

# Peter Lafferty

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PL - Oh yeah. You've got that thing, huh? Where'd you find that?

MMS - *Angus (Beaulieu)*.

PL - *Angus*? I'll be darned.

MMS - So what year would that have been that you had that kind of promotional thing taken?

PL - In Ontario someplace. Probably Sudbury or North Bay.

MMS - Early '60s, late '60s?

PL - Maybe '64 or '65, maybe.

MMS - Okay.

PL - Yeah.

MMS - Cool. You would've been how old then?

PL - 22 or 23.

MMS - Beautiful. That's such a beautiful shot, that one for sure.

PL - Yeah, that's more than 50 years ago.

MMS - Yeah. You got some more pictures there?

PL - See what we got here. Here's me and *Sam*.

MMS - Wow.

PL - When we came back up here.

MMS - That's amazing.

PL - *Sam Briggs*. Bass player and singer.

MMS - So this is when you came back, you said when you came back up here.

PL - Yeah.

MMS - In '69.

PL - Yeah, he's from Toronto and we met up there. He was looking for a job playing bass and I picked him up and let's head to the Yukon.

MMS - Magical years and this one here?

PL - This guy's from ... or he was from Guelph, Ontario and he's from Fort Frances. He's an Ojibwe from the Lake of the Woods area there and *Medore Laramie*, he's from...Oh, I can't remember the name of his town. It's on Georgian Bay, south of Parry Sound.

MMS - Yeah, and this fellow here? Do you remember his name?

PL - Yeah, this is *Junior Brierre*. Yeah, *Norman*.

MMS - Okay.

PL - *Norman Junior*. And he died young. He was 20, 21 I think and just out playing catch with his younger brother in the back yard of their place at Fort Frances and he dropped. That was it. Just 21. Maybe a blood clot or something might've got him.

This is 1970. Oh yeah and there we are. Here, come to town. "Eight months entertaining and still going strong. Tourist Services." Yeah, what is now the Yukon Inn. hey, *Pete Lafferty* and *Sam Briggs* begin playing their kind of music. Yeah, we was mostly country. That was the years before Japanese drummers even, you know? Just guitar and bass that's all we had.

MMS - It's all you needed.

PL - They seemed to like us.

MMS - Oh yeah.

PL - Beer drinking music.

MMS - Yep.

PL - "Arctic Ramblers".

MMS - Did you ever get to see those guys?

PL - No, I don't know them. My God, that's quite a crew. That's eight guys.

MMS - Sort of Akaitcho Hall. I think that's *Richard Lafferty*.

PL - Oh, *Richard*. Oh God, yeah, I know *Richard*.

MMS - *Nick Sibbeston* over there right in the corner there.

PL - Oh, okay. Yeah. Okay, he's got hair.

MMS - Yeah, exactly. Yeah, he's got hair.

PL - "The Arctic Ramblers". Okay.

MMS - I'm gonna try and find the names of these guys here.

PL - Oh yeah. Yeah, you mentioned (*Tony*) *Buggins* and some other ... I never got to know these kids because they were a lot younger than me, you know.

MMS - Ah, interesting.

PL - See, they're from the (Fort) Resolution area, hey? I went there working on the power line and they were setting up the power commission in Fort Res (Fort Resolution) and I was stringing line.

MMS - Okay.

PL - Climbing poles at the time. Yeah.

MMS - They kind of talk about that time too because they, maybe it was you that did it but they left behind a whole bunch of copper wire.

PL - Really?

MMS - And so what they did was they thought, "Okay, well this is an antenna," so they went out and they cut up a whole bunch of trees and they made tripods and they ran this wire as far as they could and then hooked it up to the antenna on their old battery powered radio. They were able to pick up Memphis and depending on the weather conditions and everything like that because that's one of my questions, is how did you guys get your music, you know? It was like, "Well, here's this radio and there was this old car battery." They remember it like somebody coming through, some construction crew and they just put up this antenna and hooked it up to the back of the radio. So yeah, those stories to me are magical.

PL - Oh yeah.

