

Morris Lafferty - Interview
Fort Simpson, NT
August 15, 2001
Traditional Métis Fiddle Project

Herb: At that point in time you were nine years old. You had been chording on the guitar for old Joe Villeneuve. So do you remember how old you were when you got your first fiddle? What would have been the first fiddle that you played on, maybe would have been a better way to put it.

Morris: Well we all started as guitar players. The younger generation, even in our day, we wanted to play guitar, but before too long, we were forced, or realized that we were fiddlers. Your dad, Ed, my older brother, Ed, went to Fort Rigley in 1942 and he had a small Martin guitar that he had earned by hauling wood with a team of horses the winter before. This Martin guitar is a guitar that such stars as Johnny Cash and Marty Robbins and all them guys had. I'm sure it was the same guitar, but your dad, I'm talking to Herb Lafferty here, my nephew. Ed went to Fort Rigley in 1942 to work for the Hudson's Bay and he came back the next year with an old beat up fiddle. He looked at the old fiddle. He just admired that dirty old thing, but he had traded his Martin guitar for it. I didn't like that one bit, anyway he impressed us with his fiddling after he picked up that fiddle. After a year, my God, he was playing all the square dances that we knew. The square dance tunes that we knew. Even my dad was impressed. The next year, I think maybe that year or the next year, dad bought a fiddle for my brother, Frank from the Hudson's Bay. Your dad went to work at the airport and then he was transferred to Fort Smith. During that time Frank picked up the fiddle and he became a fiddler. That's when I started to play that fiddle when he wasn't home. He worked for the Hudson's Bay too. I guess the Hudson's Bay thought they would make company men out of these two young fellas, but they didn't stay very long. Your dad to Fort Smith with his M.O.T. and brother Frank became the fiddler at home. I used to sneak and play on that fiddle. One time over at our grandparents where Frank and our cousin, George, kept their instruments, George played the guitar, and they'd play there, it was sort of an open house, road house and all the kids would gather there around the old people. I guess the old people liked that. Old Joe and old Murray Villeneuve and they put up with all the kids there in that place every evening with them playing fiddle and guitar and just making general noise like they do today. One day George walked in when I was practicing on Frank's fiddle. At the next dance George told Frank, Morris can play a tune. Frank, he would rather dance. He was that kind of a guy that he would rather dance than play the fiddle, but somehow he had become a fairly good fiddler that he took over from the older fiddlers that were the McPhersons, George and Walter. They're the only two that I remember playing at that time and Frank took over from them. That one night, at the dance just in the private home over at the folk's place. Frank said, "Well, you play that tune and I'll dance." So I played the tune. I don't know which tune it was. Maybe it was the St. Anne's Reel. Some very traditional tune. Then Frank said, "You're going to

have to learn another tune for the next dance." Before the next dance, he had taught me this song. The tune that he had wanted me to play. He didn't teach me. He just played it and he said, "Learn this tune for the next dance." I guess I worked on it, but I don't remember labouring over any tune. I just seemed to learn it without much effort and at the next dance I had two tunes to play. That's the way I became a fiddler pretty quick. Frank would rather dance. I think he used to call for the dances too. A few years after that Ed came back from Fort Smith. He had learned to how to play by music? by that time, but that didn't discourage me. He was playing new Scottish tunes and old Jimmy Cree, the fur trader here at Fort Simpson, started to come to the dances. I never seen that man at the dances before. I was wondering how come old man Cree was always at the dances. Eventually he told Ed, he knew all them tunes that Ed was playing by music, because they were all Scottish tunes. That's why Mr. and Mrs. Cree started to come to the dances to hear these Scottish tunes, but I wasn't discouraged by that. I guess I continued playing the fiddle and before long I was playing with Eddy. Two fiddles, on a few tunes that I learned from him. That's the way I learned how to play. I eventually became a better fiddler at that time, but Eddy improved after that. I was only thirty-three years old when I was paralyzed in 1967, December, 1967. Had I continued for the next thirty-three years, I think I would have improved a little bit. Even on the tunes that I used to play then, a few years ago there was a fiddle festival here and some boys that were arriving down to the grounds where the festival was held, came up to me, there was three young fellas that used to come to my dances and they said, they thought it was me playing. They said, "That's got to be Morris Lafferty playing." I was standing there. I was unable to play by that time. That was about ten or fifteen years ago. That guy that was playing all my tunes just the way that I used to play twenty-five years previously was the fiddle champion of the Yukon. So I had been in that class of champions when I lost the use of my right arm. I've been???myself. I had been, if not as good as these fiddlers, I would have given them a rough time. They would have known when Morris Lafferty came to the festival. I'm not bragging, but this is the truth.

Herb: It's true, because I remember, as a kid, running at the sound of the fiddle coming from the community hall dances and I could hear from far away and I was just drawn to it. I'd run to the community hall and I'd stand by the door and listen. Probably just as much to hear Peter play guitar as much as the fiddle, because I could hear the fiddle at home anytime I wanted to, cause dad was always playing in the dining room. That's where I learned how to chord for the fiddle, with dad.

