

ALBERT (HAP) BOYER INTERVIEW

Gabriel Dumont Institute, Friday October 5, 2001

Start with your family, name, place of birth, about your grandparents, your parents.

Hap:

I was born 1928, November 2 in a log house along Murray Lake not too far from Cochin. My parents were Joe Boyer and Helen ? They were married by a father in Cochin. I was baptized by Father Lagott nearly 73 years ago. My dad was a fiddle player and he fiddled at home. He didn't fiddle in public. It was different with my Grandfather, Patrice Boyer, he was a great fiddle player along with his brothers. He was also a jigger. He was born in St. Louis, SK. He married late Charles Nolin's daughter, Virginia Boyer. I like fiddle music so much that I would go to one house with my mother and sit by the old fiddle players until I tired myself out till I fell asleep. I use to listen to their fiddle tunes. I got to play some of their fiddle numbers. Later in the years, I got to myself one these rattle phones that you wound up and got fiddle numbers. I copied some of these fiddle tunes; I copied most of the old lady fiddlers down home. I use to practice and practice and practice and I was getting nowhere, then I was just disgusted. Then my mother told me that if I wanted to be a good fiddle player, that I should play at a crossroads when there is a bright moon and play at 12 midnight and you will become a fiddler. I never said anything, then one night there was a big moon so I put my fiddle in a pillowcase and tied around the saddle horn and rode my horse out to the crossroads, a quarter of a mile away. Waited for 12:00 midnight and I played my fiddle at the crossroads, then I put my fiddle back in the pillowcase. I never told my mom for three or four days. When I told her she said I would become a fiddle player now.

How old were you when you went to the crossroads?

Hap:

I think I was 11 years old. What made me upset was when I was 7 years old and we got two fiddles, one for me and one for my brother, my brother got a wooden fiddle and guess what I got, a tin fiddle made out of tin. These were sold through mail order. I was upset with that so I took some scissors and cut the string off my tin fiddle; I didn't want to play it, I wanted the wooden fiddle. My neighbor, a Métis guy, he had a fiddle and he played at a house dances. He had no gun (.22) and he wanted to shoot Robin so bad; he asked me if I had a gun (.22). He asked if he could borrow my .22 and I asked him if I could borrow his fiddle. He agreed. I had his fiddle for awhile and then when I saw him I asked if he wanted his fiddle back and he said no because he wanted to keep the gun for the winter. I kept his fiddle all winter. I had a lot of practice and dad use to tune up the fiddle. He (dad) said to me that he was going to an auction and if there was a fiddle and not too expensive that he would buy it. I was about 12 years old and I went with him. We got into the wagon and off we went. It (the auction) was about five miles down the road. So they auctioned this fiddle and that fiddle went for thirteen dollars. Dad bought it, we got home and he tuned it up for me and away I went. I played, played, played. After thirty days of playing with the good fiddle, I was hired to play for a wedding dance. I played for that dance but I also had help from other Métis fiddlers, so I did not play all night alone. I will never forget before that wedding, I was asked to play a waltz at a school dance. This old Métis guy was playing and he said that Albert wants to play a tune but I did not say that. They wanted me to play. So he gave me his fiddle and I played Max Calihoo (?), well I was sweating and nervous and I played this tune and everyone was dancing and I wanted to show off. After that I went back home and I practiced and I don't know why

that priest kicked me out of church for. I was going to catechism and I wanted to play the violin so bad I had two sticks in my pocket and during catechism I was playing the violin with the two sticks. The priest took me by the ears and put me behind him. When he put me behind him was teaching catechism but I was still playing the fiddle. But I had no sticks and was still playing the fiddle so he took me by the ears and he kicked me out. I get a kick out this because I get kicked out church for pretending to play the fiddle and then forty years later they (the church) asked me to play at funerals.

So you said your dad was a fiddler?

Hap:

He had a fiddle at home and he played there. He wouldn't play in public. He helped me play fiddle. I couldn't tune the fiddle. I would take the fiddle out of tune and I would tune the fiddle up to see if I was close but later I got to tune the fiddle okay.

So I guess you answered the question, do you come from a musical family? So it's from being around your grandfather and your dad...?

Hap:

My grandfather's brother in-law played mostly.

So the very first fiddle you got came in a trade of a .22 rifle for a fiddle?

Hap:

He just loaned it to me.

Did you end up giving that fiddle back?

Hap:

Yes. I got me .22 back.

How did you get your first fiddle that you got to keep?

Hap:

That was from the auction sale.

That was the thirteen dollar one?

Hap:

Yes.

Do you remember what kind of fiddle it was?

Hap:

I really don't know but it belonged to old farmer. In those days you could buy a fiddle for five to nine dollars.

What year would that have been?

Hap:

I must have been 13 years old.

So that would put it about...

Hap:

I'll be 73 years old at the end of the month the 2nd of November.

We'll do the math later. So you were 7 years old then when you started...

Hap:

Yeah, I wasn't really playing; I was just playing with it.

So what age did you really get serious about like I ...

Hap:

About 12 or 13 years old.

Do you remember how many hours a day you would play?

Hap:

Well as I soon as I do the chores, I come in the house and I started playing. But I played late until three in the morning.

From when would you start?

Hap:

I started after supper. I played and played and played. I went to a dance one time and I told my mother that this old Métis guy was playing the fiddle last night and couldn't even write his name. His fiddle had to be tuned for him because he couldn't hear but boy could he play. I asked my mother what is the matter, I can read, I can write, and I'm not deaf and I can't play the fiddle. She said just take your time it will come.

We'll back up a bit; everyone knows you as Hap Boyer but your first name is Albert, so how did the name Hap come about?

Hap:

Well when I went to Korea, I took my fiddle with me. When I got to Japan it was so hot there, my? they just melted just fell apart. So rather than take it with me I just threw in the garbage. I got on a train and away I went to Korea. When I got to Korea I went and bought a fiddle. A Japanese fiddle. Just a cheap one. I organized a little band there. So we were playing around there in the canteen and this officer come and asked if we had a name for the band. I said no and he said that music is wanted at a camp down the road. He suggested that we play but we needed a name. He suggested that the band be called Hap Boyer and his Homesteaders. I agreed. So he said that he would get some boxes and paint the band's name on there. That's is how it started and stuck ever since

That is an interesting story. So we'll back even further to when you were a young boy about 12 years old. Do you remember the very first tune you learned on the fiddle?