MMS - Yeah, yeah.

PL - Yeah. I was probably 17 or something. I was no foreman or nothing, just climbing and stringing as much as we could every day. Yeah, just a job.

MMS - Yeah, for sure. It got you places there.

PL - And of course I had a guitar with me, so in the evenings I'd always ... *Angus (Beaulieu)*, I think I was staying at *Angus'* place maybe and so the kids would drop around and I guess maybe *(Tony) Buggins* and these guys because I never got to meet them or know them or nothing and never heard them actually play. Even *Herbie (Lafferty)*. I never heard *Herbie* play guitar, believe it or not. My nephew, he was 50 when he died. Yeah, never got to hear him.

MMS - And I got a chance to actually record with *Herbie (Lafferty)* and *Ed (Lafferty)* in the studio going way back.

PL - Okay.

MMS - When I was a teenager I was in one band with *Herbie* but I listened to a lot of bands with *Herbie* playing rock and roll electric guitar.

PL - So you knew *Eddie* as well.

MMS - Yes. Yeah, very briefly, very briefly. I was really lucky to be able to play with those guys. But again, that's one of the main reasons that I'm doing this is, I just recognize that there's as rich a history up here with what was going on musically when all of those musics started to come north and people like yourself were going back and forth down south and playing and then coming back up north and bringing that music and like you say, going and influencing the *Tony Buggins* and all of these other younger players too and just for the record, when I got a hold of you, I got your number through *George Mandeville* and whenever I play with *George*, I'm chasing my tail trying to keep up to him in what he does when he's playing behind his son *Lee (Mandeville)*. I kind of go, "*George*, man, your guitar playing is amazing" and the first thing he says is your name.

PL - Wow.

MMS - But no, your influence on their playing, I mean, you were the guy to match or to aspire to. So I knew I had to get a hold of you.

PL - Well that's nice to hear.

MMS - Yeah, for sure. So you were born in (Fort) Simpson?

PL - Yeah.

MMS - What year were you born? Sorry, I'm just, for the ...

PL - 1941.

MMS - Okay.

PL - Yeah. Yeah. I'm the youngest boy in the group and there's three younger sisters than me. We was a family of five and five. Five boys, five girls.

MMS - Very traditional community probably at that time too.

PL - Oh yeah and my dad was quite a fiddler too. I used to like to listen to him whenever they would play and *Uncle Phillip (Lafferty)*, he was really good. Yeah. I think *Henry (Lafferty)* played a little bit too but never really heard him. I guess they must've learned their fiddling from their dad but I never heard anything about him being a fiddler. But he died during the big flu in what was it, 1920s? He wasn't an old man when he died. And *Joe Villeneuve* my other grandfather, he was quite a fiddler, a Metis fiddler.

MMS - They would have got their fiddle music ... obviously you were on the river and there was boats going by. That was the highway, right? For the North, and so ...

PL - Yeah. But Grandfather (*Joe Villeneuve*), I think he came from St. Albert in Alberta. Yeah. Yeah. He brought his fiddle style with him from there I believe and he came north to settle in Fort Simpson. Worked with a Catholic church there, the missionary, looking after the animals. They had a little bit of cattle, horses and oxen back in those days.

MMS - Wow, they would have had livestock back there then.

PL - Yeah, yeah. Mm-hmm (affirmative). He was looking after the farm.

MMS - Again, no roads. It's just all ...

PL - Boats.

MMS - River traffic and that's it, eh?

PL - Yeah, yeah. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

MMS - So their influence would've been mostly French, Quebecois or would it have been a Scottish thing?

PL - I think it to be the French. Yeah, especially in that part of Alberta that he came from, just north of Edmonton I think. I'm sure you're familiar with that "Drops of Brandy" book they talk about all the old Metis fiddlers. I got the CD. I thought maybe if you were interested I might hand it to you. You'd get more use out of it than I. They've got two CDs in here.

MMS - Oh my goodness, look at that book.