Morris: As people that came to our dances, mainly in the 1960's when there was a lot of people around here, there was loggers and the building of the hostels and the school, there was quite a few people then and we had nice dances and to this day, people come back to Fort Simpson and they say, they've never been to better dances than they had in Fort Simpson. One bush pilot came into town. He had supper at the hotel and he asked what was going on in town tonight. It just happened to be Saturday night. The waitress told him there was a dance at the

community hall just down the road. I remember when that guy walked in. I saw him years later in Yellowknife and he said he was surprised when he walked in. He said he thought he was walking into a dancehall in Edmonton, because he never expected that kind of music up here in the north in the middle of nowhere. Here was Peter and I playing the Orange Blossom Special. Peter would take the guitar pieces and I would play the Orange Blossom Special. I think I played that tune even before the fiddlers recorded it. I learned it from Lawrence Welk. We had bought a Lawrence Welk orchestra record for the waltzes. The old time waltzes he used to play. It wasn't fiddle. It was all accordion mainly, but we learned from it. That's where I learned the Orange Blossom Special from the Lawrence Welk orchestra. When a fiddle tune was recorded by the professional fiddlers down south, I had been playing that tune. I didn't do anything fancy. I just stayed to the music. The way it was first recorded. I wasn't fancy. Just straight music. I just played the fiddle. Does that answer your question?

Herb: It sure does. Do you remember getting your own fiddle? A fiddle you could call your own. How did you get your first fiddle that you could call your own?

Morris: I earned money since I was a kid. I trapped squirrels and weasels. Us kids here always had money because we were trappers from the day we could set a trap. My dad set my first trap. He said this is the way you set it and watch you don't catch your fingers in it. From there on we were on our own. We always had money. I went to work at the school when I was fourteen looking after the teacher's residence. I was making money that way. I helped out with the janitorial work. The outside work was pretty rough. It was a full time job to get water and snow to fill the barrels and to keep the wood boxes full. That school burnt down a few years later because of the wood furnace. I think I was already working after I had quit school when I bought I bought my first fiddle. I ordered it from Eaton's I think it was. They had a good range of fiddles them days. I got a fiddle within my range. I think it might have been \$45.00 or \$50.00 at that time, but it was pretty good. The fiddle that I bought in 1960, around 1961, I paid \$75.00 dollars for it and its now worth \$1,800.00. The tone, the quality of it is \$1,800.00. That's what Ed told me. When he went to Vancouver to buy himself a fiddle, he tried all the fiddles in this particular store and he came back and he played on my fiddle which I had set up, but I don't want to say...the way it was fixed up, because people would ruin their fiddle. You can't cut away too much. You have to be very careful, but I raised the price of that fiddle up to \$1,800.00. Your dad played that fiddle when he came back from Vancouver. He said what did you do to this fiddle? I told him what I had done. He said its worth between \$1,500.00 and \$2,000.00 now. He said I'll give you \$1,800.00 for it, but I didn't want to sell it. It's a pretty good fiddle and I think I'll leave it with my granddaughter. I had another fiddle before that. That's the fiddle that Danny Beaulieu owns now in Fort Providence.

Herb: You said Danny Beaulieu, you mean Danny Bouvier.

Morris: Oh Danny Bouvier, pardon me. That's my first fiddle.

Herb: It would have been a Hudson's Bay...?

Morris: No, no, this was from the Eaton's catalogue. It was good enough for Daniel to play. Some of these fiddles were pretty good fiddles.

Leah: I'd really like to get some stuff on Danny Bouvier. Herb was telling me earlier about Danny Bouvier. He said that you knew about him. Can you tell me a bit about Danny Bouvier?

Morris: I always knew about Danny Bouvier, because I knew he was a good fiddler. Danny Bouvier, to tell you the truth, was better than any of us. He had to be the best fiddler of the Métis traditional tunes. By the traditional tunes, I mean the tunes for the traditional dances like the Drops of Brandy, the Reel of Eight, the Hankerchief Dance, the Red River Jig, the Double Jig and the Duck Dance and the Kissing Dance. You didn't know about the Kissing Dance?

Leah: I never heard of it. Can you tell me...?

Morris: That dance was done...well, it was usually my cousin Edna, who I think I told you about earlier, she liked to dance and she was always the first on the floor and she was always the first to grab a hankerchief. This dance was done with a hankerchief and women sort of danced around the hall and all the men would sort of cower and she'd sort of run when she decided who she was going to kiss as a partner. She'd kind of run up to the guy and throw the hanky around his neck and kiss him. Then this guy had to get up with her and they'd dance together around the hall and then the man would pick a girl this time and the man would kiss a girl. She'd get up on the floor with them and eventually they had a big circle going. The last person always kissed the person of the opposite sex. After this went on for quite a while, they'd have a big circle and then the last person with the hankerchief would start eliminating people. They'd kiss one of the people in the circle and then they'd leave the ring and this girl would do the same and she'd leave the ring. Eventually there was one person left. I don't know if there was any prize for this or I don't know if it was a booby prize or what. But, it was a lot of fun. They had a lot of fun doing it. They had a reel that they used to dance to. Every one of these traditional dances had a special tune that the fiddler would play for these dances. I didn't play all the tunes. I played the Drops of Brandy. In my time, they done a lot of the Hankerchief Dance, the Drops of Brandy and the Jig. I played for the Jig, but not too well. I didn't like the way I played it. My dad said everybody played the jig their own way. Every fiddler used their own way to play the Red River Jig, but up here it was all close to what old Joe brought in and it was different from the jigs we have now on record. I hear Andy Desjarlais' jig that is quite popular up here today and Reg Bouvette had recorded the other jig, but they weren't the jigs from up here. My dad played a jig that he called the Old Jig and the New Jig. I think old Joe must have brought in these jigs. The Red River Jig, mind you, but a little different, because we play the Red River Jig up here, well the new fiddlers don't