Hap:

The very first tune was Oh My Darling Clementine. But by first dance number was Max Calihoo (?). Oh My Darling Clementine was supposedly an old number. A lot of people played that for learning.

That's interesting, Max Calihoo (?) I use to live in Ottawa in the early 80's and there was a café called Mexi Calli Rose.

Hap:

Yeah, I never played that yet.

So your very first fiddle or even any fiddles you've owned since, did you personalize your fiddle, did you decorate it or paint or hang something from it?

Hap:

I have a couple of pom-poms on one fiddle but I took them off because they were dirty. I put my picture in one them.

On the front or the back?

Hap:

Right inside. I put a picture of Hap Boyer. And I traded that for a drum set. I don't why I did that but I got a drum set, a good drum set.

Do you still have that?

Hap:

The drum set, no.

So the picture inside the fiddle was so that if you ever lost it people would know...

Hap:

Well, my name is in it and my picture is in it.

You never know that fiddle might come back to you...

Hap:

Maybe, but this fiddle I got here, I got rattle snake tail in it.

Maybe you could tell us little story about what it means.

Hap:

My dad's cousin, he's passed on now, he said "I got a rattle snake tail in my fiddle, why don't you get one" he said "That rattle snake tail is so that????? when you play." I couldn't get a rattle snake tail so I had a cousin from North Dakota come down and told her about that so

she said she would try to get me one in North Dakota. She mailed me a rattle snake tail and on the parcel she put fiddle rattler.

So I got that rattle snake tail and put it on this fiddle. When I play that fiddle, if I don't have a pickup on it, it's like I'm playing through a comb with a paper.

Last summer when she (cousin from North Dakota) to Batoche she said to me that she got me another rattle snake tail. When I got my pickup in Prince Albert during Batoche days, this one guy asked as a joke "do you have a rattle snake tail in there"? I said yes, and looked at me and said really. He couldn't believe it. The old Métis people, a lot of time put a rattle snake tail in their fiddle.

And that just changed the tone of the ...

Hap:

Well it would change on its own when your playing, sometimes it worked most and sometimes not at all. If I don't like the tone I shake my???? and I don't have that tone anymore.

Is there something Métis fiddlers would do up in this part of the country...

Hap:

Well I'll tell you when I first heard about 25 years ago, my dad's cousin had a fiddle and he that in his fiddle and he told me about it. And how are you going to get a rattle snake tail.

Around here, I don't know if they have rattle snakes...

Hap:

I got one in there and I got another one at home.

Do you play any other instruments besides the fiddle?

Hap:

I play the harmonica. I run out of wind so I don't bother playing it.

What kind of tunes would you play on your harmonica?

Hap:

Home Sweet Home.

Fiddle tunes or folk songs?

Hap:

Yeah, Yeah.

So when did you pick up the harmonica?

Hap:

I was about 10 years old.

So when did you quit, did you always have...

Hap:

Once in awhile I would pick one up and I'll play it.

Do you play any fiddle tunes on the harmonica?

Hap:

Oh yeah.

That's what my grandmother played, she taught my dad a lot of fiddle tunes he knew.

Hap:

There's a story behind this fiddle that I got.

Maybe pick it up so we can see if the camera... maybe tell us a little story about this fiddle.

Hap:

This fiddle was made by Augusta George in Wynyard in 1995. It was made for my friend, my friend, I won't say his name but he lives out by Regina. He had a son that was sick in the hospital. He asked us, he was in 80's, if we would make a fiddle for his son. He made 34 fiddles and this was his 35th fiddle. So it took quite a few years to make it because he was sick, he had emphysema and he worked in his house. I think it took him two or two or three years to make it. When he got the fiddle done, he phoned my friend and my friend asked how much the fiddle cost and the old man said \$2000.00. My friend said I can't pay that much, I thought you were going to say \$500.00 or \$600.00. I really can't afford that much money. The old man said it was a good fiddle. My friend did not get the fiddle. Then that old man died three months later, but the old man's son had all these fiddles and he phoned my friend and asked if he still wanted that fiddle. My friend said he could not afford to pay \$2000.00 but the old man's son said that if he came up with \$600.00 that same day than he would sell him that fiddle. My friend later took that fiddle to the hospital and showed his son the fiddle but he was already to sick. His son told him to take home the fiddle and that he would learn to play it later. A week later my friend's son died. My friend did not want that fiddle in the house so he called me up and gave me the fiddle. I don't want any money for it and my son will be glad for you to have that fiddle. But you have to come today to pick it up because I have it my car; I drove four and a half hours to get here. He did not want that fiddle in the house because it bothered him. So I picked the fiddle and visited him for a couple of hours. Then I left because I had a long drive ahead of me. Two months later my friend phoned me up and asked my how the fiddle was. Well you told me that there new strings on that fiddle but the G string is dead. And my friend says that's because my son died, that's why the G string is dead. There's a number I have trouble playing with my other fiddles but it comes easy on this fiddle. He said it's because my son is helping you. I told him I appreciated that. I have had this fiddle now for about six years and I played it when I made a video in Prince Albert. It is a very good fiddle.

Is it your main...?

Hap:

Yes, that is my main fiddle. I use to use my friend's, Joseph ??? fiddle but the neck got kind of worn. So were going to fix that up. That's a good fiddle also. It's got a deeper tone than this one.

So could you tell me who made that fiddle again?

Hap:

???? from Wynyard. He made it in 1995. He passed away; I think he was in early 80s.

A lot of fiddlers usually have one or maybe more than one fiddler that's been a main influence on their fiddle playing, is there one fiddle player that has been your mentor or your teacher?

Hap:

Don Messer

How did your interests in Don Messer...

Hap:

Well I had a little gramophone and it had Don Messer 78 on it. I would wind it up and play Don Messer. I got some of his records and I paid a dollar a piece for it.

Do you remember what the name of tune was that attracted you to his music?

Hap:

Oh, all his numbers. They're all good numbers. One number I liked was Buckhorn Way. That was a nice snappy number. People still play them down east music numbers.

