



Musicians of the Midnight Sun

Thank you for visiting the Musicians of the Midnight Sun website. Even though these blogs are being posted many weeks after the launch of the Musicians of the Midnight Sun website, my hope is that they will remain as a document along with the website itself with the intention to give a little bit more of a personal story of my relationships with these featured artists.

Wally Firth

Wally is one of those people that I feel truly blessed and privileged to know and to call a friend. He has lived a few different lifetimes in his own as a Hudson Bay Boy, a pilot, a CBC radio announcer and as the first indigenous MP for the NWT. Even today at 84 years old, he can recall names, places, dates, the weather and any other circumstance to compliment the story. Usually concluded with a wise, humorous anecdote and a chuckle before he launches into the next one. Through all of these lifetimes, one constant companion was the fiddle. He would jam and mentor with the musicians he would meet inspiring them with his enthusiasm, his desire to learn new songs, to improve his musicianship and his unfading awe in the power of music. Wally has the gift of the storyteller either inherited and/or passed on from his ancestors. Their culture was and still is one of oral tradition, with Wally carrying forward the history, ancestry/genealogy and music of his family and of the Gwich'in.



Wally Firth, HBC Beaver, 1952-53, Fort McPherson, NT (photo © 2018 Wally Firth)

I can remember hearing our Member of Parliament, Wally Firth on the “World at 6” around the family kitchen table. As a kid, I didn’t recognize the importance of that time here in the north and the important role Wally played. Reflecting now, I can see it was a dynamic era with the change and development of government, the hearings for the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline, the genesis of the Dene Nation and other events that would bring the north into the 21st century and shape the future.



Wally Firth. Ottawa, ON, 1973. NWT Archives, (Bobby Porritt fonds, accession number N-1987-016, item number 0152.)

I met Wally much later in life through my partner when we started our family in the late 1980s. One day, a beautiful, beaded Gwich'in baby belt arrived in the mail from Wally, so colourfully and brilliantly adorned, it was like a parade to walk with it down the street. By that time, Wally had left politics and was living in the Yukon before settling in Victoria, BC.



Wally Firth playing fiddle, 2016, Victoria, BC. (photo credit unknown)

Whenever I am in Victoria, I visit Wally. I find him sitting in one of the comfortable arm chairs in the main foyer, visiting and taking phone calls and generally holding court until meal time. Other elders in the care home endearingly refer to him as “Chief”.