say, "It wasn't just me." I said, "Okay, Jack." For us, it was Jack, 'cause that's the guy we knew, right? So we started talking about what they would need, like desks, supplies, all that stuff. So Ted said, "Maybe, we can help." Like you said, we had just come off the barge, not very long before that and we were playing little places here and there. And we thought maybe we could do a little benefit concert. So we thought we'll get a few friends to come out well we packed the place. It was packed. Did we have it at Sir John? I'm trying to think of where we had it. It must've been because there were hundreds of people there. We raised, at that time, I think it was \$600, at that time was a lot of money. Maybe not now but that time it was. So that kind of cemented our friendship with *Jack Adderley* for decades to come.

TW - That's when cigarettes were 25 cents a pack.

LW - Yeah. Exactly. There you go.

TW - A whole different time, there.

LW - Oh, yeah. Whole different time.

MMS - You're out in the community, probably had some status or some fame ... being well-known, let's just put it that way, so that you were able to draw crowds for those kinds of events.

TW - But also, everybody loved *Jack (Adderley)*. *Jack* was a real community person, up and around and he had a beautiful family. I don't know, he was one of my favorite people. I just loved the man. So, I'm gonna continue that story just a little bit because when I got an invite to play in Yellowknife at the Folk (Folk on the Rocks), I went back there and one of the people I wanted to see was *Jack*. Because I hadn't been back in Yellowknife for quite a while and I ran into *Susan*, his daughter. She said, "I wouldn't bother going to see him. He hasn't known me for three years. His Dementia, his Alzheimers was setting in." You see nothing but an ornery guy that is giving the nurses a hard time. The nurses were even almost scared to go to him. Well, I

didn't care. He was my friend and I wanted to see him. So I did a show at the senior center (Avens) which is the old hospital. I set up and I thought I'd go see *Jack* before I started 'cause he wasn't around. I went in his room and there he is, head down, sitting on the edge of his bed, giving his nurse a hard time ... Just gnarly. I said, "*Jack ... Jack Adderley*," I said, "Do you remember me?" I said, "Do you remember "Abe Miller School"?" He just tilted his head, just a little, "I started that." I said, "*Jack*, do you remember, I helped you raise funds so we could, we did this kind of together? If you remember?" He finally turned his head sideways and with the corner of his eye he could see ... We finally made eye contact. I said, "I gotta go *Jack* because the people are waiting for me and I gotta start singing."

Next thing I know, no sooner I sat down and grabbed my guitar and just started getting comfortable, started talking to, saying hi to some of the old folks over in the hospital, I hear this commotion coming down the hall. Here he is, pushing his walker full speed ahead. Nurse running behind him, trying to ... carrying his chair. He comes and parks right on my foot. His wheel was right on my foot. He sits right there, right in front of me. I had to peak around to try and sing to the audience. I watched him and he's sitting there mouthing all the words. He was mouthing all the words. Then, it was time for me to finish, so I ... was finishing off with, "I Remember". No sooner than I started to hit the first couple of chords, he jumps up, he says, "I remember!" Pushes, you know, gets off the chair and starts dancing all over the place. "I remember, I remember!" His daughter sees him, comes running up there, he ... "Susan, how are you?" The doctors are looking like, "What the heck is going on?" He actually had a flashback and remembered, it brought him back down to reality. Then I left. We heard through the grapevine, two weeks later, he was gone. But at least, he acknowledged with the rest of his family that he did remember. That kind of set me of what music does to people and to the soul. It's pushing me. Keeping me going, nowadays with trying to provide that thing for the rest of the people.

MMS - Exactly. It's a gift that you have, that you can give people at that point in their lives or almost at the end of their lives, that one little window. As much for them as for their loved ones or for yourself that way.

TW - Oh, totally. It's a win-win for anybody and everybody.

MMS - It's a beautiful story. Thank you.

TW - I love his family. We actually had kind of a get-together here just a little while back, with *Susan* and the rest of the family, *Jackie* who lives here in Enderby with us. They came in ... *Murray* came in, you know the son, came in and we all had a real, kind of northern flashback because at that time *Jack* was so busy with doing his work that he didn't have much time for the family. At the end of this all when it's time to go home, we apologized and I thanked them for sharing their dad with us, with me. Where they were shortchanged, we benefited. And so...

MMS - Pretty amazing for *Jack*, that way, now that you talk about it. The one legacy being the "Abe Miller School" and the other one being the newspaper which is still...