So was there a fiddler you actually sat down with and played fiddle with?

Hap:

I played with Red Rovet up north. He was hired to put on a show. Winston Wuttunee was hired to do one show and I was Winston's fiddle player. On open stage day they called Red Rovet up on stage to play and they said we are going to get Hap Boyer to play along with him. So I went up there with him. They were telling the audience about Red saying that he comes from Winnipeg and he is a very popular Métis fiddle player, the announcer was going on giving Red good credit. So I whisper to the announcer, and his famous fiddle player is Hap Boyer. So the announcer repeats this to the audience, then Red bursts out laughing. Then we played for about fifteen minutes. He asked me what I wanted to play because every time I told him what I was going to play; he would say don't play to fast.

He told you or you told him?

Hap:

He told me, don't play to fast.

When he was in Batoche playing; he was all alone there selling his cassettes. At that time they just hired one and I was standing behind there looking at him. And I thought to myself

wouldn't I love to be doing that, playing in Batoche and selling tapes. And look what happen, for the last ten years I've been playing at Batoche and selling my tapes.

So when you first started playing where did you learn your fiddle tunes from?

Hap:

Métis fiddlers at home. It was surprising that they could do that all night.

Yeah there were some great fiddlers, even before the time there were tape recorders and movie cameras we had some of the great...

Hap:

Well that started off with listening to these old Métis players, and then I got a little gramophone with Don Messer records on it. Then one record I had it was a good one I don't if you still hear it, John Wayne and his Corn Husters, they played it on the radio. They had records and I had one of his records. The old timers would remember him.

I use to listen to Pete Cature from Winnipeg. In 1970 when I was Winnipeg, I wanted a job that was part-time so I went to Commissionaire at a park. They had a band there and I see this old guy driving an old car he walks out and starts walking towards the stage and says hello to me; I asked him what his name was and he says Pet Cature. I told him I use to listen to you on the radio back in the 40's.

I went to a big fiddle festival in Boughman, SK and my friend told me I was going to play in the choir. They had about eight fiddlers. The lady at the choir said she was sorry because they had no more music sheets. I asked what they were playing and that I didn't need music sheets. So away we went, I played along with the choir and they were all reading music sheets and I just followed them by ear.

Quite a few old time fiddlers learned that way listening to radio or they did not have the benefit of sheet music. Well we'll talk about the sheet music a little later. But I think we pretty well covered the history of fiddling in your family...

Hap:

I got sheet music with all my tunes that I could post but the reason I got them on sheet music was because I gave them to Trent Bruner of Canwood. And he played along my music, with my tape he put them on sheet music and that's how I got them on music sheets. So now I got all my numbers on music sheets.

Young players that can read, can pick up your tunes and play them by note.

We have a question about the church and fiddle music, we've heard of some stories some good and some not so good but we're asking all the fiddlers did the church or the parish priest where you were growing up, did they encourage fiddle playing of fiddle music?

Hap:

Well Father Cochin, the late Father Cochin, he's buried in St. Albert. He was a fiddle player. That's the only priest I knew that played. When we were living in Cochin the Catholic Church was right across from the school. The school had dances and the priest got upset about that because he did not want any dances happening across from the church. The priest did not win because they still had those dances.

We were talking about reading sheet music, do you think reading sheet music would help or not help Métis fiddlers...

Hap:

I've been asked to teach fiddle tunes and the first thing I tell them is their best bet is to go to where I come from because they teach music. Because if they come to me I'll teach them how to play but they won't be able to read music. I can't read music but I carry a tune and I can play after a couple of numbers.

So you're saying...

Hap:

I'm saying they should get proper instruction and learn to play the fiddle by note because if they want to play by ear they can do that. But they will have that background of reading music which is good.

Remember the late Al Tournier, well he use to play in the 1970's orchestra and he said he did not like that because he wanted to be on his own. So he left the orchestra and went solo.

I use to enjoy watching him on TV.

Hap:

One time I was playing in Red Deer and we all had supper and Al said that if anybody wants me to come to their fiddle contest don't hesitate to phone me. So we had a big fiddle contest in North Battleford and they wanted a guest star and I suggest Tournier. They said it was impossible to get him; I don't know how you're going to get him. I told them that he told me himself he would come if we phone him. So when we phoned him he came down and put on a good show.

Where was Al from?

Hap:

He was in Mississauga, but he was playing in Saskatchewan when we got a hold of him. I was co-chairman of that fiddle contest in North Battleford.

He's quite the fiddler, is he still alive?

Hap:

No, he died of cancer.

A real popular Métis fiddle tune is been called the national anthem among other names, I'm talking about the Red River Jig, do you have any stories of the origin of the Red River Jig? How the Red River Jig cam about?

Hap:

That's way back, the Red River Days, I guess. Talking about the old tunes, I went to this museum in Frenchman Butte and I went in there and they had this old gramophone and all these old records and I was looking at them and among them was the Red River Jig, so I asked if they play that record, so they did. I never heard Red River Jig like that but it was the Red River Jig and you could dance to it. If you ever get a chance to go there I suggest you listen to that record.

You don't remember seeing a name on that record?

Hap:

No, I don't. But if the museum is still open they got it.

Henry Gardipy went to listen to that but he doesn't play it like. Henry plays it more like Andy Desjarlais.

More modern version of it. I wonder if it would be Frederick Shantaw, have you ever heard that name, well I found out in an old Hudson Bay Beaver magazine article from 1942 that the National Museum, better known as the Museum of Civilization, had a recording of the Red River Jig by Frederic Shantaw who since we found out was a friend of Ed Desjarlais' dad.

Hap:

Really, so that goes back quite a bit.

So Pierre Desjarlais and Kredechuk were friends, they were together as surveyors and they both fiddle. I was on the phone with Marcel Myeer whose played fiddle with Andy Desjarlais for some 35 years and I asked Marcel who did Andy Desjarlais learn his Red River Jig from and he said Frederick Shantaw. So now when you mention that old 78 record, well wouldn't that be nice if it was Frederick Shantaw?

Hap:

My grandfather would have been 130 years old now and he played Red River Jig. So that might be before his time.

When you go to play for fiddle bands or if you know you're going to be playing on a radio or a wedding, are there any special preparations...

