William Tagoona

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MMS: This is Pat Braden. And I'm talking today with *William Tagoona* over in… where are you *William*?

WT: I'm in Kuujjuaq, Quebec.

MMS: Ah, okay. And it's January 19th, 2022. Thank you very much for joining me here today, William.

WT: You're so welcome.

MMS: If I could start off the interview, I guess, and going right back to the beginning. If you don't mind telling me the year you were born and some of those early years of your young life and up to a point where you first got bitten by the bug or where you first got introduced to music and you realized that that was something that you really wanted to do.

WT: Sure. Yeah. Good. Thanks for the opportunity first, Pat. We've shared the same stage in Iqaluit and have played together with the same songs. So it's nice to talk to somebody that I know. And in the Inuk world, for the men anyway, age is not something that you're embarrassed of. We're quite proud of our age. I'm turning 70 this year. I was born in 1952 in Baker Lake when it was still the Northwest Territories, back in 1952 in a tent. My mom told me that I was born in a tent and I'm from a very big family. My mom and dad were very fertile and they came out with, I think 13 children and 11 of us survived. I'm very used to being with a big group of people. It's something that I was raised in and back in the 1950s, I still remember being in Baker Lake, everything was very small in numbers. There was not very many people there. Many of the people that were there were the service providers like the Hudson's Bay Company and the RCMP and the churches. And at that time, Baker Lake was also, the airstrip was one of the very few airstrips in the Keewatin region. It was built by the American army for the war efforts back in the 1940s. And that's why up to today, you'll find that Baker Lake has a very long runway, gravel runway but it's very long, where a jet can actually land over there today. That's because of the war efforts back in the 1940s. My dad worked for the military at the time. He was a heavy equipment operator and hunting at the same time. We had dogs, we had a dog team. I remember that so well as a little kid, there's bits and pieces that really stick in your mind.

And I remember being out on a dog team with my dad at a young age and falling out and thinking I was going to be left behind. So that just sort of set the stage of how and where I grew up. You know we didn't have these fancy clothes and houses that we have today.

We still lived in, pretty well, you would say shacks. They were probably more like a 12 by 16 or 16 by 16 shacks and they seemed perfectly fine in those years. And when I was born and coming up, that's when the big TB, tuberculosis epidemic was storming through the whole Arctic all the way out to Labrador. And I was one of those that was stricken by tuberculosis when I was, I think five years old, in the wintertime. I remember it being winter, really cold.

A big Canso landed in Baker Lake on wheels on the ice. They used to build a runway on the ice and my dad took me down to that airplane, I had no idea what was happening. And I was with my mom because I was only five years old and a brother and a sister. Little did I know that we were being shipped off to Manitoba, to a sanitorium in Clearwater Lake, Manitoba, which is just around Winnipeg. That sanitarium is long gone now it was a place where they put indigenous peoples. Many died of course but many of us survived as well. So I was in that sanatorium for two years with my brother and with my sister. And that was the scariest time of my whole life. I didn't speak any English at all because we only spoke Inuktitut at home and of course they forced us to learn English.

They were really tough on us at that time you know because we don't have mom or dad to protect us. So they can basically treat you any way they want and they being the hospital workers. I've seen many of my fellow young people like myself being strapped by the nurses because they wanted you to do what they want you to do. Maybe they're going to read you a story. And they say, "Look at me right in the eye," while they're telling us a story and if we turn away, you're going to pay for it. So, that was part of my upbringing. And then when I got out of there two years later, of course I had forgotten pretty well much of my language when they force you to speak English. And by that time my parents had moved from Baker Lake to Rankin Inlet because they were building a mine, a nickel mine in Rankin Inlet. 1958 I believe it was and so I was dropped off in Rankin Inlet and given over to these two very strange people, a woman and a father. And I didn't realize these are my parents. And I was trying to get away from them very much because I didn't know who they were anymore. It's been two years, so I lost track. And so that was part of my upbringing, Pat. And then of course it takes us then into the 1960s with the residential school and that's where I started to learn about bands and wonderful stuff like that.

MMS: Wow, that's hard to hear those stories. And that in your early, very early formative years, that that was your experience. One of the interesting things about that time as well is your people were pretty much, and correct me if I'm wrong, nomadic and then when you were in Baker Lake that was probably right around the time that they were encouraging the Inuit people to stay in one place and to be stationary, I guess. So, like I say, that transition time and having your dog teams and all other rest of that stuff, just the balance between still living that traditional lifestyle but obviously this new way of life is rolling down the tracks and coming at you, you don't really have much choice that way because it's changing everything but still how your people were able to sort of strike that balance between living that traditional lifestyle and in the new way, like your father did as a heavy equipment operator.

WT: Yeah, yeah. Back in ‘50's, we didn't know at the time but we were going through a real transition, as you say. And we didn't know that order was coming in from Ottawa. Get the Eskimo out of them and make sure that they assimilate into the Canadian culture. We

didn't know that was there, now we do, but at the time we didn't have a clue at all. And as I said, there was barely any people in Baker Lake and now Baker Lake is one of the largest communities in the Keewatin because it was a melting pot for different groups that were sent into Baker Lake. Many of them from the Central Arctic were sent down. Some of them from the Back River at Schultz area. You hear the stories of people that were picked up by the Canadian government airplanes and pretty well scooped up from the land and taken over to Baker Lake with nothing, with absolutely nothing. Here, survive.

You're in a community, now we can manage you. It was all about managing us and so that was all a part of it. Because I remember seeing igloos in Baker Lake right beside our houses would be igloos. Those are people that are being sent in by the Canadian government to assimilate with everybody else and survive. We know you'll survive, you're an Eskimo. And they did, you know with their pana, their snow knife, they built a home. And so Inuit really did survive that and were a witness to it. People of my age, around 69, 70, were a witness to that. We've been a part of it, very much so. And I think all that stuff happened pretty quickly. You know you look at the TB epidemic where they took us away and then transformed us into what they want is send you back up to the north again, not the same person.

This is real reality. I'm not complaining at all, this is something that I'm talking about, what I've lived through. And then because shortly after that, back in the ‘60's, that's when the residential school in Churchill, Manitoba started. One of the most famous ones anyway, the largest one. I know about the school in Chesterfield Inlet and all the terrible things that happened over there. And many of my friends were in that school and many of them joined us in Churchill. I was 12 years old at the time when I went to the one in Churchill, Manitoba. And it was the first year of operation, we actually had to set up the residence. When we went in, it was just an army barracks, completely bare. There was no beds, there was no tables, there was nothing. It was just a barracks. You can imagine American military barrack would have probably 32 rooms all lined up, just like you see in movies and with a long hallway. And so the Sergeant can get you all ready to go for breakfast, line you up and take you to the mess hall. That's exactly how that building was.