LW - *Jack* used to come and sit in the Yellowknife Inn every morning for coffee 'cause that's where he got the pulse of the community. I remember, one day before I came to work at the bank, I came in and sat down with him and had a coffee. He was sitting there sniffing away. I said, "Jack, you're getting a cold." I said, "Maybe you should go in bed." "No, no, no, I'm not getting a cold," he said, "I smell a story coming on." He was such a newshound, right? Just a real character, real rich character.

MMS - Okay. We're still in the late 1960s here, yes? From the "Abe Miller" benefit, and playing in Yellowknife and in the community.

TW - I think, in between there, there was a couple times I ... This is when I ... I can't remember. When did I travel with (*Stuart*) *Hodgson*, *Les*?

LW - That was early '70s, as well because I remember *Nahanni* was a baby. I always go with my kid's age when I'm down to dates. Yeah. Watching the film last night, the Commissioner's Ball was '73, remember? It was before that ... It was just before that ball. Very early '70s, Pat. Very early '70s. *Ted* recorded his first album, "Straight North" in November of '72. That album, I don't know if you're recording ... That album, "Straight North," came out the very day that they found *Martin Hartwell*. The same day that we premiered that album in "The Hoist Room", invited guests and that's when *Ted* showed it on the slideshow, some of the slides you saw last night. That was a premiere of that album. That was huge news that day because that had found *Martin Hartwell* alive and so "Bush Plane", of course became the most played song I think on the local radio. That was November '72. November of '73, "Black Flies" was recorded, came out. In 1975, "North of Canada". Those are the timelines, if that'll help you, at all.

MMS - Those three years are sort of almost at the apex of the time that I'm looking at...

LW - Exactly.

MMS - ... in all of that. You're kicking around Yellowknife, and you're starting your family. Are you working any jobs?

LW - Ted was singing at "The Hoist Room".

MMS - Okay.

LW - He started singing in The Hoist Room about 19, I'm gonna say-

TW - Basically, "Folk on the Rocks" disbanded because-

LW - ... 1970.

LW - "Folk on the Rocks" was way later-

TW - Not "Folk on the Rocks", I'm sorry. "Tundra Folk".

TW - I'd gone through several groups and just nothing seemed to...

LW - Stick.

TW - ... stick. There was one ... First of all, it started off with *Andy Steen* and then it became *Donna Hill*, *Olive Gordon* and my brother, *Frank*...

LW - *Billy Sylvester*.

TW - ... *Billy Sylvester*-

LW - *Ian Dowe*

TW - ... Then, *Ian Dowe*. Then, just me.

LW - Then, just *Ted*.

TW - That's when I started singing, doing gigs in "The Hoist Room".

MMS - Were you playing six nights a week or just weekends.

TW - Playing six nights a week, four hours a night.

MMS - Wow.

LW - Yeah.

TW - Started off 6:30 or something or 7:30 and play 'til, most of the time, 'til the bar closed and then even later.

MMS - Heady days in "The Hoist Room" and those years with the government just coming up and probably more of the bureaucrats moving up from Ottawa. Did you get to know the owners of that place, the *Finlayson* family?

TW - *Finlaysons*, of course. Yeah. *Doug (Finlayson)* was a huge supporter of mine. After ... we decided to...

LW - *Doug Finlayson* who owned "The Hoist Room", of course. *Ted* was playing there and he sang some northern songs. *Doug* was in one night for a drink and he was talking to us, he said, "You should record these songs."

TW - Actually, the way it started off is somebody requested, "where can I get these songs?"

LW - Where can I get these songs?

TW - I looked at *Doug* who just happened to be close by. I said, "Yeah." We didn't have any money, we were basically, in those days, you were \$600 a week. For hand to mouth. Besides, you were ... When you're partying a lot and you're spending a lot. So, I looked at *Doug* and he says, "Yeah."

LW - No, he said, "They should be recorded," and I said, "Yeah." He says, "How much money do you need?" I said, "I have no idea." He said, "You look into it, and let me know." So I did and got a hold of the studio in Edmonton where *Ted* had some connections and I told *Doug* and he just wrote us a check.

TW - The Old "Nomads", remember they used to be a big group out of Edmonton? "Damon Studios" is "Nomad" spelled backwards. So...