PL - Yeah, you might be quite interested. They talk about my grandfather in there. They never mention Dad and Uncle Phillip I don't think but they had never done any recordings I don't think. This is my brother *Morris (Lafferty)*, *Eddie (Lafferty)* and myself.

MMS - Oh, nice.

PL - Mm-hmm (affirmative).

MMS - Oh, that's beautiful.

MMS - So we'll just, I guess, pick up the story here because you can get lost in the traditional roots of the music. If I talk with *Wally Firth* from up in the Delta, it was mostly Scottish stuff because it was all the guys coming over from the Hudson Bay Company to build the outpost there, right? So they learned the Scottish thing. And so that part has always been fascinating to me, is just the mixture of the French and the Scottish up north as far as the fiddling goes and again, coming to you, that would've been the first musics that you would've heard, right?

PL - Yeah, probably. And Mom had an old wind up gramophone when we was kids, so used to hear some old *Wilf Carter* and *Jimmy Rogers* back in those days. And then along came *Hank Snow* and that's where I got my influence to try to pick a melody on a guitar. You know, *Hank Snow* had quite a style there, flat top pickin'. And *Hank Williams* of course.

MMS - Well, of course. Yeah, yeah, for sure. So, in between that, you got a guitar in your hands somehow.

PL - Yeah. Yeah, my older brothers, they had a couple guitars in the house and kind of wore them out. I don't know, I guess. My cousin *George, George Villeneuve*, he strummed a guitar and sang a little too. So, used to listen to those. My brother *Frank (Lafferty)* used to sing pretty good in those days. He played the fiddle a bit too. *Bob (Lafferty)* played a little fiddle. *Morris* and *Eddie (Lafferty)* were the real fiddlers in the family.

MMS - Okay.

PL - Mm-hmm (affirmative).

MMS - And you would've been playing the old...

PL - I had to ...

MMS - Yeah.

PL - I had to strum a guitar for them.

MMS - Okay. So you were working. What age do you think you had a guitar in your hand?

PL - 13. Probably 13, 14.

MMS - And learning obviously the traditional fiddle tunes and backing up the traditional Metis fiddle tunes.

PL - Yeah. Yeah. I never learned to play the fiddle. I tried a few notes but I couldn't make a sound out of it. No way. That must be quite a trick to learn that instrument.

MMS - I think it's a bit of a calling. I've tried it too, just put it down and go, "Nope, it's somebody else's job, that one."

PL - Oh yeah.

MMS - And also playing the *Wilf Carter* tunes and the old country tunes and stuff like that too.

PL - Yeah.

MMS - Still no road into Fort Simpson then?

PL - Still no road. I think it was ... Oh good grief, it was in the '60s. I don't even remember when ... I don't remember when the road came through. It was a winter road for years, quite a few years, eh?

MMS - Yeah, that's what they would've done for sure. I always ask, "So if you break a string, how did you even order more strings?"

PL - No, we didn't have to order strings. Old *Andy Whittington* always had some in his store. *Andy Whittington* had a general store there and there was a Hudson Bay. Yeah, they carried fiddle strings and guitar strings.

MMS - Amazing. Okay.

PL - Back when I was a little kid. Black Diamond.

MMS - Yeah, okay. Your schooling would've been right in Fort Simpson?

PL - Yeah.

MMS - Yeah?

PL - Yeah, I never went to the residential schools. Although a lot of kids were being taken out of town and going to (Fort) Providence at the time. Like even *Nick Sibbeston* was one. Yeah but our family, we just stayed in (Fort) Simpson, went to public school. We first started out in the Catholic school. There was a Protestant school and Catholic school and then the public school. We went in the public school. And I went there and I worked two years on grade eight and couldn't get past it. That's where I quit and went to work. I was almost 16. I think I was still 15 when I started to work with the Northern Canada Power.

MMS - There would've been lots of work at that time.

PL - Yeah.

MMS - Putting in the power lines and ...

PL - Yeah. I went to work in Fort Smith for a while and then (Fort) Resolution.