And that's where many of us met Eskimos at the time from different places. We never knew there was other Inuit besides the ones I knew in Baker Lake and Rankin Inlet. And we've heard about Arviat, Eskimo Point but we didn't know there was people on such a thing called Baffin Island and there's a place called Northern Quebec and so it was a place where they put us. And I think that was sort of the catalyst for the things that happened back in later ‘60's, where the Inuit started to become politicized. It was those people that were sent to those residential schools. We were very young, you know, in there and *John Amagoalik* and *James Arvaluk*, all those people were our classmates. And of course, we saw what was happening. We met each other and realized that it's a northern phenomenon. It's not only in your little town where awful things are happening, it's all over the place. And so we learned a lot from each other and many of those people became the leaders of their communities.

MMS: So you were 12 years old when you went to Churchill. If I could just sort of hold it back there a little bit, what musics do you remember, traditional or otherwise, what music was sort of happening around you?

WT: When I was a boy, I caught the drum dancing, the chanting of the women. And of course in those years back in the, and I'm talking the 1950s, 1958, '59. I was named after *Akuliaq* who was a famous shaman around Baker Lake and he had a song that he had written. He wrote a number of them and I had been told of this stuff over and over and when we were in Rankin in 1958, 59, my dad had just become an Anglican minister. He wasn't a heavy equipment operator anymore. He was now in charge of a church and Rankin Inlet was opening up as a nickel mine and they needed a preacher. So they sent my dad over there to Rankin Inlet. And when I was very young, that's where I met him coming home from Clearwater Lake.

And so I heard all these hymns in the church. My dad was a musician. He played the keyboard and he was a really good keyboard player. As a matter of fact, in his lifetime, he's been gone for many years now, he wrote three hymn books in Inuktitut that's used right across Nunavut right now and Nunavik. And he translated all those songs such as "Amazing Grace", he translated that and that's what you hear today is his translation. "O Canada" in Inuktitut, that was his translation. And so, I had a musician father. And of course at the time I never thought of it. He plays the keyboard, how boring. Was my idea but he was really good at it, we had a keyboard with us all the time. When he traveled to other communities to do baptisms and that, he brought along a portable keyboard that you pump with your feet to give it that air.

MMS: Wow.

WT: And so I grew up watching that and he always seemed to have a record player in the house. Hindsight, we always had a record player. This is 1958, '59. And he would have these albums by *George Beverly Shea* and *Wilf Carter* and you know, the country music of the day. How he got the records, I'll never know but we had those and he had them playing in the house. So there was always music in our house. And then there was the other part, the very traditional, the drum dancing was very alive in those years. And I remember my grandmother told me that "you're invited to a drum dance tonight." I was probably nine or 10 years old and thought nothing of it. And you do what you're told to do in those years. So I went to the igloo, it was an igloo that was built just behind some of the miner's houses. The people that worked at the mine, they had these shacks made for them and I was to go inside. So I went in and I saw something I have never seen in my whole life. It was all these women, they circled the whole igloo on the inside and there was men but they were all wearing traditional clothing, I remember that. This is just like the old days. And they saw me come in and they said, "*Akuliaq* has walked in." My name is *Akuliaq* in Inuktitut and I used that name right up until I was almost 12 years old. I never knew I had an English name until very later in life. And so they said, "*Akuliaq* has walked in." And they say, "Okay, now we have to sing his song." And I remember that and they started singing it and it was the most scariest moment of my whole life. It was real powerful and they were drum dancing and the women are chanting and I got really, really scared. So I ran out of there and when I went outside, I saw something outside the igloo that I have never seen. I just ran out so fast. I was really, really, really, really scared of it.

What it was, I don't know, to this day I don't know. So I was exposed to both parts, the traditional and the very contemporary and of course I grabbed the contemporary and I ran off with it. Enjoyed it. Especially in Churchill, that's where it all started.

MMS: It's a familiar story amongst the different musicians that I've talked to over here, where it was like, "Yeah, one day the plane was there. I got on the plane to residential school and I don't know maybe an assumption, whether it was a good thing or not such a good thing, but you already had learned English. For a lot of the young guys over here, they never knew English and it was really hard for them but you already had English as well and were you able to get back your Inuktitut?

WT: Oh yeah. It didn't take long, to get back your Inuktitut. I think it was almost pretty instantaneous. At that time, I think when you're in a hospital, your Inuktitut sort of just goes dormant, like going into a file. It just sits there until you want it back and so, when I went back to my mother and dad, they always only spoke Inuktitut, I think it came back really, really fast. But when we went to Churchill in 1964, many of those students, especially from Northern Quebec, didn't speak any English at all. It was only Inuktitut.

And in those years, there was no CBC, there was no communication, so we had a hard time understanding different dialects. Where nowadays we all understand each other. It doesn't matter where you go, you'll speak your own language and we all understand each other. It wasn't like that back in '64, we didn't know what the people of Northern Quebec were saying. The people from Kuujjuaq where I live now, it was called Fort Chimo at the time. So many of them didn't speak English at all, as early as 1964. It doesn't seem that long ago, but Baffin Island people, their English was just very limited. So Inuktitut was the main language. And of course the supervisors, you know "No, you can't speak Inuktitut". So it was a real problem for some of them. And that time as well, we sang English songs. When we picked up a guitar, it was to do a cover from a English song. We still didn't sing in our own language. That's another story.

MMS: So the evolution of language I think is, I mean, you could probably write volumes and volumes of books and people have, on how that came about. But then also its effect on your culture as a whole, that way, probably both in positive and not so positive ways. One quick question, and then we'll move on to Churchill, do you remember any radio happening when you were growing up in Rankin Inlet or in Baker Lake?

WT: Oh yeah, I remember. Yeah, shortwave. There was shortwave and luckily living in Keewatin, we could pick up Churchill CBC at the time and Winnipeg, we could hear Winnipeg on the AM at nighttime. So we grew up turning the radio on and picking up the frequencies. CKY in Winnipeg, I still remember that, (sings) CKY in Winnipeg Radio 58, because I mean, we grew up with that. We were hearing it, we heard all the hits of *Frank Sinatra* and those people through the AM radio. We were very lucky living in Kivalliq. I don't know how it was in Baffin Island, but I think most of the Northern areas depended on AM because you could get AM frequencies. We were probably more Americanized than anybody else because "The Voice of America" was probably the strongest signal in the whole AM and you'd be able to get it. So, yeah. Not knowing where it's coming from, no idea where that is, but we'd hear all those voices and they were from a distant country and we knew it but no idea where.

MMS: Wow. Beautiful. Radio played such a big part.

WT: Yeah. It did.

MMS: Okay so 12 years old and you're in Churchill, Manitoba and attending residential school. How did the guitars and the music come into where you were going to school in Churchill?

