

CK: This is Cindy Kus interviewing Carol Witherbee for the first time on June 2nd, 2015, in the Alpena County Library. This interview is sponsored by the library's oral history program and is part of the Musicians of Northeast Michigan project. Hello Carol.

CW: Hello, thank you.

CK: I understand that you are originally from Wisconsin.

CW: Umhuh. I grew up in LaCrosse. Um, and ah, it seemed at the time I left it that it was such a long time that I'd lived there, and really only, ah twenty some years by the time I got married and moved to Alpena.

CK: Oh, okay, that... you did a lot in between based on what I've seen in those twenty years.

So...was...I'm, I'm searching on your musical background.

CW: Okay

CK: Was your family musical? What were the origins of, of music in your life?

CW: Well, um, I think my family was musical. My mother ah, noted that I was a musical child early on, and encouraged that by taking me to all the symphonies, uh, they would have been community concert type symphony programs, and um, my father used to sing on the radio in St. Louis while he was a medical student he sang a program called "Stephen Foster Melodies." And you can bet that at our piano at home I heard every Stephen Foster song there that ever was written.

CK: Oh, wow. So, LaCrosse is...what's the size of LaCrosse?

CW: Ah LaCrosse has, um, grown a bit since... I would say it's about 60,000 now...sixty to sixty-five thousand.

CK: Okay, so the programs that they had there were substantial.

CW: Oh, yes. And I started my college education in LaCrosse, first going to Viterbo College, um, which was a small college for women, a Catholic college, run by the sisters, uh, Franciscan sisters, and I started there mainly because the nun that I was studying with, past high school, would not take students of college age, unless they were of a Viterbo student. And I wanted to continue to study with her, because she had really brought me up a good long way.

CK: You studied music with her.

CW: I studied voice, voice. Then I transferred to LaCrosse State College, which is now the University of Wisconsin at LaCrosse, to study with another, ah, young

woman who was quite proficient and I thought at that time it would behoove me to get a different, um, perspective.

And then I finally ended up going to Valparaiso University from which I graduated with a degree in voice performance and music education and, there is a church music tacked on on there somewhere.

CK: I saw that.

CW: Yeah.

CK: Yeah. So, did you ever use the church music part of that?

CW: Well, I actually did, in becoming our church choir director for quite a number of years.

CK: In Alpena?

CW: Here in Alpena. And um, just doing that. I never, I never really used it for teaching or of anything in that area.

CK: I've never given very much consideration to church music as its own, its own, entity.

CW: Oh my goodness. Well, Valparaiso University is a Missouri Synod Lutheran college, and, um, some of the graduates with degrees in church music go on to these huge, huge, churches in large cities where...

CK: Cathedrals and...

CW: Oh, yes. They're responsible for all the music in those...

CK: And that is a huge part of... the church.

CW: Right, of course.

CK: That's interesting. Okay, and I also saw somewhere in there that you won some...you were voted the outstanding young soprano in the state of Wisconsin.

CW: Yes, isn't that wonderful? The contest was held on the campus of Eau Claire State University, the University of Wisconsin at Eau Claire now. And, the first prize was a monetary something, I don't know, it wasn't maybe a hundred dollars or whatever, but the choice prize for me was being able to perform with their symphony. Which was you know was a thrill, my first time doing that and so...

CK: Do you remember what it was you performed?

CW: I performed a piece from *The Marriage of Figaro*, which I later sang at Valparaiso as the character of Susanna. "Non so piu cosa son" was the name of the aria, and of course I did it in Italian.

CK: Oh! That's beautiful.

CW: As a voice major you had to have language pronunciation, you didn't possibly know what you were saying, but I had to have German, and French, and Italian; because so much vocal music is written in those languages.

CK: So you didn't necessarily need to understand it, you just needed to know how to pronounce it.

CW: Pronunciation.

CK: Interesting too. Okay. So how did you end up in Alpena, Michigan?

CW: Well, I met my husband when he returned to LaCrosse to do his Master's Degree, he had been teaching in Colorado. He returned to LaCrosse to do his Masters and I was a student at LaCrosse at the time. And I had a night class and so did he and for some reason we met in the hallway on a break and ah through a mutual friend who really, and so...

