

Diane Madsen Transcript

CC. We're at the Alpena County Library and the date is November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2015, I'm Carol Cadarette, alongside me, and running the tape recorder and asking questions will be Cindy Kus, and we are interviewing Diane Madsen. Good morning, Di.

DM. Good morning.

CC. Ok. Diane, um, how many years have you been playing music, my friend?

DM. Oh my gosh, about 50 years. Not professionally, but, you know, that's how long ago I started.

CC. Ok, and tell me the story about how you got started.

DM. Well, you know, I was a young bride, my husband played guitar, my husband, Neil, and he practiced a lot. And one day, he had an extra guitar, so I said, "Show me how to play this thing".

So he said, "OK." So he gave me the hardest chord he could find. He said, "Oh, you'll show – " I thought he said, "Oh, you'll never learn it".

About a week, I said, "Ok, I know this one, show me something else". So, I was playing music probably in three, three weeks-with, along with him.

CC. On a six string guitar.

DM. Yes, yes – I played rhythm. And the thing is, he was a lead guitar player, he just wanted someone to play rhythm for him, you know, so that's all I learned.(chuckle) I couldn't pick a tune if my life depended on it, but I know a lot of chords, so. And I enjoy it.

CC. So the bass came into your life again through Neil . . .

DM. Yes (Laughs) – one day he came home and he had this bass and I said, "Oh, that's nice, um . . ."

CK. Like a stand-up bass? No.

DM. No, just an electric, an electric bass. And he said, ah, "I thought you might like to, to play this."

And I said, "Well, I don't know how to play bass", and he said,

"Well, yes, you do, you're the bass player, just . . . just play it." (Laughing)

How? I don't know. But – it didn't take me long because you can play bass if you play guitar you can play a bass. So. I wasn't real good, but I did it.

CC. Well, you've, you have over the years – and how long has it been, Di - Diane, that you've been playing bass guitar?

DM. Oh, probably . . . 35 . . . years.

CC. Ok, ok. That happened when you moved to Alpena?

DM. Yes. Yes. It did.

CC. Originally you were from where, Diane?

DM. Brimley, Michigan in The U.P. Yes.

CK. You were born in Brimley?

DM. Yes. Well, I . . . yeah. My folks lived there when we were born. Mm hm.

CK. I haven't met anybody who is actually from there, it's probably a much bigger place than it was when you . . .

DM. I . . . you know, I don't think so.

CK. No?

DM. It's got a little more notoriety because the casino is there, and more people drive through it, but basically the population is about the same. Yeah.

CK. And how did you end up in Alpena?

DM. Well, my husband worked for the, ah, telephone company in Brimley at the Bomarc base, and they went out of business, so he had to look for a new biz, ah, a new job, so he found one here with General Telephone, so that's why we moved here.

CK. What year was that?

DM. 1972

CK. Ok.

CC. Yup. Um, did you start playing music then, right here, music scene here in Alpena? Almost immediately, teamed up with some of the locals, or -?

DM. What we did, we played with uh, we had kind of a basement band. We played, we would get together, sometimes it was like six, seven hours we'd play music. The kids would, – their kids and, you know, they'd be off, they'd have lunch, and start playing again. It would be Naomi Thompson and her husband, Jack Thompson, Carol King, uh, and myself and Neil, and we, you know basement bands, they tend to want to play out, so we played at Beaver Lake Bar – that's been a long time ago. And then, shortly after that, Neil and I just started playing just the two of us. Um, and we played a lot of parties, we played like, parties for, um, the Eagles Club, the Cycle Club, we played that, we played graduation parties, and you know, a few weddings.

CC. Ok.

DM. Before . . . And then, um, then we started playing in bars.

CC. Ok.

DM. Then we added Dick Laney to our-

CC. As the drummer.

DM. As the drummer, and that made life so much easier, playing two pieces – very difficult.

CC. Yeah, yeah.

DM. Yeah.

CC. So, something – can you name – you’ve named a few, a few of the places you’ve played, uh, private parties, uh, and you named at least one of the bars you played in, and the Eagles Club – in Beaver Lake, is that what you said?

DM. Yes. Yep.

CC. Um, There must’ve been a lot more . . .

DM. Oh, oh yeah.

CC. . . . in Alpena and around the outside.

DM. That’s just when we started. Yeah.

CC. Ok.

DM. Uh huh. Oh, where’d we play . . . one of the worst jobs was we drove to Tally’s down in Lewiston. Uh . . .

CC. Talley’s in Lewiston.

DM. Friday and Saturday night, we played two piece there. That’s kind of . . . ridiculous.

CC. And all this time you were raisin’ children-

DM: Oh yeah.

CC: - and getting’ sitters to watch, sure, ‘cause they were fairly close in age, if I remember correctly.

DM. Yes they were. Yeah. Yeah, at one time we were playing at Talley’s, Neil would have to work Saturdays at 7:30, so he’d have to be up early, 7 on Saturdays, and then on Sundays our kids would have to have them to CCD at 9:00 in the morning, so it was really difficult, but it was fun.

CC. You made it through.

DM. Yes. Mm hm.