WT: Yeah. I think even before that, the acoustic guitar came up with people like *David Aglukark*, who was *Susan Aglukark's* father. He's one of the first guys we've ever seen with a guitar in Rankin Inlet. *David Aglukark* was a very young man. He was single at the time, worked at the mine and he loved to imitate *Hank Williams* and them and *Wilf Carter*. He seemed to know all the words to their songs. And you know the stuff that we hear on the AM radio, this *David Aglukark* guy could mimic them all, sing them all. And *David* used to walk up and down the street with his acoustic guitar and singing these English songs. So it was the first time many of us have ever seen an Eskimo like ourself, carrying a guitar and singing the hits of the day, you know, the country music hits of the day, because we were very much into country.

And so, I think that was the start for many of us. *Charlie Panigoniak* came in after that, after *David Aglukark*. And then when we got to Churchill, some people had acoustic guitars but there was never a thing of orchestrated music where you'd have a drummer, a bass player, a rhythm guitarist, and a leader in the Inuk world. It didn't exist. There was no such thing as that.

And *Michael Kusugak*, he writes children's books. He's gotten very famous in Canada, travels around the country with his children's books. He's written books with Mr. *(Robert) Munsch*. And he and another guy decided to organize and come up with a band. We didn't know what the heck is a band. We've heard of the “Beatles” by that time but we’d never seen anything on TV because there is no TV. So they started a band, *Michael Kusugak* and *John Tapitai*, my uncle and my older brother, *Eric Tagoona* joined. And then there was a guy from Baffin Island, *Billy Joanie.* He was on drums. It's the first time we've seen people playing electric guitars because before this it was always an acoustic, unplugged, just acoustic. And these guys were coming out with sounds with these little amps. And then eventually, my brother said, “you know *William* knows a couple of songs. Why don't we get him to sing a couple of songs in the band?" Of course, they didn't play for dances yet. And so, that's how I got involved. But we were doing covers of songs that were hits on the radio. The “Beatles”, a lot of “Beatles”. And they knew a lot of “Ventures” (The Ventures) stuff for the instrumentals. And so that's how that got going.

We called ourselves “The Harpoons”. And people still say that today, that's still the first Eskimo rock and roll band in the history of this country. And many of the people that went to Churchill in those years, still say today that it was “The Harpoons” that made life livable in Churchill. They said they were our centerpiece, our focal point. They made us dance every Friday at the rec hall and they were one of us too. And we didn't realize this at the time. We were just having fun. But to the students, what we were doing meant something to them, a lot more than just the band playing. It was Eskimos just like them. We called ourselves Eskimos at the time, so I keep using that word because it's that era.

MMS: Yes.

WT: And so they said, "They're just like we are." So that's how we started, for two years. And then, the third year, the administration decided to take us right across the country to perform for the summer, but we refused that one. We were just way, way too homesick. We said, "No, we're going home for the summer." Yeah.

MMS: Do you know how the electric guitars and the amplifiers and the drum kits made it up to Churchill? Was it *Michael Kusugak* and your uncle responsible for that or were some of the supervisors or the managers of the residential school? Did they help to facilitate that?

WT: No, there really was no help. We were really lucky that I had a grandfather in Baker Lake who worked for the MOT (Ministry of Transport). He was a heavy equipment operator and he pretty well equipped us. Can you imagine? When I think back now, what would have prompted him to give money to his son? Because his son was my uncle, was our bass player. He would give him the money and then he'd go and buy a bass and amplifier and the school finally got us a set of drums. That was one good thing but they never supplied us with skins. For some reason in those years, I seem to remember the snare drum used to break a lot. I don't know if the skins were cheaper in those years but you really couldn't hit it very hard. It would get a hole. So that was hard to get a replacement. But we sang in English. There was still no Inuktitut. Not one song was in our own language.

MMS: Was “The Harpoons” the first band that kept going and that was the band that you played in the rec halls and stuff?

MMS: Yeah, we played all over Churchill. We would play for the Navy base. They would bring us to the Navy lounge where all the officers would be gathered and we'd be the music of the night. We played in weddings. I was way too young so they always had an agreement with the band that in between songs and at your breaks, he has to be in the washroom. He can't be around. So I stand in the washroom because I was 13 years old at the time. And we had the band when I was 13 and 14 and I was underage, so they tucked me away, hide me somewhere in the Legion and stuff like that. And it was pretty scary because I wasn't used to seeing people drinking and they all go to the washroom and they'd be drunk. And I was so scared of them. I still remember that.

And I think playing in Churchill had a ricochet effect because those students were taking pictures of this band called “The Harpoons” because I mentioned that they were really proud of “The Harpoons” because we were one of them. And they would go home and they would show that to all the other kids back home, "These are Eskimos like you are and look at them playing." And you'd see them with electric guitars and drums. And eventually, *Jose Kusugak*, who became a very famous politician in the north became our drummer. He was a drummer for most of the time that we were together. That's *Michael Kusugak's* brother, younger brother. And so, these young kids back in Baffin Island and that would see this band in Churchill playing with these instruments and with these drums. And it started bands up in the north, up in Baffin island which is what I've heard. They’d mimic “The Harpoons”. They’d want to be like “The Harpoons”. And we got bands like “The Icebergs” that came out of around the Igloolik area, Pond Inlet area. But then

those bands were quite different from what we did. They started singing in their own language.

And that was sort of the time that instead of just covering, "She loves you. Yeah, Yeah, Yeah," they were talking about life in the north, in our own language. And so, it had a changing of times back in the '60s. That was the mid-60s, that all started to happen.

MMS: Wow. That quickly. Like you say, things were happening pretty fast back then, but I mean that quickly-

WT: Pretty fast, and *Charlie Panigoniak* came out singing in Inuktitut.

MMS: That's really quite amazing and yeah, wonderful, wonderful story. What was the lifespan of “The Harpoons”? How long did they stay together?

WT: I think “The Harpoons” ended in '66 or '67. And the only reason why they disbanded was that the people graduated, such as *Eric (Tagoona*)and *Michael (Kusugak),* and they were sent somewhere else. I think they went to Ottawa for further education and I was the only one left in Churchill. So I started another band the following year. This time I was a leader and I picked up the guitar and I started playing guitar because all I did was sing with “The Harpoons”. Drums once in a while if *Jose* will let me. He hardly ever let me play drums. So, yeah. And I started another band with *David Simailak*, who probably a lot of people know he was a businessman in Baker Lake. He's been the Minister of Economic Development for the Nunavut government and other ministries with the Nunavut government. He was our Bass player. And *Brian Ladoon*, I don't know if you have heard about him. From Churchill, Manitoba, one of the polar bear whisperers. He was on that show that went on television every week from Churchill and there was that famous guy with his dogs that he raised. He started them by getting a male and a female from up in Igloolik and Spence Bay, and starting a dog pound in Churchill. He was our drummer at the time. And *Moses Tucktoo* from Churchill, Manitoba. And we played for another two years until we graduated, then we went on. But we only played English, again. I still was not into singing about our people. I was still just copying other people's English songs.