CK: Was kind of orchestrating this?

CW: Well, um, I think the ski party was not really orchestrated; it was just a happenstance.

CK: So that was before you went to Indiana.

CW: Yes, it was. Right.

CK: So you met him there and then you went to school in Indiana and then somehow both of you ended up in Northeast Michigan.

CW: Right. Well, um, actually I went to Indiana with a ring on my finger, which was, just made my mother totally, she thought, oh, I'm cutting my nose off to spite my face. But, it was apparently meant to be because I, and there were, there were fellows in the music department at Valpo that were engaged to women on other campuses, so we always kind of hung around together, and one of them wrote a song cycle, which is a composition of little pieces of music, for me, for my voice, he was a composition major and entered it in a contest at Butler University in Indiana, and we happened to, or he happened to win that contest and so, I went down to accept the award with him and sang with the Indianapolis Symphony. Just doing that particular piece. So that was very exciting. A major, you know, symphony.

CK: Um, have you since then done any performances with large symphonies?

CW: Um, well let's see. Oh, I was invited to, when I was at Valparaiso, I was invited to sing with the LaCrosse Symphony also, which has, it's called The Great River Symphony now, and has really developed into quite a fine symphony.

CK: So, your husband, was he involved in music?

CW: No. No, he and a friend of his, who apparently, as how the story goes, was interested in dating me as well, they were very good friends, but they faked the need for a couple of voice lessons to come over to my house and I thought, well what am I going to do with these two? I didn't realize that was just a ploy, but my mother did.

CK: She saw through that.

CW: Yes.

CK: Okay, so, Alpena again...how did you get here?

CW: Well, Roger had the opportunity to come here when, ah, the community school program was going strong, and that was a program that was a kind of, let's see if I can remember this correctly. Um, it was a program to involve adults in the community and children after school hours, to give the community more ownership in the schools. For example, he would set up, find teachers, and organize classes in Bishop Sewing and fly-tying, and things of that nature that would bring people in, in the evening hours for classes. And that was a big thing in Alpena back when we came here, it was um, there were, I think, were six community school directors at the time.

CK: Was it a little bit like Adult Education?

CW: Yes, actually, yes, that would be another name for it.

CK: Okay, okay...I remember fly-fishing classes, my brother took fly-fishing classes after school. So I am wondering, what year would that have been?

CW: Well, we got married in '68. So, it would have been, it, the program was going before we got married. But then we had our twin boys in 1972. At that time they were cutting funds and cut community education out. So Roger had a chance to go on, to take a Mott Scholarship or take a principalship here in Alpena and here we were with two babies, we had just bought a house, and so he decided to stay here.

CK: Okay. So you had two young children. Were you teaching at that point?

CW: I was teaching a couple of years before. I actually came into Alpena as a hire.

CK: Oh, okay.

CW: That was very, very fortunate for me. I was a January graduate. And, um, so the schools just happened to need someone and I was lucky enough to be hired as a full-time teacher at that time.

CK: At what level?

CW: Ah, elementary.

CK: And did you go from school to school?

CW: I did.

CK: You were a travelling music teacher.

CW: My first assignment was Sunset School, Lincoln School, hmm...cranking the old brain cells here.

CK: You're doing a good job.

CW: I'm sure there was one more; but yes it was a circuit, once a week to visit at, and of course we had, probably, um, five or six full time music teachers at that time, because students would see us two times a week, rather than one, which it is now. And so, the population when we first came to Alpena of elementary students was over ten thousand.

CK: Wow.

CW: And now we have dwindled down, of course, to closing so many buildings...so...

CK: I guess that was a time when the industry was flourishing here and what do you think the difference is, has...what's caused the decrease in population?

CW: Well, I think, um, I think for one thing, the closing of Portland Huron Cement was a big influence there. And the fact that our community suddenly became a place where our young people did not want to return to raise their families because the job opportunities here were limited- and we kind of became a community of retirees, which we still are.

CK: So music was considered important at that time.