Hap:

No, I don't prepare. I know what I'm going to play. When I go play for a dance, start off with two or three sets of an old time waltz. Usually I have an accordion player with me and he'll come on with some good polkas. I got a singer on and he'll sing some songs. So we mix it up. Some people want two sets and some people want three sets at dances. So we ask them what they want and also ask them to bring their requests. Their requests mainly are the Barn Dance, Bird Dance, Santese, the Old Toe, and the Cotton Eye Joe Dance and Walking Across Texas. If you go to the real good old Métis dances, you go with Drops of Brandy every time. Red River Jig and Drops of Brandy are some good square dances now, some of these square dances they don't call, they just dance. Years ago we use to call them. When I went to play in Moose Jaw here last month, I played there and there were Métis dancers, first thing they wanted was the Duck Dance then they wanted three sets of square dancing. They did the old way, this lady called and then she wanted the Red River Jig. They had dancers from Lois Riel Dancers. I went to Candle Lake the same week and they had the Cumberland Dancers. They wanted the same thing: The Duck Dance, the square dancing, but they had no caller, they just danced. They were young kids and they were good.

Is there one fiddle tune to your way of thinking would define the Métis style of fiddling? Is there one tune that comes to mind?

Hap:
Yeah, Drops of Brandy.

Why would that be?

Hap:
Well, years ago when my grandpa was playing the fiddle when they played Drops of Brandy it took fiddlers because they were so old playing and they danced for 20 minutes. But I fixed that, when they want Drops of Brandy, I break them in to four couples and than it doesn't last as long but it lasts long enough, maybe a good 12 minutes. So when my grandpa was playing; he was playing so long that the other fiddler would take over. They would switch over after 5-6 minutes of fiddling.

So when the fiddlers changed taking turns did the dance stop, the fiddle joined in and then other ones...

Hap:
No, no they just kept going.
I was playing at Batoche four year ago with only two fiddlers that time. And he was playing Big John McNeil and he got cramps in his hands so he yelled at me to take over. I came over and nobody knew the difference.

So speaking of unusual stories, can you recall any unusual stories, strange or funny about Métis fiddling or funny incidents at fiddle dances in your travels?

Hap:
Well, I remember, this isn't Métis, it was when I was in the Armed Forces and they wanted me to come play Bird Sanders Nest. I went with a guitar player and singer...

Where about was this?

In Germany, in a big tent, there was a lot of booze, boxers, beer and they were dancing there. So I went to have a little drink but I guess I had a little to much to drink, so I walked home with my fiddle case and went to my tent where we stayed and went to sleep and when I woke up I was wondering if I tightened the bow on my fiddle. So I got up and checked the case and there was no fiddle. Here I left on an bunch of empty beer boxes and I walked over the empty case.

I hoped you found your fiddle.

Hap:
Yes, I found my fiddle.

A little earlier we were talking about the devil's dream and the devil is real and I believe, there are a lot of old timers that believe when songs like the devil's real and the devil's dream are played that the devil will come to you, do you believe in stories like that or have you heard of any stories...

Hap:

I heard that but no devil came to me. Maybe he's waiting for me till I die. You know that fiddle is supposed to be a devil's instrument.

No, tell me why.

Hap:

All I know is my cousin came back from Uma and he had a video with a fiddle.

Where did he go?

Hap:

He went to Uma, Arizona. He come back with a video about the fiddle. And it said on there that the fiddle is the devil's instrument.

Oh I wonder why.

Hap:

I don't know. You know something. Did you know a fiddle is a female?

Well, I'm looking at the fiddle...

Hap:

Did you know the fiddle is a female?

Why would that be?

Hap:

When someone refers to his fiddle, they say she's a good old fiddle, she's a good sounding fiddle. They never say he's a good fiddle.

There's a song called the Hangman's Reel, I got one fiddle album for my dad and it was by Jaques ???? and that was the only album my dad ever gave me and I here there are stories behind the Hangman's Reel, why was it named the Hangman's Reel? Have you heard any stories about that? Can you tell us any stories about that?

Hap:

I'll tell you. I played the Hangman's Reel at the Jamboree in Battleford last year and that is one the tunes I played there. Now every Métis fiddler plays the Hangman's Reel right and every Métis fiddler plays the Hangman's Reel different.

Almost like the Red River Jig?

Hap:

No, no. It's not like the Red River Jig.

The way my grandpa told me the story about the Hangman's Reel is this: this prisoner was in jail for having to have killed somebody and that was when they had the kangaroo court, years and years ago. He said was suppose to hang at day break but the judge was fiddle lover so he went to the jail cell with a fiddle and the fiddle was not tuned and the judge tells the prisoner he will be hung tomorrow morning and if you can play me a tune by day break I will set you free. So he left him with the fiddle and walked away. The next morning when they

got him to execute him, there he stood, the judge said to him, I brought a fiddle and told you if you played a tune on that fiddle I would set you free, can you play me a tune? The prisoner put the fiddle under his chin and played this number. I can't play this number because I have to take the fiddle out of tune. He did not know how to tune the fiddle so he just tightened up the strings. So he played the number for the judge and the judge liked it, set him free and called it the Hangman's Reel. That's my story. Take it from my grandfather. And last spring I played the Hangman's Reel. That day somebody got a different story, so who knows.

I've heard it like that but there are versions but I like that story. When you were growing up do you remember looking for these rpm 78 records?

Hap:

Yeah, I use to buy them for a dollar a record.

What other fiddle records did you look for besides Don Messier?

Hap:

That's the only one I looked for. That was the only fiddler that was well known, well of course they Ned Landers but he was on the LP's. I don't remember seeing him on the 78's, he could have been on the 78's, but I remember buying his LP's. LP's came out in 1954. Why I say that is because I remember going into a music store in 1954 and the guy asked me if I saw these new records that came out.

I was looking at your CD and am very anxious to listen to it but on it you play some original tunes; tunes you've since added to your repertoire when you go out and play. Maybe I could get you to tell us story of each tune; let's start with Missing Bell of Batoche.

Hap:

Missing Bell of Batoche when I was asked to play for this Bell of Batoche Days, I thought it was only right to play a tune called Missing Bell of Batoche and I made that tune up.