MMS: The music and the styles of music were changing really quickly. So from your early experiences with “The Harpoons” and through your time, did you find the styles of music changing? How are you able to keep up on that? Through radio or through records? How were you getting your music when you were in residential school?

WT: We had CHFC think is what it was, a CBC station where *Peter Mansbridge* worked. We used to see him every day passing by our residential school. Because there was a long hallway and you had to walk past our residence, and *Peter* was there and he passed by us on his way to work. And *Ron Siegel, Ron Siegel* worked in Yellowknife for the CBC for many years but at the time, he was a young man, worked in Churchill. And he was one of our big idols because they were announcer operators, I guess. And they played a lot of music. 4:00 to 5:00 was always a music hour with CBC because they know the kids are out of the classrooms and they're going to be walking all over town with their portable transistor radios blasting outside. And so, they'd give us the top hits for that whole one hour.

And so, that's where we learned our music, from people like *Peter Mansbridge* and *Ron Siegel*. As a matter of fact, it was funny. *Peter* was here, I can't remember how many years ago now and we connected and we talked about Churchill and he said, "Are you that band that knew these three songs?" I said, "I hope not." He said well, when he was in Churchill, there was this one band that would play at the “Hudson Hotel”. There was a hotel there called “Hudson Hotel”. And he said, every Friday night, they'd go there to go and relax and there was a band there that played three songs. And he said, "By 12 o'clock those three songs sounded real good." That was so funny. I said, "No, that was not us. We knew 30 songs." So that's how we learned much of our music of what was out there with “Donovan” and the “Beatles” and “Dave Clark Five” and what have you, at the time.

MMS: Yeah. How about things like strings and you mentioned heads for snare drums and stuff like that? I mean, just the maintenance of an instrument and sometimes a new guitar or something like that... Was that like a mail order thing or was there a store in Churchill that you could…

WT: Yeah, where we lived, there was two parts to Churchill. There's Churchill which is basically the downtown core. That's where all the businesses were and that's where the harbor was, the Wheat Board Harbor and the wheat elevators and the shipping docks and that, was at Churchill. In between was Akudlik, that's where all the Inuit were. The government built them a town there called Akudlik and that's where all the Inuit from Keewatin that serviced the government lived. The families lived over there.

And you'd go further on down the road, more like a little highway, then you'd get to Fort Churchill. We were at Fort Churchill. Fort Churchill was built by the American military and everything in there was built like a barrack. All the homes, the theaters, it was a complete town because this is a military. It's a complete community with theaters and stores. So they had the nicest little store that we called the commissary, and there was a Eaton's order place in there where you can go in and go through the Eaton's catalog and order whatever you need.

They also had a place where we can order 45's. So if there was a hit that you heard on the radio and you want to order it, maybe “Lovin' Spoonful” singing *Darling Be Home Soon*, you go to the commissary and say, "I want to order that 45. And it was 50 cents for a 45 record. That's how we started to stock up. But upstairs was a record store with real albums and if you can afford it, you can buy an album. But you know, we only made a dollar a week for our allowance at the residence. So $2 for two weeks was... man, it was hard to let go. But if you want to buy chocolate bars and stuff like that too but we did. We somehow got records and shared them a lot.

MMS: When you were playing in the rec halls, were you seeing some money for that or any kind of pay, I guess, that you could use to buy instruments or anything like that?

WT: Yeah, we did. Yeah, we'd make five bucks per night. This is usually on the weekends but there's also some places that still owe us money to today. They never paid. Yeah. Oh, man. We were a $5 band. That's how much you paid in, you know 1965 for a band to play in your bar, four or five bucks. And so that everybody gets $1. The five guys in the band, so they thought that was good, I suppose. But some of these weddings, you know they

don't pay. Yeah. But that was fun. Especially playing for the military, like the Navy and at the Navy base. It was just the whole experience of being in these big buildings with all these brassed up people, you know because we were just little village Eskimos at the time, only 13 years old and 14. Back home, people were living in igloos. And to be put into this room with these people that seemed to run the whole world, it was quite an experience to be there with them. And we were also put on television one time. We had a whole one hour TV spot in Churchill where the whole town watched us. And that was really cool. There was no TV back home and here we were on TV in Churchill, Manitoba. And then the CBC recorded us. Maybe it was *Peter Mansbridge* or somebody else, I don't know, recorded us and we became part of the hit circle in Churchill with the other bands that they were playing. So, that was pretty cool. That was fun!

MMS: You still have recordings of that or video copies of that?

WT: They're completely lost. Remember when Churchill closed down? I think they got rid of most of the tapes.

MMS: Oh, no.

WT: We were taped on reel-to-reel, of course. That's all there was. And I think they threw it away.

MMS: That's too bad. That's-

WT: Yeah. We used to be on radio in Churchill.

MMS: And as far as that goes, that's still pretty early as far as any kind of portable recording device that you could have yourself that way to record yourself. Yeah, it's just too bad that some of that stuff couldn't have been archived and recorded for…

WT: Yeah, when we talk about “The Harpoons”, all we have left is pictures of “The Harpoons” playing and we have nothing to show in terms of sound. Maybe that's good. Maybe that's bad. I don't know. But anyway, we have nothing to show in sound.

MMS: Yeah. That's true.

WT: But there was a band in Churchill. You know, the thing with Churchill bands in those years, the white bands and the Eskimo bands, is we shared things. We didn't just have to own our own stuff. The other bands in Churchill accepted us as one of them and they would share with us and they would even deliver amplifiers to us when we were going to play. If we really needed a certain amp, they’d even deliver. This comradeship was really good in Churchill. They would lend us their “Fender Stratocaster” in those years.

MMS: Wow.

WT: And I remember seeing a “Les Paul”. One of the band members from Churchill brought in a “Les Paul” and I used to wonder, "I wonder why they like this guitar. It's got a really dirty sound." I didn't realize that is the sound of a “Les Paul”. Yeah.

MMS: Yeah. Were those other players... were they military guys or like you say, the white service members that were servicing the Navy and all the rest of that stuff?

WT: Yeah, there was three main bands besides us. There was four bands going all at the same time. One of them was called “The Polar Bears” and they basically played country tunes and they were a really good band. It's amazing when you think back in '65, how good those bands were, musicians were in Churchill. And I think that's where we really learned by watching them, by sitting right beside the drummer and watching his every move. I think that's how we all picked it up as “Harpoon” members. But those guys were really good bands because they're mostly all from Winnipeg, Alberta, that all gather up there to work. So they're transients that come in to Churchill and while they're there, they're musicians. And there was another band called “The Excels”. These guys were top notch. They really were topnotch. And they were probably about the best friends that we had because they'd lend us just about anything they own. I think they had fathers and mothers that worked. And so, they were able to get them the top of the line, modern equipment and even a PA system, you know, which was pretty well unheard of in those years.

MMS: No kidding.