CW: It was considered, oh yes, I think so, yeah.

CK: Did they have other art programs?

CW: Well they had art, elementary art, and they had, of course, physical education. And all of those programs were cut pretty much in half with the closing of schools and the cutting back of funds. So, I was still busy, and I was still able to teach up until my retirement in 2004. Um, I did take three or four years off with my boys. I waited until they got into school and then, fortunately there was an in for me, again, which I was grateful for.

CK: So you experienced the decrease...

CW: Yes.

CK: ...in hours, and students, and the program itself.

CW: For awhile, in fact, when I was hired back in, it was um, it was just part-time, as I remember, just for a year or two I did the music, the vocal music at Thunder Bay. And also um, took part of Bruce McCombie, he was basically the instrumental teacher at the high school, but had a choir class which I took over for him at that time. So I was able to take my boys to the child care program at Alpena High School, and have the choir class, pick them up, and

CK: It worked out.

CW: Yes it did! Oh my goodness, it did.

CK: How did the elementary school program work? I know you said you went to different schools; but how was the class itself set up? Did kids get to choose if they wanted to take music, or was it mandatory?

CW: No, that was physical education, art, and music was part of their elementary schooling. And so, classes were set up on a half an hour time period once a week, or twice a week for a while, for classes to see you. And then, um, as it was cut it was only once a week for a half an hour for each area- art, music and physical education.

CK: And, was it vocal? I mean, how did you teach your class? Give me a picture...

CW: I taught the vocal music.

CK: Okay.

CW: Ah, and there was a band, instrumental music program for sixth graders at the time, ah, could sign up to begin a band program that hopefully would carry through the junior high and high school. And ah, unfortunately for the children I think more than anything I think was that, when they cut the program, we had a choir program in each elementary school too for fifth and sixth graders; but in sixth grade, we became almost, it wasn't an adversarial position by any means, but we were struggling for the same kids to be in both, because musical kids are musical all the

way through, you know, usually all the way through. And in a way, we were trying, you know, to get those same kids to participate in our programs. And, ah, it was difficult because in junior high they started limiting the, what they call the elective classes for kids, so. Of course we wanted to start them in something musical, in one kind of class or another, but ah, just so they went on into music.

CK: Yeah, right. To keep the flame burning there, right?

CW: And I certainly spent a great deal of time introducing children to the sounds of instruments and telling them that if they hoped to play they should start thinking now; because you didn't want to play an instrument you didn't like the sound of. So, I had units on instruments as a general music teacher. I tried to give them a listening opportunity every week within that half an hour, listening opportunity, a rhythmic exercise, and then, a study of our folk music history.

CK: Oh that's great. It gives them kind of a broad...

CW: That was a lot. I got to know and I still can guesstimate the passing of a half an hour pretty exactly, because I lived on half hours for so long.

CK: Do you see any of those students?

CW: Oh yes, I see many, many. And in fact, um, one of my little students cuts and colors my hair for me and I think, oh my goodness, I'm so glad I had a good relationship with this girl, or she could do me dirt! Every once in awhile give me a horrible haircut or...

CK: a streak of purple...

CW: Yes, right. But I do, I see so many of kids I've had, and they seem genuinely happy to run into me. So I did have fun with my kids mostly.

CK: Yeah, that sounds like success right there.

CW: Even a couple of little pips see me now and seem glad to see me. You know, and one in particular, ah, became a physician's assistant. And, I went to see him, and he said to me towards the end, he said, of the examination, I was having, ah, edema problems, and he said, "I would like to say something." And I said, "Well what's that?" And he said, "Well, I know I was a little pip in your classroom. And I said, "Well, I said, you were just a little boy too." I said "don't give it to much worry." Ah, so kids sometimes do, if they remember being a problem once in awhile and then afraid that's that what I remember, they'll apologize.

CK: That's funny.

CW: Yeah.

CK: Um, I also have in my notes that you have directed and performed large works with the Alpena Choral Society.

CW: Yes.

CK: Would you explain to me what exactly a choral society is?