play the jig that I'm talking about. People of my generation played the Red River with a three note grouping. There was a break with the bow. The timing was set to three notes and the ends of these different parts of the tune were...they were ah... I can't explain it, but they play a high note and then the low note, you see, for the ending. This is the trick that put the kick to the jig. Some new fiddlers make fun of the old way of fiddling where the whole note is drawn out up to the utmost. It just hurts. That old note. The whole note. The way it was drawn out had a purpose to it. I seen a seventy year old man jig in 1951. When the fiddler hit that long note, that drawn out note, the old man kicked his two heels to his butt. He kicked his but with both heels! Whoa, did that put a little spark in the old man's step. He really was putting out at seventy years old. That's what that long drawn out note that new fiddlers turn up their noses to was for, for the extra kick in the dance. The dancers dance to the changes of the fiddle. It was very important. In that way the fiddler was taking part in the dance. I also played this way. I played for the people dancing on the floor and I always played for the best couple on the floor and I played as well as I could for them. I brought it right up to their timing. If I had to speed up a little bit, I would until I could just see it flow. In doing so it would make it easier for the other people that were not so proficient in their dance step. It was beneficial to everyone and it taught me how to play with gusto. In that way, my cousin, the women who liked to dance, Edna, had gone to Edmonton and when she returned for a visit, I went to see her and I asked her, have you been to any Métis dances in Edmonton. She said, yes, but not like the dances up here. She said, they call them Métis dances, but they're not, because the Métis music that I dance to was played by my cousins. I was dumbfounded and I said, whew. She says, you guys, you, my cousins, you played the real Métis music that I could dance to. You see what happened here, these fiddlers today are playing for performance. Mainly showmanship and performance and they're forgetting the dancers. Where us old timers used to play for the dancers. You know in jig time and square dances. And even the round dances, but you don't know what I mean when I say round dance. It's the waltzes. Two steps.

Leah: You were saying earlier in the interview about you have your opinions on some theories of the origin of Métis music. Since we're talking about the music and dance, do you have anything to comment about your opinions on that?

Morris: I just don't want to pretend I know it all, because I don't. It's my opinion and what I know of my grandparents and the old people that came in from Quebec. All the Bouviers and the Villeneuves that are up here were originally from Quebec. I know that Irish people had immigrated to Quebec and they brought their music along and the Irish music was blended in with the French music in Quebec, probably in the back woods where the Irish worked as lumberjacks way back in the days immemorial, like the Indians like to say. These are Métis people. They brought this music from Quebec to the Red River area. In the meantime, there was the Hudson's Bay Scottish half-breeds and they had their own music from their fathers. Scottish folk dances from Scotland which are very similar to the square dances and I think the western square dances are originally from Scotland, because I seen a

video on the dances in Scotland. They're the same as the square dances up here and the music is the same. That's where music started I think, from the French and the Irish mixed with the Scottish music. I sometimes hear tunes like, pieces of music in classical orchestra and there's bits and pieces from the Duck Dance or the Duck Dance is from these dances. This music and I hear the Drops of Brandy and the Reel of Eight and tunes like that coming from classical music and I think that was blended in with the Irish and the French. Maybe that's where music began. I'm not pretending to know anything about it, but that's what I see today. Now after we had T.V. up here, I think it was after 1972, I was watching a program from down east and there was this fiddler down on the coast of Newfoundland, he was sitting in his skiff, he was a fisherman, and he was playing the Red River Jig just like we play it up here. No different. He had that little Métis strut to it and everything. I'm not saying that wild fiddler is nowhere near the Métis music today, because music changes with every generation. In this program they said the Irish had come from Quebec to Newfoundland and they brought their music with them. The fiddle music and that's where the old fisherman was playing the Red River Jig. So that Red River Jig comes from Quebec and it's just perfect note for note. It's the old jig that old Joe played up here and everybody copied.

Herb: I just wanted to mention that I played dad's, Eddie Lafferty's version of the Red River Jig to Mel Bedard who was a friend of Andy Desjarlais' and after Mel Bedard heard dad's version of the Red River Jig. He said that its just like Andy's, pretty close, almost note for note like Andy Desjarlais, but when you listen to Andy Desjarlais play the Red River Jig, although maybe the sheet music is the same, and that could very well be where dad learned the Red River Jig, off Andy Desjarlais' sheet music. I thought it was kind of neat how it would be so close. I'm wondering maybe...

Morris: No, no, your dad didn't learn it from sheet music or Desjarlais. It's the same tune that we played up here, but I wish I could play the fiddle, but I'll show you what I mean on the fingering part before you leave so you'll know what I'm talking about. There's a little difference that we used to have up here. I think that was the Métis way of playing the Red River Jig up here. The Red River Jig had different versions. Today we know of Andy Desjarlais and Reg Bouvette recordings of this jig. My dad played the old jig that he called the old Red River Jig and the New Jig. There was a little bit of difference there. I could never hear it, but people that played the jig could, I guess. Today I think there's only one fiddler that I know of that knows these two jigs. Stanley Beaulieu of northern Alberta. He's in Meander River. He plays the two jigs the way they were played up here.

Herb: Where do you think Stanley would have learned those two jigs from?

Morris: Well his dad came from Fort Resolution and his dad played the fiddle and he went up to Meander River which is just up the highway from Providence. That's where he was married and raised his family. He was married to a Lafferty. So Stan Beaulieu is related to us.

Leah: I just want Herb to know we talked about the different dances. The traditional dances we mentioned how Danny Bouvier had played, his level of playing. He actually explained some of the dances. So just to let you know that's some of the stuff you missed. We didn't talk about each of the dances. There was one particular one that we did. Did you want any information or opinion on any of those dances like the Duck Dance?