CC. Ok. So, you’ve named uh, um, for sure, there was two names that I did not recognize, but I do recognize Dick Laney. Any other names come to mind?

DM. Oh, yes. Then we started playing with Big Sam.

CC. Yeah.

DM. (Chuckles) Big Sam Smith. Ah, he played rhythm, and I was playing bass by that time. And Neil was playing lead . . . we played a lot. We did a lot of parties, and we played at the, uh, DAV north of town - is that what it is?

CC. North of town, yeah.

DM. Yes. Played there for a while, ah, and it was fun. He was so much fun to play with, you know?

CC. Yeah, he was.

DM. Yes.

CK. Big -?

DM. Big Sam.

CC. Big Sam Smith was his name.

CK. Wh - Where'd you come across him? Was he playing on his own? Or –

DM. Oh, yeah, he's been around for - for a long . . .

CC. Yeah.

DM. He was a character.

CC. He was a character and, uh, I - I don't want to take up her interview, but let me remind you what he would say to you when he would call you and ask if he could hire you – what else did he need?

DM. (Laughing) One day, he called up and – I think he talked to Neil – he said, “Well, I have this job at, uh, Corner Bar” – and it was a Sunday afternoon and he said – “Neil, could you play lead for me?”

Neil said, ah, “Yeah, I guess so. So, well, can - do the boys play any music?” – because my son, Bob, played bass and my son Peter played drums, and he said, “Yeah, I guess so, they wouldn't mind. Sure.” So he said, “Well, I don't . . . Do you have a P.A. system? I don't have any P.A. system”. Neil says, “Well, yeah, I guess so, we could do that . . .”

He says, “By the way, do you have an amp (Laughing) for my guitar . . .”

CC. That was typical Sam.

DM. Yeah. He had the job, that's all he had. He did have his guitar. So . . . but we did have a good time that day.

CK. So Sam's no longer with us?

DM. No, he's not.

CC. No.

CK. Is there any else – anything else you could share, 'cause . . .

CC. I could share – I would be more than willing to share, as - as I'm sure Diane would, if you want – if we want to do something about Sam. I actually have a recording that I made with him.

CK. Ok.

DM. I believe I do, too.

CK. We could put him up there. He – he was a central character around here that most all of us that played country –

DM. Oh, yes.

CK. Knew. If you didn't play country, they usually didn't know him, but – yeah.

DM. He loved to go and sit in – like a Sunday afternoon, sittin’ in a bar with just his guitar, and then somebody’d come in and sit in with him, and pretty soon you had five, six people there. It was fun.

CC. Mm hm. My whole family. Our whole families.

DM. Yeah.

CC. So he was a central character, for sure, in Alpena. Glad you brought his name up, uh, Diane. Did ya have any, any – you had “Three’s Company”, did you and Neil have a specific name? For your band? Or just . . .

DM. We started out as “Two’s Company.”

CC. “Two’s Company”, and then you went “Three’s Company”?

DM. Yes, and then - that’s when we added Dick Laney, and then we added Larry Golbeck and we didn’t change it, but we played four piece for quite a while.

CC. Ok.

DM. Larry was a great steel player.

CC. Yeah, yeah.

DM. So . . . it was . . .

CC. Uh, any other band names come to mind?

DM. Oh, let me check here!

CC. I know you had a lot of ‘em.

DM. Well, “Three On a String”, I played with them.

CC: Yep.

DM. How long did we play?

CC. We were, we started in about 1990 and went to . . . fifteen years?

DM. Yeah, probably fifteen years. And that was Carol-

CC. Yeah, Carol Witherbee

DM. And Carole Cadarette, and myself.

CC. Yeah.

DM. Yeah, we played

CC. A whole new style of music for you, Diane

DM. Oh, yes. Totally different.

CC. I do remember the day that you tried out.

DM. (Laughing) Oh, you do?!

CC. I remember it like it was yesterday.

DM. Yes, I believe I was shaking a little bit.

CC. But you hadn't played in a long time.

DM. Right. And besides that, I'd never played music with anybody except Neil, and so I was ah, I didn't know that I could set in with somebody else – and it worked out really well. And another time, I went to play with another band – they asked if I could sit in with them, they needed a bass player and I said, "I don't know, I've never played with another band."

He said, "If you can follow Neil, you can follow anybody", so . . .

CC. True, very true.

DM. That put me at ease a little bit. And it was fun, then I started playing with a lot of different – if they needed a bass player.

CC. Yeah. I think – I think a lot of your time on the bass, uh, Diane – am I right? – was taken exactly with that, somebody needed a bass player, it was either an organized band or not, and you would step in and do that.

DM. Right, right. And I - and I enjoyed that. You learn a lot doing it that way, you know?

CC. Absolutely.

DM. A lot of different songs, a lot of different styles, so . . .

CC. I guess the term for it is really not "jam session", but, uh, "oops, we got a gig to do, and somebody's sick, and we need a fill-in bass player" and Diane was the go-to girl to get someone to play, to step in and play. She was the go-to. I mean, for lack of another word.