CW: Well, society of course is made up of people of all vocations and interests and, ah, that sort of thing. And, we had a fairly large choral society group, back when probably, even before I came. I can't remember who was the director at the time that I came but I remember that we met at Thunder Bay. I was just out of college and I was given a solo opportunity, at that time, right away. So a chorale society is just a group of people that love to sing and want to sing; but as a, not as a vocation.

CK: Okay. And is there any instrumentation?

CW: Sometimes. Depends on the work and ah, so, what is available here. And there have been times in most recent years when the choral society has done performances of *The Messiah*. We would sometimes hire the larger solos out to, I remember we had one particular tenor that came over from Traverse City and ah, the Harts, Jim and Mary Louise Hart who directed it and were involved in over twenty-some some Messiahs, had a daughter-in-law, ah, Martha Hart, who was just a lovely singer, and she came over to do, and I was lucky to do, um, the ah, he shall, no let's see, come, ah, hmm, "He Shall Feed His Flock" and "I Know that My Redeemer Liveth", ah, two arias from *The Messiah*, that are slow and sustained tones, and that's my forte. I did not have a very acrobatic voice-the flitter flutter all over the place.

CK: But you can carry something for a long time.

CW: Yes.

CK: So would, like, the Besser Male Chorus, would that be, kind of an example of a choral group? I don't have any sense of that. I'm learning something here.

CW: The Lumberman's Chorus we had for many years that liked to sing barbershop, Sweet Adelines was a chorus that I happened to direct for awhile, during their activity here in Alpena. And so, it's a recreational type group but, for people who want to, who want to be able to perform some things. Not just a for laughs kind of thing.

CK: Right. Right, right, right. And so then who, who, do you perform for?

CW: The community.

CK: Do you just get asked to perform at different events, or do you have concerts...specifically for the group?

CW: The major concerts for the Community Chorus were at Christmas, and then again a spring concert in May.

CK: And where were they usually held?

CW: At the high school.

CK: You played the hammered dulcimer.

CW: I did.

CK: And I understand you participated in competitions with ...

CW: I did

CK: ...that instrument. What are the origins of the dulcimer and what styles of music is it heard in?

CW: Well um, there are two types of dulcimers. There's the mountain dulcimer, which is sometimes called the lap dulcimer. It sits on the lap and you fret with these two fingers and strum with the right hand or I suppose you could switch if you're left-handed. Everything would seem backwards to me with that. And then there is something called the hammered dulcimer, and this is a trapezoid- shaped instrument, it has bridges on either side and it's, the strings are strung horizontally, across these two bridges, they're stretched.

CK: What's the distance?

CW: Oh.

CK: Between the two bridges. I mean is it...

CW: It's trapezoidal, so the bridges go this way.

CK: It varies. That's what gives it its different...

CW: Right and they are different sizes. I've seen some really huge dulcimers and then some not so big. But, both, my first dulcimer was made in Michigan by Kurt Sanders and Linda Foley and they lived in Muskegon, as I remember. And, I ordered it made for me, I saw them at an art fair and I ordered it made and got it shipped to me. So when I opened it up, I thought, " Oh, I wonder what I should be doing with this?" But the sound was so enchanting! I heard my first hammered dulcimer player on Mackinaw Island. And, I think I stood there for an hour at least while my kids and

husband climbed that awful ascending walkway to the fort. Do you remember that? I couldn't do it now with the Charcot-Marie-Tooth disease. But, um, it's just so bell-like, and of course, there is no damper pedal or dampening of the strings. Once you strike a string you have that tone sustained until the string stops vibrating and in some cases, when you hit a wrong string, unless you are quick enough to dampen it with the outside of your hand it will stay for a little while.

CK: And remind you of your mistake.

CW: It has its origins, actually back to, um I think, ah, Bible times when it was, or there are, there are, examples of instruments that are like the hammered dulcimer in several different of the Oriental cultures too. It was referred to as a cymbalum... and, in some cultures. And, it just kind of became a folk-type of an instrument because of its portability. And in this country it was known as the lumberjack's piano because they could pick it up like a suitcase and take it right to the logging camps with them. And a good dulcimer player will not only play a melody, but the harmony around it. And so, they could have quite a full sound of music with just one player. It developed as more of a folk instrument in this country.