Morris: I want to explain the version of the Reel of Eight that my grandfather played. Old Joe Villeneuve played a medley for the Drops of Brandy, no the Reel of Eight, pardon me. He played a medley of the Reel of Eight. It starts with the Reel of Eight and just one part of the Reel of Eight and the other part was Whiskey Before Breakfast and he played that for most of the dance and when the dance was going good, he'd throw in an old fiddle tune that the people up here, the native people up here had composed lyrics to and it was an old Indian love song. My mother said when her dad played this tune for the Reel of Eight and when you changed to that old Indian love song, the old ladies would all yell in delight and old Joe would take 'em home. That's the way old Joe played. Tunes like the Devil's Dream, old Joe had a low part to it that is pretty near the same tune that's played on the high strings. He played that on the low part. I played it that way. You don't hear the Devil's Dream played like that today. It's not played like that by the professional fiddlers, but oh that really added spark to the dance. Especially when you throw in a few of the modern??to it. You could really add to that Devil's Dream. I played the Devil's Reel also and I think I played them two tunes better than Danny Bouvier would have. These tunes were not played by any other fiddlers, but I learnt it from my mother. She taught me them tunes the way her dad played and she was a very...she wasn't an easy coach. She demanded perfection and as much as I tried she said you have to cut it. You have to cut your music. I learned after I couldn't play anymore because of my handicap, I learned what she meant by cutting it is ...

End of side A

Beginning of side B

Morris: From what I understand he had gone back south and my uncle said that he had been a sailor on the Lake Superior. He must have been, because he was married in St. Paul, Minnesota as far as we know, but that was the oral history of the family. When he got back to the north, he had about five or six children born outside somewhere, maybe St. Boniface or in that area. From what I understand, they came from the Lake of the Woods area. That would be my great grandparents. He was a Lafferty and his family was born at Fort ray? at the trading post there and that's where all the Laffertys came from. There was only one Lafferty in the North. He had brothers, but they went back south, maybe under another name. For one reason or another, the Lafferty was sort of an alias. They used alias names. Alfred was all over the country in the south using the name Schmidt. The name was Alfred Schmidt. He was married under that name. Today

researchers think the Lafferty's might have come from the Schmidt family, but no they were Laferte with that accent. That was the French name and because of business my grandfather, Alexis Lafferty had been a fur trader. He didn't work for the Hudson's Bay very much. Being in business and due to the Riel conflict that the conflicts the French-Métis were having, I think they anglicized the name and it was changed to Lafferty. Just a few of the families used that name. The people that went back towards the South, to the Saskatchewan and maybe into Northern Manitoba from the same family that was born up here are still using the French spelling Laferte. They are around La Ronge and in that area. They are the same family and so it was only Alexis Lafferty and a few brothers that stayed up here. A few in Fort ray? Other brothers of the family were trading in Fort Nelson and Fond Du Lac and places like that and some of the old Lafferty's ended up in Edmonton, my dad's cousins and all throughout Alberta and into Saskatchewan and all the way to Fort Simpson and one fellow went to Fort Good Hope and that's the farthest North you'll find Lafferty's, because they came from the South. All these Métis, the French Métis married Métis people, mainly Bouvier. They intermarried with the Bouvier and the Bouvier came from the South too. They traced their ancestry five generations into France and the Bouvier worked with the Hudson's Bay on contract and he had five sons with him. When he died one of the boys came up here. I think it was Joseph Bouvier. His three children were baptized here on August 18, 1856. One of the boys, Joseph, who was baptized here was my maternal grandfather. My grandmother was Marie Augustine Bouvier and she married the fiddler, Joseph Villeneuve, who we call old Joe. ? fiddler.

Herb: Did you come from a musical family? Tell us how that may have affected or influenced you to pick up the fiddle or other instruments.

Morris: I think the Métis were a talented people too, because all the old Métis, Lafferty's were fiddlers up in Fort ray? I don't know if my grandfather, Alexis, played fiddle but his sons all played fiddle. At least I'm sure of my dad and Phillip. Marie Augustine Bouvier married old Joe Villeneuve and he came from a musical background. His grandfather came from Quebec into the Red River colony. It was a colony in 1800 or 1835 I think, maybe sooner and he married a Métis. She was Julie Morin and their son David Villeneuve had served... I don't know what kind of a police service it was, but they were known as the Métis Horseman. I get this from oral history. Because of the many conflicts, and the things he was told to do, he more or less escaped and he came up here on a Hudson's Bay contract in 1865 to 1868. He was married here in September 8, 1857. Louison Lafferty was the witness at his wedding. He was married by the well-known Father Grouard. His wife didn't have a surname at the marriage in the register, but I'm sure that she was a McKay. This is what I hear. People didn't use their surnames very often. Through this practice, of the priests, who came from France and they didn't know the people. They just thought that everyone was from the Slavey people up here. They didn't register some of the surnames. People like that sometimes used Indian nicknames or alias names so then you have families that are originally from the South using all kinds of alias Indian names up here. Some of these Métis that may