LW - *Doug* just said, "These need to be recorded," and he just sponsored it, period. Just like that. Then the second album which was recorded a year later, *Pat Carney* stepped up to the plate and did the same thing. We need to get this stuff down. So *Doug (Finlayson)* sponsored the first one, completely. Then *Pat (Carney)* helped with the second one and the third one. It was more ... It wasn't so much of an attitude, "Let's record these songs, we can all get rich." It was more an attitude, "This stuff needs to be put down and not lost." Of course, "Straight North" came out and it was just like ... We had an interview with "As It Happens", with CBC Radio. They called actually and *Ted* wasn't home so they chatted with me for a little bit but they really wanted to talk to him. I had no idea where he was. Because he was the first musician in the Northwest Territories ever to be signed by a major label. So it was big news at that time. He was 27 years old.

MMS - "Straight North," was ... You were signed with?

LW - "London Records".

TW - London.

LW - Yeah. It was all over the North and then people wanted albums so we started getting, we had an initial pressing, I think I can't even remember how many but then all the "Northern" stores wanted ... It came out at ... It was early November. It was the day they found *Martin Hartwell*. That's right. So by Christmas, we were able to get those records in the stores, all over the North.

MMS - Perfect timing.

LW - It was perfect timing. People stepped up to the plate. It was just like, "I'm flying up to Gjoa Haven, I'll take some." It was the old North communication thing at the time. And we had these albums so of course *Ted* would give them out to anybody who'd buy them. It wasn't a business, *Pat*. It was like, you know...

MMS - For sure.

LW - ... You know what musicians are like. "Oh, you like my music? Sure, here. Have some."

MMS - Here yeah go. Can you tell me about the recording process? The story of the recording, itself, where the songs came from?

TW - Yeah. Sure. When we decided that we were gonna record, we were totally brand new into this. We'd never recorded anything. It wasn't that accessible, first of all, recording, you had to be in the studio for that kind of thing. Of course, I was doing basically a single gig and now in order to record, we needed a group. I didn't know anything about groups so we asked for their help. We wound up ... I had, what was his name, *Don Paches*... *Don Paches* wound up scoring the music. He had called a couple of his friends. It was actually some of "The Nomads". A group played for us. Then there was a choral group and there's four voices, two men, two women that did the vocal parts behind me. The strings were from the Symphony Orchestra.

LW - Edmonton Symphony.

MMS - Wow.

TW - That's basically how it was manufactured, at that time. Of course, the second album was a little bit easier because we already knew what had worked. You couldn't afford to keep the symphony in all the songs because the costs are too great. So you start limiting them to just playing their little parts and highlighting and stuff like this. By the time it came to the third album, it was basically, I walked in the studio-

LW - That was "Eastern Sound", though.

TW - ... That was "Eastern Sound", Toronto because they figure *Yuri* from "Brew Records" decided that I should do one in the east to get more exposure, to get more airplay and stuff like that because you know, become an eastern kind of a product. So I walk in the studio and there's *Red Shea*, who was (*Gordon*) *Lightfoot's* lead guitar player. *John Stockfish*, his bass player and this kid called *Brian Russel*. *Red Shea* who is *Lightfoot's* lead guitar player, said, "Listen partner," he said, "Keep this guy on the electric. Nobody, nobody can touch him." Okay, sir, I'll listen." It was basically a live performance. We went through the song once. It was like a second take, period. They had no rehearsal. They heard me playing it then they just jumped in. This *Brian (Russel)*, he was on the electric and he started using his volume pedal. You wouldn't hear the plunk of the guitar, the strings, you just hear the swell of the ... It was almost like a steel guitar or almost like a ... I don't know. Some pretty neat effects. That was the third album. We've done really well.

MMS - Were you writing for all of these albums? Were you doing cover songs? What kind of material were you doing?

TW - No, no, no. Only ones I ever recorded were northern songs. A lot of them if you're talking the eastern arctic or Inuvik area that was *Bob Razicka* most of his stuff. Then, *Wilf Bean* came along. Then, I did a few of my own and *Doug Leonard* of course, helped write a couple tunes.

He wrote the poetry, and I put it to music kind of thing. *Frank Ferguson*, never heard of *Chuck McAvoy* but I told him the story and he put it down.

LW - Yeah. It was a collaboration.

TW - It was just more of a...

LW - One of my favorite songs is "Caribou Song". We were living in Vancouver for a short period of time, *Ted* was doing a stint in Vancouver. We were living in one of *Pat Carney's* homes there, temporarily. The phone rang, *Ted* was in the shower and it was *Wilf Bean*. He said, "Where's *Ted*?" I said, "He's in the shower. Can he call you back?" He said, "I gotta catch a plane really quickly." He said, "I just wrote this song and he said "*Ted's* gotta record this, he's gotta record this!" I said, "Okay. Send it to us." He said, "I'll sing it for you." He sang "Caribou Song" on the phone for me. He says, "Tell *Ted*, he's gotta record this. I'll call him later." So I think he ended up sending us a cassette or something or a tape of it. He said, "I basically wrote this song for *Ted*."