Do you remember how the tune came to you?

Hap:

The tune is so simple; it's like running back and forth on the same street. It's just the run of the fingers. It's nothing so special.

How about the Rabbit's Two Jig?

Hap:

I was dreaming about that tune a lot and when I would go to bed, I dreamt the first part of that tune. I got up one morning and put on a cassette and then I was wondering why isn't there another part to that; all I'm getting is the first part. So I got started on the second part and then I saw Eddie Gardipy and told him I made a second part to this tune and asked him to listen to it. He listened and says there are three notes missing. So he asked me to play again, so I did. He said yes there are three notes missing. So he plays the tune back for me and he was write there were three notes missing. So I fixed it up but I had no name for the tune. So a guy came to me to my house and wanted to record a cassette, I told them I can't afford to come up to record. I don't have \$3000.00. Well he says if you can come up with

\$600.00 than we'll record you a cassette. And we'll sell it and we'll get our money that way. We got to have some fiddle tunes. I gave him \$600.00 and they wanted this tune on it. I want that tune on it but what are you going to call he said. I said I don't know. We talked along and it was getting late but he kept nagging me about the name of the song. I was getting upset and told what do you want me call it Rabbit's Two Jig? He said that's it; we'll call it that. And then a few years I played in Leoville, probably about 10 years ago, this comes up and wanted to jig. Do you know Rabbits Two Jig. I told her I think I do. She asked me play it and man did she ever jig.

She must have had your tape.

Hap:

No, she didn't know who I was. She just wanted to know if knew it.

What about the Rolling Hill Waltz?

Hap:

I was born up in the hills of Cochin and there are a lot of rolling hills. It's just a matter of repeating yourself. It's simple to do that tune. I had to have a name for that so I called it Rolling Hill Waltz but I couldn't find a name for the Métis Lovers' Waltz. A famous waltz and the producer's said there has to be a name for that waltz. I told them I would like to have something with Métis in it. He said how about the Métis Lovers' Waltz. And I agreed.

Do you remember where you were when you created that tune? What inspired the Métis Lovers' Waltz?

Hap:

Well, this old Métis years ago use to play a bit of that, but he didn't play it all, I made the rest of it up. He started it up for me.

You have a tune on your CD called the Bush Rabbit Hop.

Hap:

Yeah, it's kind of a santiese, you can dance to it with the Fox Trot also. I just thought I got to have a name to it so since I Rabbit's Two Jig then I'll call it the Bush Rabbit Hop.

That's a good name. Maybe tell us a bit about the tune Big Butt in Three Quarter Ton.

Hap:

Oh that one I have a friend in Ovide, SK. He's the one that puts up fiddle festivals for years in Ovide, SK. They called Big Butt and I told I am going to make a waltz for you; what do you want me to call it and he says to call it Big Butt. I told him it's a waltz so he says Big Butt in Three Quarter Ton. So that was it I made that tune for him.

I like this one, Big Muskeg Shateese?

Hap:

Big Muskeg is about 27 miles south of Meadow Lake. And there is a little bridge that says Elkcott Creek just to the west of that is a lot of Muskeg. That area is called Big Muskeg and

how I know that is because my dad told me. The first part of that number played by my grandfather which he operated the halfway house. There was a trail that they use to run to Glaslyn down to Battleford. He played this number, mainly the first part, and I don't know the second part of it. So I made up the second part and had no name for it. My grandpa played it and he operated the halfway house west of it, Muskeg, so I called it the Big Muskeg Shateese.

What types of fiddle music were popular where you grew up, in Cochin?

Hap:

Square dancing, yellow tow, and polka, old time waltz. They use to have a lot of box socials. That's when they use to pay \$0.25 to get in and if you brought a lunch and if you brought in lunch you got in free.

The men would bid on these lunch boxes.

Hap:

They bought these for you for Christmas and you had to use them for school. And if they knew if you had a girlfriend, and you had her food box in there watch out they would beat you up.

Me and my friend did that, went to play for a box social a couple of years ago. And this guy played for his girlfriend; we went to play for this big box social on the reserve. They were sitting together and we found it was someone's girlfriend. So my buddy said we'll bid on that box and go half on that box. It went up to forty bucks and we let it go. He wouldn't let his girlfriend's food go. He bid on his girlfriend's box lunch.

He was determined to have lunch with his girlfriend.

Hap:

Yeah it cost him forty dollars.

There are a lot of tunes that you mentioned that very popular, mostly Métis dances, I'm trying to think of about the Métis fiddle dances...

Hap:

The one dance I really remember was the Rabbit Dance; I was only about 8 years old. I can see it a guy got up with a scarf and the guy would play the fiddle and play the Rabbit Dance which I got it on my CD, Kookum's Wapoose II. I had to have an introduction on fiddle so I put the Rabbit Dance so he would go hopping around the dance throw the scarf around this lady and throw her up. Then he would throw the scarf at the next gentleman, then he would go hopping around and see who he wanted to pull up. Pretty soon every one was on the dance floor. That tune on my CD is called Kookum's Wapoose II but the introduction on there is the Rabbit Dance that my grandma use to play.

Do you play the Duck Dance?

Yeah

What makes that tune different from the other traditional...?

Hap:

Well some people want the Duck Dance but they don't know how to dance it and some people ask for a different number than the original Duck Dance; they dance it but it's not really right but they just go at it. They dance like ducks, I guess. John Arcand really played it nicely at Batoche last year, he played the original Duck Dance and the dancers of Edmonton were dancing.

Do you play the reel of four?

Yeah, that's a reel.

Does four refer to four sets of dancers, four pairs of dancers?

Hap:

Yeah, well you can have more than four.

How about a reel of eight, is that the same thing or just another reel?

Hap:

Yeah it's just another reel.

Drops of Brandy...

Hap:

That's the one that's long. But I made it short and made it into four couples. Even five couples is long. If you have eight couples than you would never get done fiddling.

So the way you play it...

Hap:

I put four couples... I break it down.

So the dancers would dance for how long?

Hap:

They would dance for at least 7 – 8 minutes.

When Leah were on our trip up north we were in Fort Simpson, my uncle Maurice Lafferty, who was a really good old time Métis fiddler in his time before his accident and couldn't play anymore... he was telling us about the kissing dance...