WT: But they had a PA and so we'd borrow that from them too. “The Excels” finally moved to Vancouver as a complete band and they apparently became a really big band in Vancouver, British Columbia. They got really well known and it looked like they were going to hit the big time because man, these guys were good. They were young. They were probably all under 20 or maybe 20. And then on their way to a gig, they were in a car and they fell off a bridge and all died instantly.

MMS: No Way.

WT: Yeah, “The Excels”, E-X-C-E-L-S.

MMS: Okay.

WT: And I checked up on them on Google and there they are. It tells you when they died and who they were. They were from Churchill. We grew up with those guys. They're the reason why we had “Fender” guitars here and there. If not for them, we would all be playing our “Saturn” guitars.

MMS: Wow. That's a great story, but tragic, tragic ending. Ouch. Man...

WT: Yeah, sure is.

MMS: Yeah.

WT: Yeah. We were all wooing for them. We were all cheering, one of us is going to make it now. Because people in Churchill, you get a comradeship feeling amongst each other.

MMS: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

WT: So we were really happy. They were going to make it and we can say, "Oh we know those guys".

MMS: When you picked up the guitar after the original founding member of "The Harpoons" graduated and moved on, what kind of guitar were you playing? An acoustic guitar? Did you buy an electric?

WT: Yeah, it was electric. We really didn't go for the acoustic. It just was not really in our mind. We had to be electric, even though we had acoustic around the house but it wasn't the instrument you went to. Because back in '67, that's when myself, anyway, I started to spin "Jimmy Hendrix" and start to learn about that sound. There was something about that sound that really, really intrigued me. 1967 was the year that I finally was able to stay home with mom and dad. Because you know, at that time, we were forced to go to residential school. You had no option. You had to go or the government would threaten to cut off your family allowance, to your mom and dad. We didn't realize that was all a lie. They had no authority to do that but they would throw that lie at mom and dad and we'd go because we loved them, we feel bad for them. But that one time, my dad finally put his foot down and said, "William is not going. He's staying home this year." And it was the best year I've ever had in learning how to be an Inuk and learning how to hunt. It was also the year that I was away from being with 300 people all the time. Because when you're in a residential school, you're there with about 300 people all the time and you really don't have time to be an individual. So that year in '67, I was me. I was myself. I can get up, be alone, all I want. I really got into "Jimmy Hendrix". How I got the album, I'll never know. But I spun that until it just went completely brown. I liked it so much. Then I also heard about "Led Zeppelin" came out, it's just getting better and better and better.

MMS: Yeah, those are the years, for sure.

WT: Yeah, hands down.

MMS: So your dad kept you home and so, you did like no schooling at all or were you doing like a…

WT: Yeah, I did. I went to school in Arviat, in Eskimo Point and I was so happy because for the first time, since we moved to Eskimo Point, I could really, finally connect with the young people there. Because as soon as we moved to Eskimo Point from Rankin back in '64, they shipped us off to Churchill within one month. I never really got to know the young people of Arviat until 1967. I was finally there for the whole year. I went to school with them and got to know them well and got to know who the musicians were, who plays at home. But I really, really tagged onto the elders. I was so close to them. I'd even go visit them at night just to be with them and found out the way they tick. And I'd go to their houses, like our janitor, *Anmak*, at the school. I'd go to his house and he had a record player. As soon

as he sees me coming in, he'd put on “Wilf Carter”. I'd say, "Wow." He'd be spinning all these, probably his only two albums but we'd have tea and just listen to his two albums, every single song. So it was a real connection to the people and I think that's where I started to, I want to sing in my own language, where it really started to click on me that I have my own culture too and I'm with my people. Then I went hunting with the elders so much, every time they were going to go out, they'd call my dad on those old telephones that, you know, it was a community phone. And everybody else can hear you too. You know they're there, but what can you do? So they would call us and say, " *Akuliaq* I'm going to go hunting tomorrow for caribou. You want to come along?" I said, "Yeah." So I went out a lot with people, much older than I am, 50, 60. I'd be out with them, just camping with them all alone in a tent.

And so it was a real awakening to my own culture. Because you know, before that, there was all these forces to take it away from you and every move you made, they were trying to get you away from you being that Inuk person with your own culture. Finally, when I was in Arviat, it was all there just for you to see. Nobody saying anything against you, being an Inuk. As a matter of fact, you tried to be the best Inuk there is because it's a competition, who's a better hunter? It was a totally different atmosphere. It wasn't about whose got the best song or who can entertain the most people on stage, who's the best hunter? Wow, that's tough.

MMS: And at a time, I mean you're talking, you're 15 or 16-years-old there and powerful. I mean, as a young man and a young person, you're just sort of being galvanized. But fortunately, you were back amongst your people and back in your home that way, to be able to connect even further with your traditional culture, that way. Beautiful.

WT: Yeah. Very much.

MMS: When you were there in Arviat, you talk about the other young musicians and stuff like that, did you have a band there?

WT: No, I didn't. We really didn't have any bands at all. We just sort of jammed together here and there, maybe yourself and another guy. There was a guy, *Thomas Kudluk*. He came out with a couple of gospel albums that were so good. *Thomas Kudluk*, he went to Alberta and recorded over there with a Christian label and they have that TV show. I think that's on every Sunday. It's a very traditional indigenous people. There's a lot of singing in it, Christian program. I think it's through them, he had gotten connected with them and came out with an album that was so good, it's bluegrass. Because he's always been into bluegrass. I remember that when we were in Arviat. This guy could play. How he learned? I'll never know but he could play bluegrass. He was my age. He was only about 15, 16 and he'd be playing bluegrass, probably from listening to it on the radio. You know, some people are just natural on the guitar. They understand the neck. How? I don't know but they just do. He was one of those. So he came out with a bluegrass gospel album singing in Inuktitut. That's cool.

MMS: I was going to ask you that he was singing in Inuktitut.

WT: Yeah, all Inuktitut.

MMS: And bluegrass.

WT: A few English songs. Our generation still will come out with a full Inuktitut album but we'll slip in a couple of English ones. It must have something to do with our upbringing, the way we were forced into becoming somebody else. It's going to leave an imprint, you know. No matter what you do, it sort of shaped you and you really can't completely leave it behind. There's got to be something. As long as it's positive. Yeah.

MMS: You were back in school in '67 in Arviat. Did you finish off your schooling in Arviat?

WT: I was there for one year. My dad had said, "I'll give you a year and then you have to go back to school." They were very convinced, rightfully so. They knew that, you know, what's going to be our future without schooling? Even at that time, I think they pushed us harder than some people do nowadays to get educated. You have a job to do. And so I went back to school and I finished it in Churchill. I finished that whole scene up to 1969, '70, I think it was. I graduated from Churchill. It just got easier and easier because the school there, the residential school, eased up on their rules. Because between 1964 and 1970, that residence since had changed. They had eased up a little bit, got more used to running education, I suppose.