TW - It wasn't a cassette, it was a reel-to-reel.

LW - Yeah. Reel-to-reel. It became ... It's an incredible song. And *Wilf Bean* was like that. He wrote from his experiences of the north but he had no desire to record it. Years later when we contacted him, when we re-digitized the ... Like I was telling you, last night, the three albums. He said, "I got some more stuff, *Ted*. I'll dig it up. I'll dig it up." People sang and recorded and wrote for the love of the land and the people. There was no ulterior motives-

TW - And the storytelling.

LW - ... Yeah. It was to share.

MMS - How did you meet these guys? Did they just hear about you and then contact you?

TW - Basically, the North is pretty small. You're always passing through Yellowknife.

MMS - This is true.

TW - Those days, we always wound up stopping at "The Hoist Room" or I'd be traveling and come across these people.

LW - Yeah. I remember (*Bob*) *Ruzicka* saying, "Yeah, do what you want with them." *Wilf Bean* was a little different 'cause you would have more layers with *Wilf Bean* because *Wilf Bean* was a good friend of my sisters and had connections with the community that my sister lived in, in Vancouver. They had mutual friends. They're still friends to this day. He's retired now and living in Nova Scotia, I think it is. Yeah, so we had lots of kind of other connections with *Wilf Bean* throughout the years. But wonderful songwriter. Oh my god.

TW - Beautiful human being.

LW - Beautiful person. Beautiful human being.

MMS - So once you recorded "Straight North," and you were on a label and being distributed. Were you touring a lot? Were you going and playing live gigs a lot?

TW - Oh, yeah. Throughout that course of the time, just for an example, I was ... One of the songs ... There's a line in there that says, "The sleeping giant's breaking free."

LW - "Northlands Destiny."

TW - "Northlands Destiny," that's what it was called. "Oh, Canada, look North and see sleeping giants bursting free." Wow. I had a phone call from Thunder Bay, from a guy who owned a hotel there. He says, "Sleeping Giant, you're singing about my kind of country." Because a sleeping giant is a big rock that's just outside Fort William and Port Arthur. This is at the transition when Thunder Bay became one, when they tied the two communities together. The sleeping giant is the big rock that they have out there. He says, "You gotta come over here and do a show for us." I wound up there then I wind up playing the "Confederation Center", in Charlottetown. This is different times. One show I did in Quebec City. Then other show was in ... I think it was in Ottawa. And I got touring around and did a few other big gigs. Got invited to Vancouver here playing at for "Schmockey", big fundraiser for the National Hockey team. We played at the "Cook Coliseum".

LW - That was 1973. That was with *Dal Richards* band, from Vancouver, in the huge... Thousands of people, Ted's backed, sitting with his guitar, singing ... I can't even remember, which was it, "Nahanni" or something, backed with this huge orchestra. It's like, woaaa....

TW - *Dal Richards* and his orchestra, they were huge. They're probably like 60 or... minimum, about 60 piece.

LW - Oh, they're huge. Very, very-

TW - This is playing-

LW - ... very successful band.

TW - ... in an arena.

TW - We're sitting off on the corner. You start playing but then the sound comes through the P.A. system which is centre ice but you're off on the ... There's a time delay and I wasn't used to that.

LW - No, that's weird.

TW - When we were rehearsing, they did have the P.A. on. Who do you sing to? Do you listen...

LW - It was quite an experience.

TW - It was quite something.

LW - Yeah.

MMS - So it sounds like you were starting to rub shoulders with a whole other sort of level of musician and composers, arrangers, studio musicians...

TW - Just for an example, after we did the barge thing, *Ian and Sylvia (Tyson)* came through. I opened for them. *Valdy* came through, I opened for him, for *Valdy*.

MMS - This is in the later '60s, then?

LW - *Ian and Sylvia* would've been 1968. *Valdy* would've been a little bit later than that.

TW - They're still with public schools. I remember, because...

LW - It was common for *Ted* to open for whatever.

TW - I opened for them. *Valdy* came up and started playing. Busted two guitar strings. He was playing a Martin like mine and I just finished, so we swapped guitars. He's never forgot that.