MMS - So you talk about going when you were putting power lines into Fort Resolution and hanging out with *Angus (Beaulieu)* and getting to meet some of the other players there. In Fort Smith as well, do you remember some of the players there?

PL - I don't remember their names. *Nick (Sibbeston)* was going to school there at the time so he had a couple of friends but I don't remember them. Oh and there was another friend of mine, *David Rayko*. His dad was a manager at the airport. We sort of started playing the guitars and trying to sing "Everly Brothers" at the time.

MMS - Nice. Yeah, of course.

PL - It's '57. Yeah, I think it was '57. I was 16.

MMS - That music would've been coming to you via radio or ...

PL - Record.

MMS - Records?

PL - Yeah, yeah. Yeah, by that time the LPs had come out, eh?.

MMS - And you would be able to get those at the store as well? They would bring in records?

PL - Yeah, the Hudson Bay would have the records. They'd try to get the latest that's coming out. All the old country that's coming out at the time. I don't know, I can't even mention them all. *Jim Reeves*, *Don Gibson*. Of course *Hank Snow* was always big on my books and then while a lot of the other guys were probably learning rock and roll by that time too, eh? But it's funny, I was just stubborn. I couldn't bring myself to even like it or try to learn it. I don't know why. I just stuck in my old *Hank Snow* rut and that's where I stayed most of my life I guess. It was kind of too bad. I never gave myself a chance to learn. Then *Chet Atkins* was coming out at the time and I tried to pick up some of his stuff as much as I could. That's quite a different style between the two. They actually done an album together.

MMS - Oh wow, okay.

PL - Yep, *Chet Atkins* and *Hank Snow*.



MMS - So that finger picking style definitely came into the jazz world. Those guys were almost sort of cross over players, right? In what they were doing in the country field. They were almost playing jazz.

PL - Oh yeah. Oh, for sure.

MMS - So the jazz guys-

PL - Yeah, you listen to the guitar players.

MMS - Were picking up all of those tricks too off of the country guys and vice versa which is the beauty of it. It's a lot of work to get that style.

PL - To learn it, yeah.

MMS - Yeah and to get it fluid and then learn the repertoire.

PL - Yeah. The way they teach now on Facebook is just amazing. You could learn so much and so fast and myself, I had to ... I'll tell you how hard it was to learn a tune. Had to run down to the restaurant with my change in my pocket. It's close to a mile down there if I walk and listen over and over again, the certain tune and then run back home and try it on the guitar. Oh boy, it wasn't easy.

We always had our own guitars and then *Morris (Lafferty)* bought himself a "Harmony" flat top but electric. That's the first electric guitar I ever heard. It was years and years in the '60s before I finally bought myself my own electric "Gibson". As I was working for the power commission I went through a couple Gibson flat tops, they were pretty nice guitars.

MMS - So, again, you're in your sort of mid to late teens in the '50s and you're out doing work with the power corporation.

PL - Yeah. Yeah.

MMS - How long did you do that for?

PL - Probably four years, maybe five, I don't know. Then I decided to go to Alberta I guess and see what I could find out there. Didn't find any music. Didn't find anybody to play with or anything. Just worked on jobs to stay alive. Had a sister there. She let me board at her place. Fed me. I was lucky there. I worked different jobs in the carwash and cement factory. That was quite the deal. I'm lucky I'm still alive after all that dust, I guess.

MMS - Rough jobs. Yeah, for sure. Would that have been in the city or ...

PL - In the city, yeah.

MMS - In Edmonton?

PL - Yeah, mm-hmm (affirmative), and then came back North and wound up coming to the Yukon. Found a job working with "White Pass" here in '67. Yeah, '67 I worked for "White Pass" and then I quit because there was a band passing through. That's the guy on this picture here. (*Don Latimer*) He was passing through and happened to need a guitar player so all right, here we go and then wound up in Ontario. Played with them there for a couple years and then decided to strike out on my own. Played with different bands formed my own as we went. Usually I had a trio, drums and bass. I done a lot of singles. Travel from town to town you know and just walk in and check out the hotels. That's how we used to do it back in those days.