Like we had to have crew cuts back in '64. They would scrub you just like you were a dangerous thing to touch. They would put you right into a bathtub and scrub you. What you see on TV is very true and then they would wash your hair with lice disinfectant. First, they'd cut your hair right off though, in a crew cut, you'd have really no hair left. And you know this was so contrary to what we were. We never had short hair like that. If you look at old photos of Inuit, it's traditional to have longer hair for men.

And so, it really stripped you of who you were when they would line you up and put you on a barber's chair and just cut your hair in one minute, pew, gone, and another person. And you'd look at yourself and see what you look like now. You know, even when you're 12, you care about what you look like but there was none of that. But by the 1970s, you could have your hair longer now. It was a real graduation for the school. It got a little easier. We didn't all have to dress the same. We had uniforms, school uniforms. We all had to look the same. By 1970, that was gone. You could be individual, so that was cool.

MMS: When you returned to residential school after your year in Arviat, did you play music? Was there another band there?

WT: Yeah, that was the time that I set up that other band called “The Poor”. We called ourselves that, obvious because we were poor. That was with *David Somailak* and *Brian LaDoon* and we lasted right until we graduated. I guess we were together for about two, three years. So once you start, you can't get out, as you would know. Once you've been in a band and you feel the comradeship and it's quite hard to just walk away from there. That's what we did. But it didn't have the same quite impact as it did with “The Harpoons”. I guess because with “The Harpoons” we were, the first and the residence were so strict

that somehow you felt the sense of really being needed. I think is what was different about “The Harpoons” and the second time around with another band, this time we were more like just entertaining and not a real purpose. It's been done before by that time.

MMS: Playing pretty much the same types of gigs that you were playing before?

WT: Yeah, pretty well. Just different songs, there was new hits of the day then. So we did those hits and oh yeah, it was pretty well the same. There was no more Navy. Army had pulled out by that time and there was no more army base and army lounges to play in. That was different. I think we played a lot more downtown than “The Harpoons” had. Because now we had a white boy with us, *Brian LaDoon*. He lived downtown. His father worked there at the dock so they were part of the community and so he was well-known. *Brian* was a very vocal young person and he died like that in Churchill, very well-known young man. He got sick and died but he was always very vocal so he got us quite a few gigs in Churchill, at the bars and the Legions. That was a lot of fun. It had its own fun too, that one, with “The Poor”. It was so cool to play with a white guy, so different.

MMS: Well, he sounds like a different kind of a white guy, that one. From just what you said, we're not all like that.

WT: What a guy, what a character. He was so funny to have behind you on the drums. Just full of life.

MMS: So you graduated and I guess, where did the life path take you once you had graduated?

WT: Yeah, once I graduated, then I went to Ottawa for my upgrading until I was grade-12 and then I joined the federal government as an information officer in Ottawa. Of course, really getting into watching the scene there, going to every single rock show we could find because now, we can do that, myself and my cousin, *David Somailak*. And really opening up our eyes to the music that was around. “Sly and the Family Stone” and “Alice Cooper”. “Yes” all those big bands were all in Ottawa. We'd see them all and it was a real eyeopener. Then from there, I got transferred to Yellowknife as an information officer. The federal government was setting up DIAND (Dept. of Indian Affairs and Northern Development) office in Yellowknife at the Bellanca Building. Yeah, that's where we were and working for the federal government. And then somebody told me that there was these guys looking for a drummer in Yellowknife. At work, they knew that I was very interested in music and so I showed up where the audition was. They met with me and they said, "You have a set of drums?" I said, "Nope." There was a set there. They said, "Okay, you can try with this one." It was *Tom Dempsey* and *Brian*, I'm forgetting their names now. Anyway, they were all from Yellowknife. There was a Dene. *Tom* was a Dene. There was a Filipino, and there was a Scotsman. A guy from, I guess his parents were originally from Scottish, *Brian*, a hell of a singer. Then the bass player, and he was French, from Quebec. And so they said, "You know, you're not the best drummer that we've tried out, but you're so full of energy. You're so committed to what you're, we're going to hire you."

MMS: Beautiful.

WT: They said, "We can tell you're right into this." I said, "Okay, thank you." So that's how I got on. I bought a set of drums and we played Yellowknife for about two years, I guess. That was really fun.

MMS: What years would those have been, William?

WT: Oh, my goodness. I think '71, '72. I have pictures of the band because we played the Elks and the Legion a lot and at Akaitcho Hall. We were one of the favorites of Akaitcho Hall and we played there quite often as well. It was nice to not have to sing. I would just sing harmony and I played drums and *Brian* was our main singer and they were singing all the hits from "The Hollies" and man, that was fun. And of course, the other big competition was *Tom Hudson* and them with their band. *Tom Dempsey*, is I believe a cousin of *Tom Hudson* and he used to play with him too but he wanted to start his own band. That was our band with *Tom Dempsey*.

MMS: Do you remember the names of that band or those bands at that time?

WT: *Tom Hudson's* band? You know, I don't.

MMS: Was that the "UM²"? "The Universal Music Machine"?

WT: "UM²" eh?, I believe. Yeah. I think that sort of comes. They played more country stuff than we did. We played just mostly all rock. We were trying to sound different from them. *Tom (Dempsey)* didn't want to sound like them. He said, "It's already being done. Let's do something else." So we'd bring songs to the table. It was up to *Tom* whether he said yes or no. He always judged it by, "Is it too much like the other guys? Is it going to be different with our line up?" We'd always meet at the lounge. I'm forgetting these, it's been so long ago. I think *Ted Wesley* played there quite a bit.

MMS: Oh, "The Hoist Room".

WT: Yeah, "The Hoist Room". Yeah, we'd go in there and have a beer or two before going to a gig. That used to be a lot of fun. It was always a tradition. We always meet in there first and now we're together. Now, let's all walk over or drive to the Legion or something. It was very interesting. It was so exciting and so different for a little Inuk boy.

MMS: Dynamic times in the north, in those years.

WT: Oh, my goodness, oh yeah. The political change, the political turmoil, the oil companies around Inuvik, the oil companies leaving Inuvik. Just that whole feeling and we were still struggling with land claims. We didn't have it at that time. I knew *George Erasmus* and them, we just automatically connected. We would've been pretty damn young but we all knew each other. How? I don't know. I think we were all heading into the same direction, no matter what we were doing, whether you're playing drums for a band or you're doing this work for this… the mindset was over there. There was something about anything that we're doing, it's not for here. It's for over there that I'm doing this. I want us to get out of this. It was that feeling of getting and beating colonialism. It was colonialism, we didn't

realize that was killing us, beating us. Feeling very hopeless, from what we could see but I think there was so much hope in our hearts that we all prevailed.

MMS: Just the changes that were happening were just incredible. And yourself and *Tom Dempsey* and all of the bands that you were playing with, you were the soundtrack of the time, of the day. That was the music and it was the popular music people heard on the radio and then they would go to the dances on the weekend and hear you guys playing it as well. So, yeah, really important touchstone, I guess, the music that was happening at that time, like I say, just being the soundtrack. So if you were going into "The Hoist Room" and having a beer before the gig with the boys and the band, would that have been where you met and heard *Ted Wesley*?