LW - We net him years later, in Fort McMurray. He came up ... so I'm thinking, we've been gone from Fort Mac, now, for almost five years ... Maybe six years ago, *Valdy* came through and played the "Keyano College" in Fort McMurray and we had not seen him for decades. We waited around till he was done in the lobby and everybody was getting autographs and stuff and then he looked at *Ted* and he said, "*Ted Wesley*?" He said, "Hi," and he shook his hand. He said, "You still got that Martin?"

MMS - Wow.

LW - Tremendous memory, *Valdy* has. Just incredible. But he said no, he really enjoyed that show in Yellowknife. He said, "I really enjoyed that show. So you guys should bring him back there. He's still playing. He's travelling with *Gary Fjellgaard* they call themselves, "The Contenders." He's playing November 1st, at Lorenzo's in Ashton Creek, just a few minutes away. He's still playing and touring and still just as good as ever.,

MMS - Even before you were recording, you were rubbing shoulders with the *Ian and Sylvias*, and the *Valdys* and all the rest....

TW - Oh, yeah. Of course. The world is pretty small.

LW - Yellowknife, there weren't that many musicians-

TW - And (*Gordon Lightfoot*) of course, was coming through. He was one of my mentors. I grew up falling in love with him and doing the storytelling part of it that he does so well. He was quite

a kayaker. He used to come up to do the Coppermine River a few times. He'd stop. First of all, we ran into each other at the Junos.

MMS - What year would that have been?

LW - '77.

MMS - Okay.

LW - Yeah.

TW - So we had met him then. We re-met again when he was coming through Yellowknife. He'd stop in and basically stay with us.

LW - Yeah, he stayed with us for a couple of summers, just overnight so he wouldn't have to ... because he would get hounded at the hotels and stuff, so he'd stay with us-

TW - So we had the privilege of getting to know him quite well.

LW - Yeah, got to know him a little bit there.

TW - Then, I got invited to play for the "Miss World Canada Pageant" in Ottawa, and he was playing in it. Not *Jim Croce*,

LW - *Harry Chapin*.

TW - *Harry Chapin* played at the same show. I got an invite to *Gordon's* place after and it was quite beautiful home in York.

MMS - This was in New York?

TW - County of York-

LW - Toronto.

MMS - Toronto, yeah.

TW - Just outside of Toronto where *Gordon* has his few acres.

MMS - You still in touch with him?

TW - Once in a while, I haven't talked to him for...

LW - It's been quite a while, we haven't talked to him. *Ted* has a mutual friend with *Bruce*, quite close to quite close to *Gordie* actually. Every once in a while, we just notice that he's going to be 80 and he's playing at the ... "National Arts Center", I think soon.

LW - Next month or something.

MMS - Wow. He's still playing.

LW - He's still touring.

MMS - Amazing.

LW - He still has a lot of his original band with him.

MMS - Yeah.

LW - Yeah. He left such a legacy for this country when you think about ... to this day even *Ted* will sing a lot of the stuff at the Legion. It just expressed what Canadians were feeling and couldn't express and *Gordie* just did it for everybody. Brilliant songwriter. Absolutely brilliant.

MMS - Even amongst songwriters, I was really quite surprised to ... Well, I'm not quite surprised but ... Pleasantly surprised to read that quote from (*Bob*) *Dylan*, from that time.

LW - Yes!

MMS - It was just like, "You wanna hear the goods, you listen to this Canadian guy, his name is *Gordon Lightfoot*. He's the deal." It was like, "That's from (*Bob*) *Dylan*. Oh my god." That's so cool that you got to rub shoulders with those guys, perform with them and hang with them. You said you were at the Junos, you got to meet *Gordon Lightfoot* at the Junos. Why were you at the Junos?

TW - I did ... I don't know if I should. This is actually quite different ... I'll tell you, but I don't think you should put it ...

MMS - Okay.

TW - We were sitting there, during the break. Of course there's a big line up ... This in the Royal York, in Toronto. Everybody's heading for the washroom. We were way down the line, standing basically in the hallway, waiting for a urinal to open up. There happened to be two sinks ... I look at him, he looks at me and we both really had to go.

LW - So what the hell.

TW - You gotta go, you gotta go. He turns the water on...

LW - That was the first meeting.

TW - I was ... "Hi, *Gord*."