CK: Okay. And is it used in bluegrass?

CW: Bluegrass...not so much, maybe. But, ah, fiddle tunes and hornpipes. One of the first songs I learned to play was called Soldier's Joy, and the story behind this song, and whether it is absolutely true, I don't know. But was that a soldier from the other side, whatever side that was, was in prison, and was asked by his, you know, prisoner, magistrate of the camp or whatever it was, if he could play "Soldier's Joy". And he said, "If you can play that song, I will let you go." And so, actually don't think, I think it was named or renamed "Soldier's Joy" because it provided him his freedom.

CK: He obviously knew it.

CW: Right. He knew the tune.

CK: Is it a familiar tune?

CW: No. I mean it's a folk tune, and it is familiar to folk musicians.

CK: I thought I might have you hum a few bars.

CW: Oh! Deedaladeeladee. It's very fast.

CK: I get that; it is very joyful. In, ah, 1988, you were the guest artist for the Thunder Bay Arts Council "In Concert" Series.

CW: Yes! Oh my goodness, that was a wonderful opportunity. It was a wonderful opportunity to... I was paired with two other, paired isn't the word because that denotes two doesn't it? I was combined with two other music teachers. One was a trumpet player, another was an oboist, and then there was me. And we did a total concert of different tunes and things, and I was lucky enough to have resurrected some of my college graduate recital music, which I had loved and performed and still hung onto the music. Ah but it, to say it took an accompanist was not quite right...it took a pianist... to accompany these pieces and I was very fortunate to have Mary Louise Hart, who in my estimation, is a true pianist, accompany me.

CK: She was one of the three?

CW: No, she was my accompanist.

CK: Oh, she was your accompanist, okay.

CW: I don't think I could have done the music without her; because the music was so much a part of the entire work, works. One was by DeBussy and another by Gerald Finzi, it was a wonderful song cycle. It was a unit, not like, here is the singer and here is the piano player.

CK: Right.

CW: Absolutely.

CK: It was a series, so there were several performances that you did as part of being the artist in residence.

CW: Well, we, I think we each had approximately a half an hour of music to perform, and really that's a lot.

CK: Being on stage for that long.

CW: Right. And so, but I, it was a very nice opportunity; I enjoyed it. My boys have a video of their mother, you know, doing that sort of thing. Which is kind of an heirloom.

CK: So that exists. There is a video of...

CW: Yes, of that concert

CK: Where would we access that?

CW: Well, I think it's in my drawer at home.

CK: So is that something we could possibly transcribe? Um, transcribe is not the word...but

CW: Copy.

CK: Copy.

CW: Let's just put it that way.

CK: Let's just put it that way.

CW; I wonder if...yes you certainly may. And I wonder if you would have, a way of putting it on, because its an old VHS, a way to put in on a disc for me?

CK: Okay.

CW: Because I've been wanting to do that anyway and just wondering where to have it done, so...if you have a way of doing that it would be great.

CK: Okay, I will look into that. I know that we are looking at ways to transfer tape and make it digital, because ultimately what we would like to do is, if we had that piece, tie it in to this oral history, so people could go...

CW: And there it is!

CK: And see it along with the oral history- that would be great. Thank you for mentioning it and I will ask Nancy about that.

CK: In your illustrious career, it seems like you've been involved in so much, not just in the schools; but in the community, it's impressive. You've appeared in many plays at the Alpena Civic Theater, which has been in operation since 1956 and the Thunder Bay Theater recently celebrated its forty-seventh year. In what capacity did you serve in these groups?

CW: Well, I was an actress first. And I was amazed at how much I enjoyed that. I guess there is a little bit of ham in me, so musicals were light and fun and gave me a chance to be, you know, to be someone I was not, which made me a little more bold. People have said that I tend to do comedy very well. And I sort of slipped from being just a musical person, a person that did musicals, into doing straight plays, non-musicals, but most of the time they were comedies. And then, I was given a chance to do a couple of more serious plays, which I greatly enjoyed.