WT: *Ted Wesley*, tell the truth, him and I have never met personally. I've seen him. When I was in Yellowknife, he was my taxi driver. I was starstruck. Someone told me, "William, that's *Ted Wesley*." Because he knew I'm playing *Ted* all the time in my apartment. I'm just playing his album. It meant so much to me. So I've always known his stuff. I knew he was a big star in the town and in the Northwest territories and he was singing about us, whatever it is that we were up to. Even singing about the James Bay hydro dam that we were hearing so much about on the news in Yellowknife. Because you know we had the *(Thomas) Berger* Inquiry while I was in Yellowknife at the time. There was just so much happening and development and people, the indigenous groups saying, "Not now, not now". And you say, "Why not now? We don't have land claims yet". You know, we need to settle those kinds of issues before. So there was so much turmoil and he was coming out with that stuff, even in English and he wasn't even indigenous. I was certainly one of his big fans and no matter where I go in Baker Lake, they'd say *Ted Wesley* was here. Oh shit, I missed it. And so I knew about him all these years. And then about a year, two years ago, him and I connected through Facebook and we became really good friends. And I told him all that I knew and I exchanged music with him. He sent me his double CD. Something came in the mail. I opened it. It's from *Ted*, it's his compilation of all his years of writing all this stuff. So we really connected through there but he was one of our first stars, I guess if I can put it that way, that represented the Northwest Territories on the hit charts.

MMS: Your time in Yellowknife, where did you end up going after that?

WT: Yeah, it was ironic that I was very much into that song that *Ted* was writing about, about the James Bay hydro play. And then I got a call from Montreal back in '73. It was this young Inuk leader called *Charlie Watt* and he said, "William, you remember me from the residential school? I was a supervisor". I said, "I sure remember you". He said, "Anyway, what are you doing in Yellowknife?" And I said, "I'm working for the federal government, publishing a magazine on resource development". And he said, "Oh, I need a man exactly like that right now, that knows about publishing because we're just about to negotiate with the Quebec government on a land claims." Because we'd been fighting the hydro project, I said, "Wow!". Here's that hydro that *Ted* sings about that I really want to be involved in and here was an offer from *Charlie Watt*. Come to Quebec, to Montreal. Wow, that was the scariest offer ever. To go from Yellowknife to this big city of Montreal that I've never been at. Man, so scary but I'm coming. When do you want me? And so, that was a life changer. I moved to Montreal and joined the Inuit rights movement and it really

formed me after that, being a Inuit rights activist. And that's where it all started. And I met some of these indigenous singers that were on the charts, like *Willie Dunn* and... in Montreal. And just being able to sit around with these kind of people that you only heard about was truly inspiring to do it yourself. I said, "If I can sit there with this guy, *Willie Dunn*, who's just amazing indigenous singer, you know, I can do my own too." And that's where that started, saying, you know "I'm not going to sing covers anymore. I'm going to write my own stuff." That's where it all started, in Montreal.

After being with *Willie Dunn* and those guys and being inspired to write about my people, instead of just singing about some other people's songs that he wrote or she wrote just to get on the hits, is not where I want to be anymore. I want to write about our people after hearing these lyrics and that. So I wrote to the CBC Northern Service. I was listening to a lot of the stuff that they play in their Inuktitut shows. And they were reel-to-reels of anybody that sends a song in, no matter how badly recorded it was, to them, that's a Eskimo song. That's a Inuktitut song. We're going to air it. That's what they are. So it bothered me. I said, "You know, we need a standard." I'm not saying these were bad songs but the CBC should have a higher standard than what it just puts on the air.

It doesn't just put any old thing on when it's an English song, it has to have a standard. And I felt we need that too in the Inuktitut. So I wrote to CBC and I said, "I think what you guys are doing is a total disservice to the Inuit. You should be putting more emphasis on recording and coming up with really good recordings, so that our young people will hear that and say, Oh, that's Inuktitut music. That's a standard I have to go for and even get better than it."

So I got a reply quite quickly from *Sheldon O'Connell* who was the manager of CBC in Montreal. And they said, "William, we're giving you a challenge. We're asking you to come to Montreal, we'll pay for everything. Your airfare, we'll put you into a studio with studio musicians and we'll record you and come out with an album. We're challenging you on what you were saying." And I said, "Okay, when do you want me there?" So I went down and that's when I came with that first album, "Northern Man". And then after that, then other albums started coming out with *Charlie Panigoniak* and *Charlie Adams.* It was after that first broadcast recording that we did. And then after that, I knew that, you know, we shouldn't always have to depend on CBC paying for our recording sessions. There's got to be money for individuals that just want to record their album in a studio of their choice.

So I wrote to the NWT government in Yellowknife, *Gordon Ray* was the Minister of Culture at the time. And I said, "Gordon, you know you guys have been spending millions to preserve the Inuktitut language, sending money here, sending money there but you're not putting anything into the arts." I said, "That's where the young people are. If you want to reach them, if you want to preserve their language or promote it, you have to put it into music." And then he wrote back and said, "Watch what we're going to do in the very early future." And that was, they came out with money that you can go after to record an album. I still have those letters.

MMS: That's right too. That would've probably been the beginnings of the NWT Arts Council.

WT: I think so. I think so. *George Tuccaro* was there at the time.

MMS: Okay.

WT: Yeah. I'm mentioning names so that you know that I'm complete being honest.

MMS: No doubt about that, I was...

WT: He'll vouch for that.

MMS: I was going to throw another name at you as well. When I was growing up as a young man and there was different people doing CBC Northern Service recordings through *Les McLaughlin* and that whole program, where CBC was taking people in. And I know *Charlie Panigoniak* got in there. Those early albums are priceless. They're gold, as far as...

WT: Oh my goodness. They sure are. Yeah.

MMS: ... as far as a snapshot of the time.

WT: Old *Les*, he was a... what a guy he was. Yeah. I miss him very, very much.

MMS: I only got to meet him once but there's another fellow that left a really huge imprint with his legacy and what he was able to pull together for Northern musicians at the time and for Northern radio as well. Those men were honorable men of character, is what they were.

WT: He was so cooperative. He was just there for us everywhere. We did that first 'True North Concert" in 1981, in Frobisher Bay at the time. These "True North Concerts" didn't exist at the time and *Les* wanted to try it out with Inuit performers. And he called up and said, "I have an idea." Because we had just been coming out with those broadcast recordings that were accepted so well. They were only in the Eastern Arctic at the time, the broadcast recordings. They hadn't moved into the Yellowknife area and that. So, he said, "You know, we gotta do a live show on stage with all these hits you guys are recording. They're such big hits in the North that we got to show it to all the Northerners. We'll make a TV show out of it and a radio show, live right from Frobisher Bay to Beaver Creek, Yukon. And so we did that show with the same studio musicians that we used on our broadcast recordings, *Dougie Trineer* and *Serge Boogie* and those guys and it was live. We went on at eight o'clock, it lasted until ten. And it has to be right to the second because we're on live. That was so exciting. It was the very first time that a music show had ever been broadcast, I believe, on radio coast to coast in the north all at the same time. So it had to start at eight because it would be, what five o'clock in the Yukon? Yeah. That was interesting. We had timers. Yeah.