LW - Those Junos were really fun, Pat because I actually got to go with *Ted* on that trip which was wonderful. They were really fun because we also knew "Trooper" really well, *Brian Smith* was a neighbor of *Ted's* best friend, in Langley so we already knew *Brian* quite well. Of course they were at those Junos, they were big. Their song, "One for the money, Two for the show," had just come out, and they'd been nominated. Then, we sat at a table with *Liona Boyd*, and "The Emeralds" from Edmonton, who were up for a lot of awards. Of course that was the year *Murray McLaughlin's* song "Farmer's Song" was so big so he won in that category.

TW - I actually sold more albums than he did

LW - Actually, *Ted* would have won that, without that song, I think because we had sold so many albums.

TW - ... but he was more popular.

LW - Got a lot of airplay.

TW - He got more airplay than I did.

LW - It was an amazing song. That song has stayed the test of time, as well. The Junos were fun because we knew people there. We had a great time.

MMS - One of the albums, your album that year was nominated? You were nominated...

TW - Yeah. It was a song called, "Long, Dusty Road." One of Wilf's.

LW - From "North of Canada". Yeah so, exciting times.

TW - Just beat me out the bugger but that's okay. I sing the "Farmer's Song," at the ... Usually perform at the Legion here for the guys...

LW - They love it.

TW - ... There are a lot of farmers in this area. People get quite teary eyed and...

LW - That year, too, Pat, the big song of that year was *Carol Baker* and she had come out with *Kris Kristofferson's* song, "Lord, Help me, Jesus." She sang that live and she brought the house down. Powerful, powerful singer. She sang it live at the Junos as a guest singer, right? That was a good year. It was a good year for music.

MMS - Powerful moment, for sure.

LW - Yeah, it was.

MMS - Was that the first JUNOs?

LW - It was '77-

TW - It wasn't the first JUNO.

LW - ... I don't know if it was the first one but it was right up there.

MMS - It was still in the single digits, I think.

LW - Quite sure it was '77. Yeah. I can-

MMS - I'll check that one out, as well.

LW - Check that out, but I'm quite sure it was '77.

MMS - This is very early, again very early...

LW - It was right at the end of the era that you're looking at. You're looking at to the mid-70s, but it might fit in there?

MMS - Yeah. Oh yeah, no, for sure.

LW - That was kind of the culmination of ... Even to this day, we get so much of a charge out of *Sean* eh? Because *Sean* as you can see, is a really talented musician and has played for some big bands and has done a number of things. He always introduces *Ted* as a "Juno nominee," 'cause it's such a feather in his cap, right now. "Yeah, okay."

MMS - Never gonna be able to take that away from you.

LW - Exactly. That's what he says.

MMS - Again in those years where the Canadian music quote, unquote industry was trying get out from underneath the American....

TW - Of course-

MMS - ... define itself. The Juno Awards, I think, were sort of at the time just a pillar of the industry being able to celebrate its own. Whereas before that there wasn't really, anything that way. It really was bringing the National community...

TW - ... Canadiana

MMS - ... Yeah, exactly.

TW - That's basically what, which was tying the country together.

LW - But for us, it was great, because we knew “Trooper”, quite well. Well, *Brian Smith*, anyway, from “Trooper”. We met *Liona Boyd* and we knew “The Emeralds” fairly well from Edmonton. We knew people. It was like a gathering, it was very comfortable. It was really fun.

MMS - Yeah. Very comfortable in a time when there was a lot less music being cranked out. Today, at a time when the quality of the music was ... a lot higher and a lot more meaningful, I think. People like yourself, the *Gordie Lightfoots* or the *Murray McLaughlins*

TW - It was all analog.

MMS - ... Canadiana, like you say and drawing a line in the sand, marking, "No, this is Canadian. Like I say, it's kind of hard to call it patriotism but just a real pride I guess in your country and again celebrating that in song and then it becoming popular song. Then it keeps taking off, from there.

TW - The biggest thing that kind of drives me is that ... First of all, you look at yourself. "Who am I?" Well, you have to keep pride in yourself, in order to be able to recognize others for doing the same. But as a collective, this is what you come up with. You can come up with Canadiana. Sure, *Gordon (Lightfoot)* comes from there. You got your *Stan Rogers*, *Ron Hynes*, I mean. These guys are tremendous performers. Tremendous.

LW - It was such an honor meeting *Stan Rogers*, oh my god.

TW - Such storytellers.

LW - Yeah, tremendous storytelling.

MMS - Yeah. In mentioning *Stan Rogers*, we'll just carry it just beyond the 70s...

LW - You have to if you want ... because that's “Folk on the Rocks”.

MMS - Okay. There you're coming off of heavier times. You keep wrapping it up, there.

MMS - You're in the late '70s and integral in “Folk on the Rocks”. How did that all come together?