CK: So initially music...

CW: Drew me into that activity. I've also done quite a bit of directing for them now. And I still can, if I have a good assistant director who will take down my stage

directions for me, because I don't write. I can't pop up on the stage like I used to and say "I want you to turn this way," but if I get the right person to work with me I still could be bossy and direct.

CK: Do you work at both theaters or primarily one?

CW: Well, mostly the Civic Theater because, let's see, I think the first things I ever did at TBT was their 25th anniversary thing, or I just can't remember. Of course I did some TBT things when they were housed at Civic Theater before they moved over and established...it was called Summer Bay Summer Theater.

CK: Oh, I remember that.

CW: Keith Titus and Ginny most of, Keith and Sonya and Ginny, ah, did most of that. So I was in *Fiddler on the Roof* there, for Thunder Bay Summer Theater, I was in *Damned Yankees* as a community person; but then when they moved over, they ah, wanted to employ the professionals, but I use the term loosely because many of them were in college, working on their degrees. Or having just graduated from college and were starting out.

CK: So it wasn't that they necessarily had experience, but were in the field.

CW: Yes, in the field, and thus would be called professional, or setting out to make their living in the theatre and many found out it was a hard way to do that.

CK: So what were some of the serious roles that you had, do you recall?

CW: I recall doing a play several years ago called "The Westside Waltz", and in the movie version, it was Shirley MacLaine who did the role. And, it was about a woman who was a pianist, used to perform, getting older, and it shows her, during the course of the play going from a cane, to a walker, to a wheel chair. And how she lived by herself in a New York apartment, and ah, there was a friend, a single woman, who kind of makes friends with her, in a, let's see, I think you would say the young woman was more eager for a friendship with the pianist, than the pianist was with her. It was just a kind of a "hello, how are you?" but they end up realizing that they, ah the main character, ends up realizing how much she is dependent on this young woman to, for her friendship and her support. And they actually end up being quite endeared to one another which was, I thought, a nice storyline...so, it was a challenge to sort of build this um, this relationship, to the point to which it became at the end of the play.

CK: What part did you play?

CK: I played the Shirley MacLaine part. It was amazing. Chip Lavelly, who was the director of this show, did so much stage work. He actually built a grand piano that

looked darn like a grand piano on the stage and, being a musician myself, the pieces of piano music that were to be played by this woman, ah, I could tell when I had to go down, so people said they actually thought I was playing. So that was good.

CK: You were able to add some believability to it. How was it for you to do the aging process?

CW: Well, I think it was, of course the lines of the play, and how it was written established the changes in her. And physically, I just had to get a little more feeble in my movements and how much I depended on. This young woman was a violinist and so they would often play together. And there is a third character that comes in, a young girl and she is, kind of involves herself somewhat, with the pianist. They have sort of a mother-daughter kind of thing going. And, she ends up getting married and leaving, and that's when the two original friends pull, really pull together.

CK: It's called "The West Side Waltz".

CW: Right.

CK: I'm going to have to check out the movie version, it sounds good.

CW: Oh yes, yeah, yeah.

CK: Were there other memorable roles?

CW: I loved playing in "The Odd Couple" female version. I got to be the neat freak. And ah, a very well known person in Alpena, Sonya Titus, was the Oscar, of the, or was it Oscar that was... Anyway, she was the slob.

CK: Have you two known each other for years?

CW: Oh yeah.

CK: So that probably even made it more fun too.

CW: It was. It was really a lot of fun. And that's the only time I ever did something as crude as belching on stage. I said "That's the lowest I will go, don't ask me anymore."

CK: Any others? I'm guessing you were in a lot over the years?

CW: Well, let's see. Isn't that funny, I just don't...

CK: Or in direction, you did a lot of directing...

CW: Oh I have been very lucky in directing. I directed "Escanaba in da Moonlight."

CK: Oh I saw that!

CW: Our production?

CK: Upstairs at the Civic Theater.