have been up here since the 1700's lived with the Indian and they became part of the Indian, like the Manoir family. Manoir was a Métis that came up here and he was much like Francois Boulieu in the South McKenzie. Most of the people here are from the Manoir family. That's about all I want to say on that family. My father's mother was a McKivor. Her dad was a Métis that came up with the Hudson's Bay. He was born at Fort Carlton, Saskatchewan. His father was? William McKivor. This William McKivor came from...well, he was hired at Stornoway, Scotland. It's on the island of Lewis. I think it is on the west coast of Scotland. He was born in Nepe on that island, but he was from the Irish people. His wife was Catherine McKay. Her dad was Angus McKay. He had married Anne Morrison. Then this William McKivor hires on with Hudson's Bay and he sailed across to York factory on the Prince Rupert, the Hudson's Bay ship. That was 1838. He was married twice to Métis women. I have their names written down somewhere, but I won't even attempt it. They're from the Métis people of that area. He had twelve children. He was up here for one year on the McKenzie. I'm sure it was Fort Simpson. He went back and he tried to farm there. He died and he's buried there at Fort Carlton. His son John came up here and married an Indian woman, but when he brought her back after twenty-seven years, in the North, he brought her back and they went in the Winnipeg area around Carlin? In the documents that he left in Winnipeg in some government department there, he said his wife was Marie Dunor Duschane Lenoire. I think she had been married to a Lenoire before, but the man that she was married to was Johnny Lenoire and he was only twenty years old when their son was born. Maybe it was not a marriage. Maybe it was just a common-law marriage. This woman married John McKivor and they lived at Fort Franklin, Fort McPherson. They left from there in 1892. I was to meet my dad's uncle. We're way back into the 1800's. Frank McKivor had raised a family at Tisdale and that's where John McKivor is buried and his wife is buried there also. John McKivor had married LaRose Lapointe and he had seven other children with this young Métis woman that he married at St. Daniel's parish. I think its somewhere near Corman, Manitoba. They traveled between Carman and Tisdale. His son had farmed in that area, Frank McKivor. He was married to Margaret Gagnon and her mother was L'Esperance. That ties us into the same family with these people from Manitoba. We are L'Esperance, Lafferty, Villeneuve, Bouvier, McKay.

Short break

Herb: You mentioned your grandfather old Joe Villeneuve was a fiddler. Could you tell us more about old Joe's fiddling?

Morris: Old Joe was born here in 1868 to David and Lalouise Villeneuve. He was baptized by Father Grouard. He was witnessed in the presence of the Bouviers. Joseph Bouvier had married Catherine Beaulieu. Her parents were Beaulieu and St. Germaine. They are from the south too. They were French Métis. I don't know where the talent came from, but old Joe had plenty of it. He married Louison's daughter, Rose Lafferty. They went out by ox cart from Fort Providence to St. Albert. I heard him say to a visitor one time when I was very young, he mentioned

Salt River in Fort Vermillion. So he might have gone out on that boat Salt River Trail. There was a trail there. I seen that old trail in 1956. I got wood with one of my relatives from down there, Eddy Mercredi. His mother was a Lafferty. That Lafferty came from Saskatchewan, but the same family. I seen the old Salt River Trail and that's possible that Joe and his wife Rose went out on that trail. Rose and three children died at St. Albert, because they were probably not immune to the new diseases that were brought to the prairies by the settlers. They are probably buried on the flat by the Sturgeon River next to the bridge in St. Albert. I had seen the old bridge there in my day, in the 1950's, early fifties.

Leah sent to you up to here.

After his wife and children died, he was supposed to have gone to Prince Albert. He had other relatives there near by the Villeneuves in Saskatchewan. That's old Joe's relatives and he sent to St. Albert because he was related to all the Villeneuves there and Lawrence Villeneuve, his cousin, was the MLA for the NWT from 1894 to 1904 when Alberta became a province. Then Lawrence was on his way up here to the McKenzie too, but he only got as far as Paddle Prairie and he's the man that established the Métis colony there. They are now getting royalties from oil and gas.

So he was intelligent. He had been to school. Old Joe was illiterate, because old Joe had gone to the Indian residential school at Fort Providence. And he did too well so he broke his spirit. So he didn't stay long enough to learn to write his name. When he signed his government cheques with his mark somebody else had to witness. He spoke seven languages. He spoke French, Cree, Chipewyan, Dogrib, Slavey, Yushoo and a bit of English. His poorest language was English.

Leah: Did he speak any Michif?

Morris: Yes. He also spoke real good French, because of his grandfather and his father. They all came from Quebec. Old Joe had been in Prince Albert before the turn of the century and because I'm a fiddler and I know what a fiddler would be like. He must have been a fiddler, an accomplished fiddler, probably, before he left the North. He probably knew all the old tunes up here from the Bouvier and the Lafferty's and the other Métis that brought this music from South. We don't know when the music came. It was shortly after 1800, as soon as a Métis was willing to pack a fiddle on top of these 200 pound loads. I think a Métis would learn how to sneak in a fiddle on top of his 200 pound load over a portage. I think Joe was a fiddler already when he arrived to St. Albert and Prince Albert. That would be the reason why he had picked up the tunes so easily. A fiddler with that memory, what would you call it, training, you know. Well, if he spoke seven languages, he would pick up music easily, because he didn't have anything else to think about. He became a very, very good fiddler and he probably brought the fiddle tunes from Prince Albert up before the turn of the century like it was played down there. We retained that music here. Some people said our Métis traditional was probably the unspoiled Métis music of that period. On his way up here before the 1900's, he stopped in Fort Chipewyan and he played for a dance there. The old timers