Hap:

I haven't heard of that one.

That's a new one to me.

The way he explained it, it similar to the handkerchief dance but rather than the handkerchief you gave your partner a kiss and then you got up on the floor...

Hap:

They use to dance years ago; they use to call it the Requiem Polka, get your partners from the Russian Polka. Today they call it the Finger Polka. When I was playing for a dance they wanted the Finger Polka and when I was a kid they called it the Russian Polka.

When they call it the Finger Polka...

Hap:

You go this way and that way and you a couple hit your hand.

So you point the direction in the way you're supposed to go?

Hap:

No, they're dancing and they go by the tune. Then they'll stop and go this way, this way, this way and away they go. That's the Finger Polka; years ago they called it the Russian Polka. Why I don't know.

Earlier you were telling us about the first gig you went out to play; can you tell us about the first dance you went out to play where you were actually paid money to play. Is that the story you told us earlier?

Hap:

No, we use to play the guitar and the fiddle and we got \$2.50 each. We were getting bigger of the money than a lot of the people and some people got less than that but we charged \$9.00 to play. We played till 3:00 or 3:30 in the morning.

What year was that and where were you playing?

Hap:

I was playing at Murray Lake School, Gerome School, Loss Horn Creek, and and all those schools that wanted fiddle players. The only time you sang at jig was at supper time. At supper break, take your partner for a supper waltz. They would waltz and get their partner and they would go around with this bread-where you part bread. Lots of sandwiches and some girls would come around with coffee and they would give sandwiches all around. Years ago every household was their turn to make the house dance.

The dance would be in their house?

Hap:

In their house. I wasn't going to dances yet; I was too small but my grandmother would tell me a lot. Whoever's turn it was to make the dance had to supply the lunch and these people were very, very poor. It was their turn to make lunch and a lot of time people use to make a living with their hounds.

Do you remember that? They would go around, they would have a catcher and a killer. They would sick their hounds against the coyote. The catcher would trip the coyote and the killer would grab it by the throat. Going back to my story, these people, it was their turn to make the lunch and they had a big dance and holy man they had meat sandwiches.

The next day there was no house around.

From what you remember on the old time fiddle dances did the old time Métis fiddlers clog with their feet?

Hap:

Yeah, in my grandfather's time but I come we had a guitar. But my grandfather just used a fiddle with their feet; of course, there was more than one fiddler. So they took turns fiddling.

So they clogged more before guitars and pianos came along?

Hap:

That's all they had to do those Métis fiddlers. They used their feet to keep time.

Do you recall playing at fiddle dances where there was more than one fiddler playing the same tune at the same time?

Hap:

In my days the fiddler played then if someone wanted to relieve that fiddler then he took over. But the relief fiddler never got paid.

Only the main fiddler.

Hap:

Just the main fiddler. Like if I was paid \$2.50 to play and if someone wanted to play a few numbers then I wouldn't play the fiddle but he never got the money; I did and my guitar player got \$2.50.

We've heard stories where a fiddler would be playing and someone would tap along...

Hap:

Yeah, I've heard of that but I've never seen it done.

The first time I've seen it was when we were up in Fort Resolution and Angus Boyle heard of that tune done and they demonstrated to us...

Hap:

I've seen it on TV.

Almost like north, almost like having little chopsticks, so you did hear...

Hap:

I've seen it on TV up north on a northern program.

I wonder how long that sort of thing...

Hap:

I don't know anything about that part, how long, I have never heard anything about it.

Most of these small communities never had pianos and the Métis fiddlers in the old days usually played alone. Do you remember in your area when guitars first started showing up? Like in the Cochin area?

Hap:

Well when I started playing fiddle at the dances I was about 14 or 15 years old; there was already guitars so I don't know there must have been guitars before that.

When they talk of traditional Métis fiddling the guitar was probably one the first instruments to accompany the fiddle...

Hap:

Yeah, that's right.

Do you prefer guitar or piano?

Hap:

I prefer both; I like both. If there are guitars; I love it and if there are pianos; I love it just as much.

Before pick up fiddles came along and microphones and amplifiers, you know to amplify your sound in a big dance hall, do you recall seeing fiddlers or did you yourself do anything different...

Hap:

Yeah, I did it different because this white man that use to play for big halls, he told me what to do and what you're doing wrong, he said you're playing too much in your "d" and "g" string. Keep away from your "d" and "g" string and play your "e" and "a" because when your shuffling of the feet and your playing your "e" and "a" you go straight through they can hear you. But as soon as you hit the big strings you start to get mixed up with the shuffle and you can't hear it so you have to play the high strings.

Earlier you mentioned ordering fiddles from Eaton's; I'm interested in the old Métis fiddlers in some of the smaller communities, where could they buy they buy their fiddles from?

Hap:

Well, some would get them from the Hudson's Bay and Eaton's. In those days, some of the stuff would get shipped through the Hudson's Bay and the Hudson's Bay would sell the instruments and pipes; for instance, there was an old grave that was dug up and there was an old corn cob pipe, and the guy wanted to know why there was an old corn cob pipe in an Indian grave. Dad told him that years ago the all the persons died came from the Hudson's Bay who traveled by ship, from France and that's how that stuff got here.

When you're looking to buy a fiddle what qualities did you look for in a fiddle? If you were to go out tomorrow and buy a fiddle what would that fiddle have to look like or sound like?

Hap:

Well, it would have to be good fiddle. I would stay away from a certain fiddle but they say they make better ones now. Suzuki fiddles are good fiddles, they sell for about \$700 and up but I can't see why they are worth it, really, I can't. I play it, I can play it and you get nice music out of it but it's not the fiddle I want to play for recording and dancing. You know when someone always says I got a Stradivarius; well, I can get a Stradivarius for \$100.00 or \$500.00, they vary.

But there are a lot of Stradivarius copies out there... maybe that's what they have...many fiddlers experience tuning problems with tuning pics slipping; do you have tricks of the trade?