CW: That was me. How five men entrusted their flatulence to me, I'll never know, but, the fellow who played Ranger Tom, who ended up with the Superman shorts on, came one time, and we had just cast the show and he put a CD on my lap and I said "What is that?" and he said "Sixty-three farts." And I said, "Where did you get that?" and he said, "fart.com." And so I kinda laughed and I rolled my eyes and, the next day I said, "We're using number sixteen!" Should I have said that on tape? I don't know. You wanted to talk to me and so here I am.

CK: That's great.

CW: That lives in so many peoples minds, I almost ah, shudder, when people say, "Oh you did that play?" It was tremendous fun, and the Jimmer we had, ah who talked, and you could hardly ever understand him...I think he came into the theater, he was kind of a homeless guy, or, not homeless; but...

CK: Down on his luck.

CW: Yes, down on his luck is a good description. I think he came into the theater to kind of warm up and watch and see what was going on and Evelyn gave him, a, Evelyn Hunter, my assistant said, "You're here, you might as well read." And oh my gosh, was he perfect for the role! Just perfect.

CK: It's so amazing how those things happen.

CW. We ended up as a cast helping him out a couple of times, just because we felt wanted to.

CK: I remember going as a family to see that, and we all, there's hunters in my family, and it was wonderful. I'm glad to know you did it.

CW: Well, it's a little part of Michigan's culture, we'll say.

CK: Still is, still is. And finally, you mentioned before we started the interview today that you are no longer able to play the dulcimer. And you have, can you talk about the condition that you have and how affects both the musical part and your singing?

CW: Oh sure. Several years ago, probably, six or seven years ago, I was diagnosed with a disease called Charcot-Marie-Tooth Syndrome. It is a part of the, it is under the umbrella of the muscular dystrophies and it was named after three doctors that submitted their studies on this particular neurological disorder. My hands have

gotten fairly numb, it is mostly a disease of the extremities. So, I, I am not able to grasp my hammers as firmly as I need to, so my accuracy is, I could probably tap out a song or two; but I don't know, maybe I still will do that, it's kind of a matter of pride, after having done so well with it and then seeing I can't do this anymore. And of course it has affected the support muscles in my abdomen for supporting a good singing tone, it just doesn't happen anymore. I can start a tone, and then it vibrates, or the vibrato. We like to laugh at the old, old, sopranos, that probably should have quit twenty years before they open their mouths again. And so, I sing in church, I can still do that. And sometimes I get frustrated, and um, there's no sense in bemoaning what you used to be able to do, when your health circumstances change, or whatever changes that prevents from you doing- you just are grateful for the gifts the good lord has given you to be able to enjoy those things in the first place. He doesn't bless everybody...

CK: That's true.

CW: ...the way he did me. So, I can, I can be thankful.

CK: And share your stories with us; but are you able, do you, you said you sing in church, there's ways that you can continue to...

CW: Oh, sure. I can still bounce around the house with Captain and Tennille or, you know...

CK I'd like to be a fly on the wall.

CW: Right.

CK: One of the things that you had mentioned was playing the dulcimer well. And, ah, you were given a, you were in a competition, in a dulcimer competition in the 80's.

CW: I did. I won the competition at Ewart, Michigan, which is one of the larger dulcimer festivals in the country. I was the District Seven dulcimer champion. I won a dulcimer, which has ended up being the one I've kept all of this time. It holds its tune through a hurricane, where some are so touchy to the atmosphere in the air. If it is too damp, it will vary. But, this dulcimer was made by a Texan, and boy, it just holds and it has been the one that I've kept.

And as a result of this, I was able to compete in Kansas, I can't think of the name right now of the town. It was the national championships. My goodness, I mean the caliber of players. They were people that made their living doing performances. I was honored to be the person that was sent by our...and it was a fun experience! I had my first shower on a flatbed truck. In this little Kansas town and that was an experience in itself.

CK: How fun just to be able to get the exposure to all of those players.

CW: I mean it was a big, big conference, or umm...

CK: Was it a competition?

CW: Competition. They had not only dulcimer, but they had all kinds of folk instruments that were competing in their categories. I met a lot of interesting people. And some were escapees from the sixties that were still doing the ...