remembered that dance, the old timers spoke of it. People of my generation know of it. That's oral history. Old Joe got back to Fort Providence and he married Marie Augustine Bouvier. Her mother was a Lafferty. The Bouvier had only been related to the Beaulieu's. So it was all pure Métis blood from the South, from the way I see it today. They were people from the South and because of the conflicts in the South, they stayed up here. Old Joe arrived back here before the turn of the century because his first son was born in 1899 in Fort Providence. He got here in Fort Simpson in 1911 and he went to work for the Indian agency that had just come in and brought in a government? here at Fort Simpson and because old Joe spoke all these languages, in them days there was many people that spoke Cree here and many people would come to Fort Simpson for entertainment during the summer. At least they did back in the voyageur days. It is written in the Catholic history. They called Fort Simpson the devil's island and the island of sins. The little dabble on of the North, Towers of the North and seven towers of Satan. To name just a few. One good priest said among all these people that blasphemed poor old Fort Simpson right into the ground, this one good priest said, he's praying for the master to send the right man up here, a priest who would save Fort Simpson. The way I understand it, now that I'm older, the pope eventually came to Fort Simpson and blessed this island, so I think we're saved. I don't want to say too much about the church, but you know they thought that a fiddler carried all the sins that were committed at the dance and during and after the dance. All these sins were supposed to be carried on old Joe's back. Now I continued the tradition and I carried the rest of the sins. I think the priest freed me from that heavy load that I carried. When I was young I noticed young Métis from Providence would always come for the summer and they'd camp next door to old Joe. Later in years I asked Danny Bouvier, my cousin in Fort Providence about this and he said, oh that was my older brother, George and Joe Lamoel. Joe Lamoel was their cousin. He said they came up here to listen to old Joe's fiddling. These young Métis brought old Joe's tunes back to Fort Providence though I know that the other Métis were already playing the traditional music there, but old Joe had just arrived before the turn of the century with all this new music he brought in from Prince Albert so these young boys came and listened to the old man play. Now the old man played every day after supper. He light his pipe and he sat back and he held his fiddle to his shoulder and he played with his fingers flat. Not the tips of his fingers. The flats of his fingers and he just played the old tunes and he tapped the music out with the bow. He never applied the bow to his fiddle when he was at home. Just practice, you know, just sit there smoking his pipe and he'd run through his old tunes. When he played for a dance, they say, I don't remember seeing him at the dance, I was too young, they said he didn't play the fiddle between dances. He'd wait until everybody was on the floor until he applied the bow to the fiddle and he only applied the bow at the dances and man could he play, they say. They said his fiddle was a little larger than the standard fiddle and we don't know if it was a home made fiddle. We don't know where he brought in this fiddle from, but one of my older cousins, Joe Villeneuve, who is seventy-five years old now, tells me that it was a bigger fiddle. My older brother said when they were going to the dance with my mother, they'd hear the old man playing the fiddle. They'd hear the old man's

fiddle from a ways down the road, which in blocks would be, pretty near a block away. In the winter time when the hall was all closed in, there was no open windows or no door open, they could hear the old man's fiddle. So he had a lot of fiddle. He gave his fiddle to Joe, my cousin Joe, who's now seventy-five years old. Joe said he never learned to play, because he had gone to work on the boats and he went to Hay River and he worked over there when he was young. The fiddle was picked up from his dad's place, Ginger's place, he was called Ginger, Isadore Villeneuve was called Ginger. He used to play the fiddle too. Old Joe's violin was picked up there and brought across the river by an Indian and it didn't last long. They say it was broken up in one of the canoe parts? so we don't know anything about the fiddle. We only know that it was broken there. That's before our time. But he had placed that fiddle on me and he said in French, play the Little Rabbit and he showed me those three notes and I remember those three notes today.

Morris: There was bleachers built in the hall by the American army right to the ceiling. The ceiling in that dance hall was maybe sixteen to twenty feet. It was a high ceiling and there was bleachers built and the American soldiers were sitting in the bleachers. The hall was packed and somebody brought the fiddle there after the concert. The kids put on a concert, like a Christmas concert. I was in the concert and I was wandering about and old Joe was playing the fiddle and I don't remember the tunes that he played. Maybe in all the excitement I didn't hear. I come close to where the old man was playing the fiddle. My uncle sat me in the chair and he put a huge guitar in my lap and he said, play D, the chord D, the old man is playing in D. He looked at the soldiers that were just standing and he said, this is his grandson, here's his grandson. After the old man was playing the fiddle and I was chording and strumming this big guitar. I don't know where I learned to play the chords. I don't remember learning. I just played. I was doing good, I think. Nobody complained and I heard one of the soldiers say to his buddy, just like the Ozarks. Old Joe got me as far as I was going to go in the music industry. He took me all the way to the Ozarks. That's getting pretty close to the Grand Ole Opry, I think today, you know. So that's the closest I came to the big time. I don't remember the tunes he was playing. I was nine years old and he was seventy-five years old. Today when I think of the fiddle history, old Joe being seventy-five and now I'm sixty-three, I've experienced a hundred and forty plus years of live Métis fiddle music. This is why I know a little bit about fiddle music. I'm not telling much of the fiddle history....

End of Tape One

Beginning of Tape Two – Side A

Herb: Once you got your very first fiddle, Morris, let's talk about say the fiddle that you worked for. It would have been the fiddle that you bought with your own money. Did you personalize your fiddle in any way? Did you modify it? Did you do anything to make it look better or sound better?