The last trip I went out there to Ontario, I got a agent in Toronto and he was booking me around. You never know what you're gonna wind up in doing some of those gigs. One time I had to ... It was a place they had go-go girls. They had two go-go girls and here I come in with my flat top and little PA system. I was supposed to make these go-go girls dance. Oh good grief, he sure screwed up there. I don't think I took his bookings after that one. I just did my own. Good grief.

MMS - So this would have all been all in Ontario.

PL - Yeah and I played a little bit in Edmonton after that. Edmonton, Calgary, just a few little hotels there. Yeah, Ontario was pretty nice. Saint Catherine's, I played Saint Catherine's, London. There's more towns then I can name. Niagara Falls was nice. Tourist town. Stayed for a month there in a little hotel. Sing at night. Easy living.

MMS - Yeah, nice lifestyle and the gigs paid okay?

PL - Oh yeah. Oh yeah. They did. Always managed to have a pretty good car but I probably drank up a couple motor homes.

MMS - Were you checking out any of the other music that was sort of happening in Ontario or...

PL - Oh yeah. Well, I'd stop in to other bars and listen to these guys but my God they're just too advanced for my old style. I just used to play the small little junky hotels. They're not all so junky. I've been in a few nice ones too and they seemed to be okay with that, with my old stuff.

MMS - But it must have been at that time in Ontario like full on rock and roll.

PL - What's his name? He's from Georgia and lives in Toronto. He was a big rock and roller and settled in Ontario. Oh, I can't remember his name and *Robbie Robertson* was working for him for a long time.

MMS - *Ronnie Hawkins*.

PL - *Ronnie Hawkins*. Yeah, he was the big thing going on there. Holy crap. Another guy would draw the crowds was *Stomping Tom*. Oh my God. *Stomping Tom Connors* He could fill the places. There was a lot of stiff competition.

MMS - I was just gonna say ... That strip. I can't remember the name of the street but they talk about it. "Le Coq d'Or" and all of these huge rooms and you could just walk out of one and into the other and it's just these amazing players.

PL - Oh yeah.

MMS - They're all there. It just seemed to be a really exciting time. I don't know if that rings true or maybe I'm still glamorizing?

PL - Well it's true but I just walked by it and just did my own little thing.

MMS - Playing the country standards of the day in that *Chet Atkins* style and those country songs. Yeah.

PL - Mm-hmm (affirmative).

MMS - And when you went back out to Alberta, was it a little bit more country friendly there or other country players?

PL - Yeah, I guess it was. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Although they have their jazz ... A lot of jazz in Calgary.

MMS - What made you make the move from Ontario to Alberta? Just a change?

PL - Yeah, I guess I wanted to get back in the North so, I always knew I could come back to this job here at "White Pass" and that was a pretty good paying job, you know? Working in the freight department and delivering freight. I settled down and got married. Bought two or three houses. Settled down in the last one and stayed there for 20 years. Stayed at the job for 20 years. All the time I was on this 8 to 5 job, I was playing bars during the night. So, working 11 days a week. Six days in the bar, five on the job. Yeah. I came back '69, started playing at different bars here. Well, like this one place "Tour Services" and then there was "The Bamboo." What they later called "The Roadhouse Inn". You might remember that little place.

MMS - I was like eight years old in 1969

PL - Oh, okay. Yeah.

MMS - What other places or rooms would've been here in White Horse at that time?

PL - Well there was "The White Horse Inn" going strong. "The Canucks" were there. You heard of "The Canucks", I'm sure and "The Kopper King" was going at the time. Yeah.

MMS - Wow. That early.

PL - Yeah. I always had my little trio and we done good. We held our own.

MMS - Yeah, this place sounded pretty magical in the '70s so I can see as good as you were doing down in Ontario or even Alberta that way...

PL - Yeah.

MMS - Later on, to be able to come back up here and have that day job and then go play at night that's not an opportunity that a lot of musicians had that way, that's for sure.

PL - No, I would've starved to death I guess if I had to just rely on music way back then. Certainly no family.