CK: The festival circuit.

CW: Yeah, festival, right. Winfield, Kansas, that's what it was.

CK: There is a lot of space out there in Kansas.

CW: Yes. You could see a thunderstorm coming for a good long ways.

CK: On the bed of the truck...

CW: No, that was, you paid your two bucks, I guess. And they had showers on

CK: Oh it was literally! I imagined it was a rain shower.

CW: Oh no. This was, you paid your two bucks and you took your bar of soap and your towel. They had sectioned it off into stalls and they had a big plastic tarp behind which you could hang your clothes and your towel and you took your soap and pulled the chain, and the water came down, and you sudsed up and you pulled your chain and you rinsed off. The only thing I remember thinking there was a helicopter that kind of flew over, it was pretty high, so I doubted that my face would be on the Alpena News...or anything. I thought, "that was a new experience."

CK: That's great. Music has taken you to a lot of different places.

CW: Right. It has. It's been a blessing in my life.

CK: Well thank you very much for sharing your stories with us. Is there anything you would like to add, anything that I might have glossed over or missed?

CW: I think we've hit the high points of my particular story about my involvement in music. I have loved being involved in the community. I might say that I was also a charter member of the Thunder Bay Arts Council, forty-some years ago. That is still going strong and has grown to where they have their gallery downtown. I was active in getting the fountain, hiring the sculptor and getting the fountain, which was placed at the Museum. That was one of our first projects.

CK: In the front of the museum?

CW: I am now on the board of the Besser Museum; but music didn't necessarily take me there. You talked about involvements in the community so....

CK: And the Arts Council, is it multi-disciplinary? What kind of projects do they undertake?

CW: Yes. They present a concert series every year. They do the Art on the Bay, down here. They have in the last several years opened a gallery for artists that has all kind of media- pottery, beading, woodcarving and painting and different medias.

CK: Is that at the Center Building?

CW: No, that is on Chisholm Street.

CK: Well I better get over there, you can tell I am new to town.

CW: It's a wonderful gallery. In fact I just bought a painting there not too long ago. It was in the museum, it was done by one of our NEMAG, Northeast Michigan Art Guild people, and I had intended to buy it when it was on display at the museum, and just didn't get around to it, then found out that it had been taken to the Thunder Bay Gallery. It's a wonderful place to buy an unusual gift or piece of quality art.

CK: Chisholm and?

CW: Well, I am just trying to think. It's along in there by The Marketplace, I think it might be the next building over, The Marketplace of Alpena between the Owl Café and the...along in there. You will not be sorry you visited there. And we are so lucky to have Art in the Loft as well. We are so lucky.

CK: I have one more question that I thought of when you were talking about the dulcimer...do you have any recordings?

CW: Actually, now that you mention it, we do. I played with a little trio called *Three On a String*, and I can't recall, it was before CD's were the norm.

CK: Probably cassette tape?

CW: It was a cassette tape, but we've had it transcribed onto a CD. So if you'd like to put that in the file I can certainly find one somewhere and get it to you.

CK: That would be wonderful.

CW: And that was just so much fun. We were of the age where I said, "I want to hand...if I'm lucky enough to have grandchildren, to hand it them and say, "This is your grandma." You know, just one. And so, all three of us treasure that, and the

experience of recording. You don't sit in the same room with your fellow players, because the sound technician wants to mix, so that if the dulcimer is too loud...

CK: So there are three dulcimers?

CW: There is a dulcimer, an autoharp, and a bass guitar. So we play some of those fiddle tunes and things that you would have heard back in the days of the lumberjacks and so forth. Plus we have a couple of more contemporary things I think. Oh there are a couple of polkas on there, "Pennsylvania Polka" and a couple of those things.

CK: And who are the other musicians who are with you?

CW: Carole Cadarette and Diane Madsen were the other two.

CK: Okay, I would love to get a copy of that.

CW: Okay, I will make sure that you do.

CK: Okay, I think that is it. Thank you, Carol.

CW: I enjoyed talking. You know, I remembered things in this conversation that have been put on the back burner in my brain.