Morris: No. Not at that time. I think I ordered my first fiddle from a catalogue. From the Eaton's catalogue, but I think it was in Simpson's that had a lot of variety of fiddles. You had different prices and I got one in my price range at that time. About thirty-five dollars when I first brought it in, but today, you know how the instruments, the prices of instruments have gone up. Today I have a seventy-five dollar fiddle that I bought in 1962, I think it was, '61 or '62. I think I already said this. It was valued around \$1,800.00 after I touched it up, but I don't want to say what I done, because people might ruin their good fiddles. I took a chance.

Herb: What make of fiddle was it?

Morris: Garnarius.

Herb: Do you know what year it would have been built?

Morris: No. It was just a copy. Garnarius fiddles are used by the professional fiddlers, recording stars. Ed Gurty had played on a Garnarius. I don't know if I'm pronouncing the word right G.a.u...I don't know.

Herb: What did you like about that fiddle in particular?

Morris: We didn't know anything about different fiddles in them days. I just happened to order the right one and I got a pretty good fiddle. I don't need any other fiddle. Even if I was able to play, I won't need another fiddle. This is good enough.

Herb: Once you got playing for fiddle dances, down South we hear stories of how the Roman Catholic or the Anglican church did certain things to discourage or not necessarily encourage Métis fiddle playing for dances and I'm wondering did the church or the parish priest here in Simpson encourage the playing of fiddle music? Did they encourage Métis fiddle dances?

Morris: Oh they never liked dances. This is before my time. My mother said that her dad, old Joe was told that all the sins committed at the dance was upon his shoulders. I think I already said this and this was the thinking right along, because in the early 1950's we had school dances. There was night classes and we had a dance every Friday and the girls brought a lunch and we bid on it, I think. What was that called? A box...

Leah: A box social.

Morris: A box social, right. The girls made sandwiches and they had all kinds of dances. They done the French minuet and the Shawtease and the Polkas and the Two Steps and all these Round dances. My brother, Frank was still here at that time. There was many fiddlers among us. We took turns in playing the fiddles and guitars and dancing with the girls. At that time there was an old priest here. I

don't want to mention his name, but somebody seen him looking through the window. So he didn't think very much of this, the young teenagers dancing. That was taboo, I guess. Maybe he preached about it in the next sermon. I don't know. I remember my mother saying the priest was to preach a sermon on the Sunday after a dance and they'd say, well, I guess the dance hall was full last night, but we don't have too many parishioners in church today. I don't know what they done last night. The dance hall was full and on and on. Preach brimstone and fire, I guess, on that topic. In them days they used to stand in the pulpit and they had big long white beards and flailing their arms like the Frenchman talks. They'd get wild.

Herb: Did you feel that you were carrying some of the sins of the community on your back too?

Morris: Well, I guess I did a little bit, but I never confessed it. It wasn't that bad. By the time I started fiddling this had all blown over and they were becoming more, what was it, could it be sophisticated. Well, we had a public school teacher by that time and we were going to public school. This doesn't belong in this fiddle music questionnaire, you know, but we were excommunicated from the church, because we transferred to the public day school. It wasn't good for my younger sister when she wanted to go to confession. She would attend the midnight mass. The father said, well you can go to confession, but you can't go to communion, because you are excommunicated. I didn't feel bad about it, but my younger sister went home crying.

Herb: Which sister?

Morris: Jean. She was twelve or thirteen years old at the time. At that age, it really affected her, but I took it in stride. I was fourteen, fifteen.

Herb: On the lighter side, can you recall any unusual stories or funny stories, funny things that have happened at some of your fiddle dances in Simpson when you were playing?

Morris: No. I can't remember. We were just out for fun and everybody had fun no matter what happened. The kids were not out to stand around on the corner and get into trouble like they would today. We went into the school there and we danced, or we went into the dance hall and we had a good time and danced. I wasn't much to dance, but I was always playing the fiddle or the guitar. And I liked to stay on the stage, at New Years time especially. You know, with all that kissing going on, at midnight. A story here I should tell about Old Joe. Old Joe always played the Devil's Reel; he tuned up his fiddle for the Devil's Reel at midnight. At the stroke of midnight he started playing the Devil's Reel. Begin the New Year with a breakdown. The Devil's Reel was a ... tune. That would sadden the mood.

Herb: Many old time fiddlers believed that when songs such as the Devil's Reel, or

as Richard Lafferty called it, and the way Gideon Bouvier would call it, L'ariel de job? and the devil's dream, like when these songs are played the devil will come to you. Do you believe this or any of these stories?

Morris: No, no, I don't believe in that kind of stuff, my dad didn't believe in that stuff and I don't believe in that. I was never superstitious about the fiddle. But I was such that I might have given my soul to the devil, you see; because I was what I was. I went to Inuvuk, in 1968. I was there for the Carter? Commission, the first man with the power commission, the Montreal engineers were just building the powerhouse. I was there to look after the diesel and I run up the machine, and after so many hours I had to change the oil and clean the filters. So, I was there for a month and a half alone, and I threw the first switch at Inuvuk on the power line, for the power commission. So, during my time I played for the Halloween dance there, and my god, people never heard anything like it I guess. I had a tape recorder with me, a baby tape recorder, and I strapped the microphone to the bottom of the fiddle where the sealer jar is, and I plugged the microphone into the tape recorder and I turned on the monitor and it played as an amplifier. I was the first to play on an electrified fiddle there in Inuvuk. There were all kinds of people there, native people from northern Mackenzie area, and they had never heard anything like that. I had been to Edmonton and I had seen the dance halls, and I had played in an orchestra, a band, you know. So, I was becoming a fiddler, you know. I remember one day, when they asked where did I learn this, how did I learn to play. So, I can still hear my tunes and people playing my style, trying to imitate my style down there. I brought that, that new way of fiddling down there. So, that's what I did I think, because I still hear my style there. I wouldn't say they are playing it note for note, but they are trying.