MMS - Yeah. Any inkling at all or any draw to go even further west out to the coast or anything like that? Was there anything enticing about Vancouver or BC?

PL - No, I don't know why. I don't know why. Nice place. I like Vancouver and Kamloops. Weather's good.

MMS - Did you bump into other aboriginal/indigenous players?

PL - I met "The Mighty Mohawks" once. Yeah, they were a rock and roll group. Very popular. Yeah, quite an impressive looking group. All five big, tall guys. Yeah.

MMS - Were they dressed up in buckskins and head dresses and stuff like that?

PL - Yeah, yeah.

MMS - Okay. So it almost sounds very much like what "The Chieftones" were doing.

PL - Oh yeah.

MMS - When you were coming back from Alberta was there any draw, any desire to go back home to (Fort) Simpson?

PL - Not really to stay I guess. I made this place my home and that was it.

MMS - So, I have to ask this question. You can confirm it or deny it. Legend has it you were asked to play with a famous country artist.

PL - *Dave Dudley* came up to do a dance with the transportation association and he needed a band so we backed up old *Dave* when he came up. One of the guys had two or three albums of his so we listened to his style and trying to figure out what he might be doing, so we backed him up. At the end he says, "I've played a lot of places with local bands but you're the best I've had so far." I learned his style and a few of his songs earlier, you know? I used to sing "Six Days on the Road" myself for years. Yeah, so I never did play anywheres else except (Fort) Simpson. That's the only place I ever done any dances with my brothers. That was it.

MMS - Nothing in (Fort) Providence or up and down the river or anything like that?

PL - Nope.

MMS - Just in (Fort) Simpson?

PL - Nope, just house parties, type of thing. Never no dance. Never no official dances.

MMS - From what the other guys were saying, it's like it was house parties. They didn't even have a community sort of rec hall. Did that happen in (Fort) Simpson too?

PL - No, we always seemed to have a dance hall.

MMS - Oh, okay.

PL - Yeah, mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah. One old hotel there. Ever since I can remember there's been a dance hall in town and later on the school gymnasium, whatever.

MMS - Mm-hmm, just use those, yeah

PL - Yeah.

MMS - "Akaitcho Hall" in Yellowknife was I think built around '61 or something like that. Did you ever...

PL - I never spent any time in Yellowknife. Been there but never spent any time. Yeah, I don't know. There was nothing going on there after. I don't know what the hell happened after I left. I don't know if *Morris (Lafferty)* kept on playing or what but he had a brain tumor operation and then was paralyzed on the right, eh? I can't remember what year that happened but ... Then there's a couple other singers in town I guess, like *Frederick Hardisty*. He was a pretty good singer. He played with us as well. But can't think of anybody else. Small town. Very small.

MMS - Yeah, yeah, for sure. Small town and it's still a long ways from (Fort) Providence. I'm just sort of thinking, river and ... That's a long trip. It's not something that you would just go from one community along the river to the next, to just sort of go and play a gig or anything like that.

PL - Yeah, no, there was no traveling like that around.

MMS - Are you still playing today?

PL - Just last Friday we played a bar in Porter Creek, "Whiskey Jack's". We got a four piece group going. All East Coasters that I'm with now. Got a fiddler. Fiddler from PEI. He's pretty good and a drummer from Newfoundland and a flat top player and he sings, from New Brunswick. So when the fiddler comes on, I take the bass and then otherwise I play lead for the rest.

MMS - I see you got your fingernails well manicured there.

PL - Oh yeah.

MMS - You take care of your fingernails.

PL - Yeah, this is short. I still don't have my calluses back. I just don't play enough. I gave it up for 20 years probably, yeah. I just didn't play at all and I had sold my guitar, my electric and finally bought another one that I'm not very happy with but that's all I got. I'm trying to get out of this music thing but they won't let me.

MMS - They won't let you, eh?

PL - Oh boy. I don't know.

MMS - Why do you feel like you want to get out of it?

PL - It's time to retire, my God.

MMS - Yeah?

PL - I'm getting old and tired.