Hap:

Well, years ago, the cheaper fiddles that had cheaper pics or cheap wood, they wouldn't stick so the old Métis fiddlers would spit in the pics and that would stay for a while. But today they have special stuff for that, like this fiddle, it never slips, it has good pics and good wood. But the cheaper fiddles they have something called pig oil and you can it for about \$10.00. You would take your fiddle to the store and put some pig oil on it and in 12 hours that thing would be stuck.

It doesn't glue it but...

Hap:

It sticks. It's called pig oil.

That's good for younger fiddlers to know. We've heard stories about old time Métis fiddlers using spruce gum when they ran out of store bought fiddle rosin. Do you recall any stories about fiddlers using spruce gum...?

Hap:

I never used it because I always had rosin and I don't know too much about spruce gum. The only thing I know about spruce gum is when my mom would take me up north in a covered wagon and she would take gum from the trees and chew it.

Do you have any preference as to kind of fiddle string you'll string your fiddle with?

Hap:

Yes, I use domestic fiddle strings but there are always new strings coming out. I like them.

What do like about them compared to the cheaper fiddle strings?

Hap:

They got a better tone. Years ago old Métis used the steel strings. For about \$60.00-\$70.00 you can get some good strings.

We've also heard some stories about some old time Métis fiddlers, when they broke their regular strings, whether they bought them from Hudson's Bay or from somewhere else, what did they use when they could not replace them with a bond string?

Hap:

I myself when I was in Korea I broke an "e" string and the guy took some signal wire and took the steel inside and wrapped it around and I had a good "e" string.

We would like to know where you performed and if there are any special memories of these performances? I'm looking at your CD and maybe we'll just go down the list. Big Valley Jamboree.

Hap:

That's up in Craven, I was a fiddler for Winston Wuttunee, a native entertainer, I toured with him in Alberta, northern Saskatchewan. I recently played with him last month and I'll be playing with him again in a week's time.

You mentioned James Bay, George Village, and northern Quebec. Well this closer to home for me; you were guest artist to Norman Wells? Maybe tell us about that trip?

Hap:

I got a phone call from Norman Wells and he asked if he was talking to Hap Boyer and I said yes and he said we have your cassette and we were wondering if you would like to be a guest artist for a Métis Assembly. Well I guessed I was not very dressed to do that because I thought I was not good enough for that. When he told me that I thought I better give a good stiff price and he'll back out and I won't have to go. He asked me how much I wanted and I told him I wanted my airfare there and back and a room. I asked him how long do I have play and he said for about 3 hours a day in the evening. So I told him it was \$500.00 per night and I want to be able to sell my cassettes ahead of time and keep them there because I can only take so much on the plane. He says to sit by my phone for about 20 minutes and I'll phone you back. I was wishing they wouldn't phone me to ask me. But when he phoned he said I was hired.

Have you ever been up there?

Hap:

No I've never been up there.

What do you think about that part of the country?

Hap:

It's pretty good country. I never got back. It's daylight all night.

It's not unusual to see kids play baseball at 3:00 in the morning...

Hap:

I got out of the plane and I was quite embarrassed because I had a big denim vest, big cowboy hat and I walked with my fiddle and there was the mayor, the RCMP, all the big officials from the Métis Nation and they escorted me to my hotel room.

They treat fiddlers really nicely where I come from...

Hap:

Then they gave me a nice candle light dinner.

They had some good players there. I was playing with a band from Whitehorse. Boy were they good.

There are a lot of good musicians from Whitehorse area.

Hap:

Yukon Jack – their name was. He was good.

You mentioned Richard Lafferty was on the same bill...

Hap:

He entered the fiddle contest. There was fiddle contest and they come and give the paper to fill out and I wasn't sure if I wanted to. I told the lady I was the guest artist and I shouldn't be playing against the others, not that I'm any better. The lady said who's paying you and I told you are then she said I want you to fill out that paper and get in there. There was about 8 players and these fiddlers up in Norman Wells, there was a lot of Indian fiddlers there. They have a different style of fiddling there. What they do is they sit down and hold their fiddle differently. I've never seen that. One of them took third, Lafferty took second, and I took first.

There was a good fiddler, besides Richard Lafferty, up there he was a friend of my dad's, Thomas Manual, did you meet him? Was Thomas Manual up there?

Hap:

No I never met him.

Speaking of old time fiddle tunes in the Red River Jig a lot of Métis fiddlers will reach in their fiddle to play the Red River Jig, I think they call it the High Yield Tuning, do you prefer to play the Red River Jig in that different tuning or the standard tuning?

Hap:

I usually leave standard because I don't want to tune it up. But I can play it the other way too. When I go to Batoche I play the Andy Desjarlais style. I can do two styles.

Richard Lafferty was saying that he played in standard tuning that way you can travel with one fiddle.

Hap:

Yeah, well I can tune that up but I just leave like that and play that way.

Getting back to the questions of performances, you've played the Gold Range Hotel...

Hap:

In Yellowknife, I played there for two weeks.

What do you remember about the Gold Range Hotel?

Hap:

It was so full in there. Gold Range was the second best sales of alcohol in North America.

I remember hearing something like that.

Hap:

It was standing room only. They would kick them out one door but they would come back in at another door so they didn't bother kicking them out because it was no use.

Was it a pretty lively crowd out there?

Hap:

I had my fiddle tuned to the capacity but I was playing with a pretty big band; they had big speakers and I had my fiddle tuned right up. And do you know what the manager come and told me? Could you put the fiddle a little louder. I couldn't.

That must have been Sam the owner, Sam Urquee, the multi-millionaire.

Hap:

The only thing I did not like about that place was that they put me on the third floor and I didn't go near the window early in the morning because the ravens would wake me up.

You've played with Ray Saint Germaine and his dance band and...

Hap:

Ray Saint Germaine had called me and wanted to know if I could join him for awhile in Batoche because he needed a fiddle player so I went and played for him there for two nights.

Is he a singer?

Hap:

Yeah, he's a singer, keyboard, guitar player. I played for two nights in Batoche with Ray Saint Germaine.

What was happening at the Harvest House in Spiritwood?

Hap:

Harvest house is only a dining place where you take your sweetheart there and have a nice quiet time. I played there quite often.

Where was the Echo Valley Jamboree?