Leah: We are interested in your remembrances of your mother taking you to a dance. Can you tell us a little bit about that, and describe in some detail what you remember?

Morris: Yes, well I remember a lot of kids sleeping under this table, and I think I was put next to them to sleep, you know. So, my mother was taking us to the dance, at that time there was nothing like babysitters, and I think a lot of the young mothers brought their children. And we had a small toboggan with a carry-all on it; there were canvas sides with light rope tied to a back board and my older sister would kneel in the back of that toboggan, hang onto the back board and my younger sister, she would be sleeping in the bottom of the toboggan and I would be probably sitting in the front. So, we would be pulled along in that little toboggan, and sometimes I remember sleeping at my grandmother's place. And, many times I think I woke up at the dance hall, we'd get bundled up and go into the cold. So, I remember those times. And after I was getting older, you know, I would have to walk, and I would go to sleep at my grandparents and I remember them waking me up and oh I hated to go. We'd have to walk about half a mile before we got to bed for the night. That is something that I remember.

Leah: Did they have old wood stoves in the homes where the dances were?

Morris: Well, in the dance hall, Andy Whittington's? dance hall he had a big 45 gallon drum. And the dance hall would get pretty warm from body heat, you know. It was warm.

Leah: Since we are talking about dances, did people dress differently, did they dress up? What do you remember in the old days?

Morris: Oh yes, everybody came to the dances with brand new moccasins, brand new footwear, and one time this particular man didn't have a new pair of moccasins, I guess my mother was talking about him. She talked about Johnny sitting there with his black moccasins, you know and everybody had brand new moccasins, but this young man was not married, he never got married, you see, so I guess he didn't have anybody to make his moccasins for him. So, I remember this, everybody wore new moccasins and probably new mitts, and everybody dressed in these black serge pants, the men did. The women always wore a new dress. My mother was a seamstress, I guess for the younger girls, and I remember the girls coming to my mother from Ontario, and to make a dress for them for the dance that night. And, oh my mother was always busy with her kids you see, she'd kind of grumble at that but she'd have to lay out the patterns and the dress on the table, and she'd cut it out. But it was easy enough, just fold it over and she'd only have to cut a little bit away and there would only be a seam on one side, the sleeves, and the cutaway of the neck probably, and that was it. She would sew that up in maybe half an hour. I remember her making dresses for my aunt, Liz. She was a young woman at the time and one of her friends, who was my cousin, so that's what I remember.

Leah: Just for interest's sake, did women put any ribbon work or anything to brighten up dresses, especially for things like dances or New Year's celebrations?

Morris: I don't know, I think they might have had rick rack sometimes.

Leah: I guess there was one more thing on the topic I didn't get to; your mother must have been a very independent woman. Can you tell us a bit; your father must have worked and did a lot in the bush. Was he around often, can you comment on that?

Morris: Sometimes he would leave before the river was frozen, they crossed the river by canoe years ago with my uncle. And they would take their dogs and toboggans across the river and make two or three trips, and they would load their canoe up on the other side. The river is a mile wide here, you know, and we would watch them going through the ice, there was big kicks of ice flowing, they took chances you know. And with two dog teams, four or five dogs to a team, and their dog harnesses and their toboggans and all their blankets and a little bit of tea. My dad never carried sugar, and the one time I went out on a trap line with him and I said "how come you don't take sugar?" he said that the sugar was too heavy to

carry, and that's why I don't take sugar. So, there were stories of young fellas, young kids, crying cause there was no sugar on the beaver hunt in spring. But I never experienced that, by that time I made sure I brought a cup of sugar.

Leah: You have to think differently when you have a weight limitation.

Morris: Yes.

Leah: And I think you mentioned something yesterday about a man, when he came to his posting in the fur trade, he only had a sleeve of ...

Morris: That's a story that a priest told me. He said, in the olden days when they first come up here, after 1858, the priests in some communities only got a sleeve of supplies. You know, their supplies in one sleeve of a shirt. That was probably their tea and flour, and sugar. By that time they were growing a bit of the vegetables and grain. I hear that they grew barley and wheat here, you know. A little bit of that, at the Hudson's Bay, the mission. And I suppose they had that in every community. There are some Métis up the river here, tell me they lived on barley, their mother she used barley instead of macaroni and rice.

Leah: Gee, it reminds me, I think you also mentioned because of that limitation of supplies the church had to contract out labour to have extra supplies, like country foods, and did your father provide those services?

Morris: No, the boats were already coming in at that time, the first steamboat came down the river here in 1885, the old river. And after that there was bigger steamboats, the SS Mackenzie and then the big distributor, I seen them both on the river.

Leah: I'm just distracting, we will go back to your questions, it's interesting.

Morris: On the riverboats, fiddlers used to work on the riverboats from Fort Smith, and I remember one guy in particular, Joe Kats? Whenever he came in he used to play a few tunes at the dance, he was a good fiddler from Fort Smith. But he was originally from Fort Providence; his folks went down to Fort Smith there, worked for the mission. That's what I remember about that.

Herb: We've heard some stories of some old time Métis fiddlers using moose gum when they ran out of store bought bow rosin. Do you recall any instances where fiddlers in Fort Simpson would use moose gum, when they ran out of rosin?

Morris: Yes, I think fiddlers did that, I think I told you the older brothers George and Walter, were better fiddlers, David also played the guitar,