MMS: Probably more than one but exciting times through CBC and the different programs coming in from government that people like yourself and people like *Charlie Panigoniak* could be writing songs and in your own language as well. Who were some of the other musicians and the Inuk writers of the time that you can remember, William?

WT: That sort of kicked off a good number of... *Donny Wiggins*, we can't forget him of course, out of Ottawa. He was a technician at the Ottawa bureau with *Les* and them and he'd be on the live shows with us. And there's other people like *Peter and Susan, (Aningmiuq*). They were so popular. They're not around anymore. *Etulu and Susan*. *Peter* quit using the name *Peter* and he started using *Etulu and Susan*. was another one. *Northern Haze*, who got resurrected, I think about three, four years ago. And they were recorded back then. And that recording, I think was ahead of its time because it was sort of heavy metal in Inuktitut and it had limited appeal. But then now those guys are the biggest band in the whole Eastern Arctic years later, with some new members of course. I think one or two of them had passed away and they got others in But *James (Ungalaq)* is still the leader. He's 70 years old now. And like he told me, "William, why am I just getting known now, now that I have a hard time walking? They should have found us out when I was 25, 30." I said, "I don't know, James. That's how music is. They finally found you." Yeah. They were even at the JUNOs, “Northern Haze” with “(The) Jerry Cans”. Yeah.

MMS: Yeah and of course “The Jerry Cans” have taken the world by storm here over the last few years as well. And...

WT: Yeah, singing in Inuktitut too.

MMS: Yeah. Yeah, for sure. In even talking about your friend from “Northern Haze” and yourself, you've had children. So, can you tell me some of the names of some of the sons and the daughters or the grandsons or the granddaughters that have gone on to continue to make music? Probably because of you and the generations preceeding.

WT: Oh, there's so much, like *Susan (Aglukark) Susan* is *David*'s daughter. *David Aglukark* that I had mentioned before. And I have played with *Susan*, and she's... Man, when she sings with you, you wonder where she picked that up from, you know but she's such a good singer. She uses vibrato. I use that too, vibrato and don't know where it came from, because it's not a natural thing for Inuit to use vibrato. And I used to go to the ICC, “Inuit Circumpolar Conference”. It's the organization that brings in people from Canada, Greenland and Alaska and meets on political issues.

I used to sing in their gatherings, just about every time they had a gathering. And when we were in Alaska, this old man came up to me. And he said, "Oh *Akuliaq*." Because they only call me *Akuliaq*, the old people. And his name was *Eric Anoee*, very well-known from Kivalliq. He's gone on to heaven many years ago. And he says, " *Akuliaq*, I know you sing but I want you to know where you got it from." I said, "Wow, okay." He said, "You got it from your namesake." And he started to talk to me about how music was back in the thirties and forties, before we picked up the guitar. He said, "Inuktitut songwriting has been around for generations and generations, the lyrics and the melody with that drum. And just like now, if you're going to a town, the town will hear about you coming and the excitement will grow. Or some people won't get excited at all because they don't like your music. It was no different in the 1930s", he told me, "We used to hear," he said, "When we were in our igloos, of a singer that's going to be coming in." Because he said, "We always had singers. Some of them were better than the others. Some of them, the whole village would get excited. And some of them, we don't really care."

"*Akuliaq*, your namesake was the only singer we ever knew that sang in vibrato." I said “he did”. “Yeah. Your namesake sang in vibrato. And when we heard you for the very first time on CBC radio singing, you sang in vibrato. That's where you got it from. It went all the way from your namesake over to you. It's transferred over to you”. So those are interesting little bits that the elders will connect you today to the 1930s. And so, maybe 50 years from now, somebody will be connected to who we are when we're not around anymore, through our music. Today, our singers are so damn good. I was just listening to a song again today. There's so many of them now coming out with... This studio explosion has really given opportunities for our young people to sing. And they are all singing in Inuktitut. Just like we said, back in the 1980s, “governments, you got to put your money into the arts if you want to save languages.” And they have. Right now, there is different places where you can get money to record. And they are recording them through all these digital home recording studios now, with all the musicians in a box. And man, some of the stuff they are coming up with is just totally amazing. I'm amazed. They're so good. But how do you do that live?

MMS: Yeah, exactly. I totally agree with you. It's really amazing and to see the explosion of young indigenous writers and Inuk writers and the importance as you just said, of not only preserving the language but I mean the language is being used. It's living, because it's being used today and being used now, it's not going into a museum here. It's actually going into laptops and being mixed up with hip hop beats, and *Nelson. Nelson Tagoona* is your grandson, is that correct?

WT: He's my great nephew. He's my niece’s son. Yeah. What a performer, eh? He usually stays with us when he's over here. And I have a little studio just outside my house where we record music and he'll just spend all his time there. We forget he's even in town, he's in the studio. He just likes the ambience of a studio because I'll go over there and visit him and say, "Well, you're not even on the board." He said, "I just like being in a studio." "He said, "I get my thoughts." Yeah. And my sons play. They have their own band called “Angava”. They were the first heavy metal band in Nunavik and they’re still at it. And they have been in Yellowknife. They have been in The Arctic Winter Games and playing. These are young people. They watch their old man and people have talked to me about, how do you come out with kids that want to play? I said, "You don't talk to them. You just do it. They'll watch you. Always make sure you have a guitar in the house, always there or have the keyboard over there. Always make sure it's plugged in and ready for them to try any time because they're probably going to pick it up when you walk out the door." And so that's the way I've done it with my boys. And nowadays, I harmonize for them when they're playing somewhere, someplace. I'll say, "Can I go up with you and sing for you?" So it's a lot of fun. I think it keeps it going and it really helps to keep the culture alive.

MMS: Totally agree with you there. And it's just such a beautiful thing to be able to do with your blood or your kin, to be able to share and to sing and to play together and to harmonize. And gosh, it's just so special and good on you for having that faith in passing off the musical skills and head space and attitude towards music and language and culture to your children. And I'm sure in 50 years, your name will be spoken and your songs will be sung, William, for sure. This seems like a really good place to wrap it up. And I’d just like to say, thank you so much for joining me here and for this interview. And best wishes to you in the future and to your good health and to good music.

WT: Yeah. Same to you Pat. Maybe one day, we'll meet again and we'll share that stage.

MMS: I sure hope so, William. Thanks so much.

WT: All right, bye for now.