LW - So “Folk on the Rocks”, it came out of an idea that ... If you back up the bus a year or so ago, *Ted* was invited to ... I think it was 1976, if I remember correctly, was invited to play at “Farrago Folk Festival”, in Faro, Yukon. That was a really going festival, at the time. There were big names that would be... That's the festival where we met *David Essig* and...

TW - “Flying Mountain”...

LW - “Flying Mountain” from Vancouver, who were amazing.

LW - *Ted* played at that festival and then when he came home, he said...

TW - ... and “Pied Pear” and “Pied Pumpkin”

LW - ... Yeah, “Pied Pear”. So he said, "Why can't we do something like this in Yellowknife? We should be able to do something like this in Yellowknife."

LW - I can remember saying to him, "Where are we gonna get the musicians and he said, "All over the North." Because he had traveled, in Centennial and...

TW - I had a vision there. Actually, well, *Heather Pritchard*, then we incorporated *Rod Russel* into it. *Rod* came a little bit after that. The concept that we wanted to inspire with the Folk was we wanted, basically, for the musicians to come out of their settlements, have a place to play. Being very selfish, thinking, "This is for the musicians."

LW - Yeah. Really was.

TW - "This is for the musicians to get together and exchange ideas and play together and just rejuvenate and re-charge for going back to their little settlements. You got something new to practice, they hear new sounds, new ideas. Then we thought, OK, well, we should incorporate the south. We'll bring in three groups from the south but they have to be able to share, to teach and to do workshops with the rest of the musicians. This is without the public, right? This is strictly for the musicians, for the musicians, recharge for the...

MMS - It was like a big workshop-

TW - ... A big workshop then you perform. Show off your talents and this is where the audience comes in. The audience just benefits, reaps the benefits of the crop that was planted, they get the fruit. You know what I mean?

MMS - Yep.

TW - We get to plant and they get the fruit. Without the plant you're not gonna get any fruit. That was basically the whole formation. Even though I started it, it wasn't about me. It wasn't the *Ted Wesley* show. I didn't want that to be, so that's why we called it “Folk on the Rocks”, instead of the *Ted Wesley* Festival. I played in the background, kind of a thing.

LW - Didn't the idea, honey, come out of “Stage on the Rocks”. That came before “Folk on the Rocks”.

TW - Well “Stage on the Rocks” was behind the Garden Apartments where we had initially filmed the Canada Day Celebrations. CBC came in, they decided because they went right across Canada, they'd finish off in Vancouver. Then they came north because we had the midnight sun. So we'd actually finish the whole show in the north. The stage was set up, built on the, basically on the edge of the Frame Lake. There was a beautiful outcrop of rock, right behind the Garden Apartments where the midnight sun would be coming in, from the north, reflecting off the water, kind of stage left. The audience was sitting up on the rocks, watching all this. We were singing, it was like a little small amphitheater, right? We call that “Stage on the Rocks”. I'm sitting there

playing and I'm looking around, people sitting on the rocks. Just like good scotch or something on the rocks ... "Folk on the Rocks". That's where the name came from. Then we moved it to "Sammy's Beach". Not "Sammy's Beach", but to the Frame Lake. No ... by the airport ...

MMS - Long Lake.

TW - Long Lake.

LW - Folk on the Rocks, its first year was 1980.

MMS - Officially?

LW - 1980. That was the first folk festival.

MMS - The "Stage on the Rocks" would've been-

LW - It was before that. 1979, I think.

TW - It was '78, and '79. We did two years there.

LW - Yeah. That's where the name came out of.

TW - It was too difficult to keep because it kept people awake because we wanted to make a little bigger event so we moved further out of town where it wouldn't bother anybody.

LW - The first one was in June but the mosquitoes were so bad. The next year, we moved it to July. And it's been in July, ever since.

TW - It was supposed to be around the solstice. Longest day, kind of thing...

LW - Yeah, but the bugs were too bad.

MMS - That's right, so you guys moved it to July?

LW - Yeah.

MMS - I think, at some point later on, they actually moved it back to June but then, it was like...

LW - Bugs are too bad.

MMS - ... too many bugs, for one thing. And the weather, for the other thing. It would just be like cold ... It would be three degrees and raining.

LW - July was pretty safe.

MMS - They ended up moving it to that third week in July. What are we talking here? 30....

LW - Well, we went to the 30th in 2010.

MMS - That's right.

LW - This must be 38, coming up 40, pretty soon.