Hap:

Echo Valley Jamboree was something like Craven but on a smaller scale, a very small scale, where local people went to perform on stage. They had everything and it was a nice area. The reason they called it Echo Valley because when you stood on a hill on the valley and yelled you could hear your voice come back. They had Echo Valley Jamboree for three years and I played there and now they don't have that event anymore.

Was that near a big town?

Hap:

Near North Battleford, about 40 miles east of North Battleford.

You were a guest artist at an assembly in Hay River? How did that come about?

Hap:

Well, it was the same outfit that hired me for Norman Wells, the Northern Métis Assemblies.

Are there any special memories about playing...?

Hap:

Lots of Red River Jig; it was played about four times, play about four minutes, then stop and they want more; they would give her some more, I must have played the Red River Jig about four times in a row.

Hay River has the biggest population of Métis of all the communities...

Hap:

It's a nice place; I have some cousins who live there.

We hear a lot talk at the down east style of fiddling that has been referred to as playing one string at a time whereas the Métis style of fiddling is where the fiddler usually plays at more than one string at once...

Hap:

I've heard down east of fiddling with two strings and I play on two strings most of the time; sometimes you got to play with one; I have some of my waltzes with one string but it's not always easy to do.

So in the Métis style fiddling is...

Hap:

I hit double strings all the time.

Is it safe to say that most Métis fiddlers play double string or more?

Hap:

If they're accomplished fiddle players but if they're beginners, they won't.

Do you have a preference for which style like as being a Métis fiddle player you would prefer the double strings but do you also like the down east style?

Hap:

Yeah, I double string down east; I can't see playing with one string. I mean you play music like ????? you are not using one string; there are double string used there because I play it and I play it identical to the record and that's how I know.

Well that was only one article, I guess if we were to read more articles there's more double stringing down east...

Hap:

A lot of people can't triple Orange Blossom (?) Special. A lot of people have trouble with that and if your arm is too stiff you'll never do it. You have to relax. I just give her. In that Orange Blossom Special it's not the finger, it's the bow.

That's what I'm hearing more and more, it's all in the bow; if you can get that bow working...

Hap:

Get that bow rocking. I carry two bows when I play and I get the bow rocking. One time someone asked me how come you have two bows you only have one fiddle. I told that person that one gets hot and smokes that I have to use the other bow.

In all the years that you've been playing fiddle can you recall one moment when you were most proud to be an old time Métis fiddler?

Hap:

That's easy to answer, right in Batoche. That's when I'm proud, when I'm playing for my brothers and sisters.

We are getting back to the double and fiddle questions but there's some superstition surrounding playing the fiddle when you're playing these open key tunings, like the way the fiddlers tune say to devil's reel or the devil's dream...

Hap:

Well the fiddle and devil's reel are just an ordinary tune; you don't take out of tune for nothing. The only tune you take it out of tune is the Hangman's Reel.

Ok I stand corrected there. There are some, we have heard, and we've read that some fiddlers won't play tunes with open key tuning at dances, I guess it's superstition or we've once heard of how a fiddler becomes possessed by the devil when he plays these open key tunings. Have you heard any stories that associate the devil with playing the fiddle open key tunings?

Hap:

No, I've never heard of that. That's totally new to me.

Do you have any good fiddle devil stories?

Hap:

I'll tell the one here but you don't have to put it on tape.

We could pick and choose what we choose to write about.

Did not transcribe this story, but if you would like to hear it, it is on Tape 2, Side A at Unit No. 22.2 when forwarding the tape. This story turns out to be a joke.

I like these old stories. What does Métis style of fiddling mean to you? If you were to tell somebody that did not know much about fiddle...

Hap:

Have you ever gone to a fiddle contest? If you go any fiddle contest and the nice thing about it is that everyone plays the St. Anne's Reel and everybody plays it a little different. That's what makes contest fiddling so interesting.

So that's what Métis style is?

Hap:

Yeah, Yeah.

And you would take a tune and change it a little bit?

Hap:

That's right, they do that. They keep timing and they still dance.

What has fiddling brought into your life and what does fiddle playing mean to you?

Hap:

It means a lot. It keeps me from getting old. When I was an eighteen year old kid, I went to work up at MacKenzie Highway and I if had taken my fiddle they said that guy isn't going to work on the highway he'll come just to fiddle. So I put my fiddle in a great big army bag and put coals all around it and took it. I played my fiddle in the evenings out there and now I play for senior homes. I like playing for senior homes because they really enjoy the old time music. I play at least once a week for seniors. I get asked to play in different places and I've played in Batoche for about ten years now. I can still play that fiddle pretty fast for ten minutes straight without taking a break and taking time. I'm alright at least for another year.

What would be your advice to any beginning or novice fiddle players?

Hap:

I'd say take violin lessons because if you want to play you have to take violin lessons. You can still play by year after if you want to but at least you'll have this behind you, your music notes. See I can't play music notes but I could play the tune. I wish I could have learned but I couldn't learn music where I went to school.

Well it seems like you don't always need to read notes.

Hap:

Well it would be better for young children today because if they want to take up fiddling and get a good music teacher and learn the notes and it's better. They're lucky, these kids are lucky that they get a chance to go to that. It's better than what I did; I had to watch myself in the kitchen and play there with a little gramophone – that was my teacher.

As an old time traditional Métis fiddle player how would you like your grandchildren to remember you?

Hap:

I just look at my picture and well say he use to play the fiddle in Batoche. I got a son who started to play the fiddle but he quit. He got a guitar; he liked the guitar better and my other son, he'll play the guitar but that rock'n'roll stuff. That's not in my line so I don't give him the cord but the oldest boy did cord for me, he cord the guitar. But he plays out, if I play a reel he'll play for about a minute and a half oh that's useless.

Ok, we're on the very last question how do feel about participating in the Gabriel Dumont Institute's traditional Métis fiddle project?

Hap:

It was an honor to be asked. I thank John Arcand for asking me. He invited me to play at his contest but I promised to play for barn dances. They still have barn dances down home every August and I'm always asked to play there. And the barns are really built for barn dances. You can hear the horses down in the barn but the hayloft is made specially for dancing, beautiful floors and stage. They dance until three in the morning.

Well Hap it was certainly an honor for me to sit down interview you, play some tunes, accompany you on the guitar so we'll take a break at this time and play a few tunes to end off the interview.