MMS - Yeah, 39. Gotta be 39 so...

LW - Yeah ... Yeah.

MMS - Still an institution up there and still going strong although it's definitely changed, as the music has and as the musicians have. Just a turnover in the generation...

TW - The big thing is still the northern collective that ... the musicians of the north, that's who I care about.

LW - It's evolved but at least the essence of the idea, the original idea was there. It really was, in those early days, it was a musician's festival. They have a little one in Fort Smith, not every year but they try every year. They always say that it's a musician's festival. Musicians come. Doesn't matter if anybody else shows up. Of course, Folk on the Rocks is business now...

TW - One of the other prerequisites that we had in those days, it was acoustic.

LW - Yeah ... Yes!

TW - Yes, you were mic'd but you weren't plugged in.

LW - You weren't plugged in, yeah.

TW - Well, except for the bass maybe. It wasn't electric guitars. It was all acoustic, something you could throw on your back and play by the campfire. That's basically what it was. Because when you're in a village or a small settlement, you're not plugged in. This is what you do.

LW - My favorite story of "Folk on the Rocks", Pat, is in 1980, and I was working in the bank at the time. Myself and my assistant accountant were in charge of the money. In those days, it was no credit cards, it was all mutilated cash. We had this little hut out there. So we went out early the first day of the Folk Festival to kind of set up. I remember thinking, "I wonder if anybody will come." It was a beautiful morning, it was early. It was probably about 8 o'clock in the morning and all of a sudden I heard this fiddle in the background, this beautiful fiddle. Then I heard the guitar and I thought, "That's *Ted*." It was *Ted*, and *Colin Adjun* playing way out and I just thought, "We're gonna make it." I just had this overpowering feeling that if nothing else happens, this is what was meant to be, *Colin (Adjun)* from the Arctic and *Ted* from Yellowknife. They got together and they just started playing. They just started jamming. It was just amazing. From then on, it was like we were overwhelmed with people and no security. "Holy crap, what just happened here?" Not organized...

TW - Well, *Heather* and *Michael's* very first Folk on the Rocks.

LW - My sister and her boyfriend slept on the stage so that nobody would steal the instruments and the equipment, the amps, and whatever.

TW - We built a stage and we didn't want it vandalized. The equipment was getting set up for the next day and power being supplied.

LW - That was crazy.

TW - They slept on the stage. Sleeping bags, roll them out.

LW - Yeah. It was three days of absolutely amazing northern ... and it was really northern music. It was really all of the people from the communities. The fiddles and the guitars and the drums.

LW - It was just incredible.

TW - Yeah, it was fun.

MMS - Kudos for you for wearing all of those hats. I know what's that's like. You're taking tickets and organizing, you're plugging in equipment, you're driving people around and you're cooking food.

LW - No idea how ... It wasn't pre-sold tickets, I don't think. People just showed up.

TW - Did we have tickets?

LW - I can't remember.

TW - I think it was just a stamp.

LW - If we did sell tickets, most of the tickets were at the gate. It was mostly word of mouth. "Guess what's going on at Long Lake?" It got better, as the years ... It got more professional and better run as the years went on. Ted was involved in it '81, and '82. That was it for him.

TW - Then I went further north, yeah.

LW - We went to Polaris and then weren't available. '86, like I said, was the big expo thing but by that time, he was out of the music business.

MMS - In those three years that you played, is that one of the years that *Stan Rogers* came because I know that's one of the-

LW - Yes.

TW - Yes. *Stan (Rogers)* was one of the guys that we...

LW - I think it was '82.

TW – This is...

MMS - People in Yellowknife are still talk about that festival...

LW - You talked about legacies, *Ted* learned a lot of his songs and still sings a lot of his songs. He made such a mark on Canadiana, like (*Gordon*) *Lightfoot*. Made a really big mark.

MMS - Yeah, there was some big personalities there, again masters whether you're talking *Ron Hynes* or *Stan Rogers*...

LW - Yeah, exactly. Yeah.

MMS - ... any one of those guys. Boy. That was something.

LW - *Ian Tyson*, same thing.

MMS - Oh, man. Yeah.

TW - Bonafide storytellers...

LW - Fortunately (*Ian*) *Tyson* and (*Gordon*) *Lightfoot*, are still with us, but *Ron Hynes* and *Stan Rogers* are not.

MMS – Again a legacy that they leave behind....

LW - Oh, it's huge. Absolutely huge.

MMS - ...will be there forever.

LW - Yeah.

MMS - This has just been wonderful. Thank you.