DM. Right. Well, people used to call if they needed a lead player or, and you know, my sons played drums, one played bass, and I played bass – they'd call if they needed a, ah, it's known as a 'side-man'

CC. They're still doing it- as of this day.

DM. Yeah. Right. They'd call, and if we were busy, I usually try to know who was available that was . . . so.

CC. You made recommendations.

DM. Oh, yes. A lot of times.

CC. Well, I know that you, as in between "Three on a String", there was "Ladies' Choice" –

DM. Right.

CC. We went out and did a few gigs together, an all-girl band . . . all girl group.

CK. Who was in that?

DM. Again, there was Carole Cadarette, and Luanne Jerome, and Caroline Egelski and myself. And sometimes . . .

CK. Ladies' Night Out?

CC. Ladies' Choice

CK. Oh, Ladies' Choice.

CC. Ladies' Choice.

DM. And sometimes Marion Cadarette would join us, that was Caroline's daughter.

CC. Yup.

DM. A very good singer.

CC. Yup.

DM. That was – that was another fun time, too.

CC. It was. We'll someday get her in here when she comes home. So in between there, in between "Three on a String" and "Ladies' Choice" was happening about the same time, Diane. In between there was a lot of people calling, am I right? For you, calling because they needed a bass player, whatever they might need – uh, I'm thinking about right now, and I know the name of the group you play with now.

DM. Well, there was another one that, in there between, I played a lot with the Versatones polka band. Frank Malenski, my husband played lead for him, so . . . and Al Zdan played bass, so he went to Mexico every winter-

CC. Yep.

DM. - two or three months, so I played for him, so I played all winter with the Versatones, and that went about three years. So, learned a lot of polkas, and that was fun, too.

CC. Right next the - The Armory, the Versatones used to put on parties.

DM. Music parties.

CC. Music parties, and they would line the bands up, and there'd be constant, solid music going, and The Armory, which I know for a fact can hold a thousand people would be pushin' 'er.

DM. Yeah.

CC. It'd be full. That's what we used to do, way back in the day - and not that long ago, really.

CK. Can you put a year on it?

CC. Uuum, in the 1990s.

DM. Yes.

CC. In the 1990s, uh, early, late 80s to early – yeah, that’s what I remember. Ah, maybe even earlier than that. I can remember “Three on a String” goin’ in and settin’ in with my brother’s bands. Uh, it was amazing, what was available here in Alpena and what we were doin’. Yep, yep.

DM. So that was another interesting part – you know it was another part of my education in music, playing polkas-

CC. Yep.

DM. -which I still enjoy.

CC. Which wasn’t – do you think, Diane, it was much of a – much of a step over to play then what “Three on a String” was doing?

DM. No, I don’t think so.

CC. It was just faster.

DM. Yeah.

CC. What we did was faster.

DM. Yes, oh, yes, definitely. Carol always goes - went 50 miles an hour. (Laughing)

CK. Still does.

DM. (Laughing) Yeah.

CC. Did we both learn to be a whole lot more organized musicians –

DM. Oh, yes.

CC. with Carol Witherbee?

DM. Yes, we did.

CC. Yes, we did.

DM. Yes.

CC. Yeah. We were – and I think, Diane, when we come – was there anymore in between, before we get to today?

DM. Let me check, here . . . let me see if I can . . . mm, not that I can think of.

CC. Well, now we’re to the practiced and polished group –

DM. Oh.

CC. I think we were practiced and polished, “Three on a String”.

DM. Yes, we were.

CC. The group you play with today is practiced and polished, that’s what – I mean, that’s not to take away from anything, you guys know exactly what you’re doing, how you’re doing it and-



DM. Well, we play so much.

CC. Exactly, and that would be Music for You.

DM. We play sometimes three and four times a week. We only play mostly maybe an hour, and, uh, if you do that, it's like practicing, you're – you gotta be good. (laughs)

CC. Yeah. Do you have a practice day, or -?

DM. Once in a while, if we're learning something new. The other day we played with, um, – uh, we had MaryAnn Hubbard come - come in and pra-, we practiced with her, because we're going to play Sunday at the, uh, Friends and Flute at the Trinity Episcopal Church. So, and we've played with MaryAnn before, and she does an excellent job – it's, it's amazing what the flute and the fiddle, they sound like together. It's wonderful.

CC. Your style of music, Diane?

DM. Oh -

CC. Every style you've played. I think.

DM. I have, yeah.

CC. Country . . .

DM. I prefer country, I - because it was what I played for a long time, but – polka, um . . .

CC. (whispers) folk

DM. Folk music, oh yes, definitely.

CC. Bluegrass?

DM. Oh, yes.

CC. You've played bluegrass . . .

DM. Oh, yeah, still do. Play a lot of bluegrass now. And some pop music, and we used to play light rock

CC. Mm hm

DM. So . . .

CC. Just about everything.

DM. Yep.

CC. Yep. Ok, over the years, do you think that music is evolved? Your music and music in general?

DM. Music in general, I think it's gone – country music I think has gone downhill, I believe. I – I really feel that way. Used to be nice, mellow, cheatin' heart stuff (laughs)

CC. Yeah, yep

DM. but . . . it's more upbeat and screaming, as I refer to it.

CC. Where do you think country music started changing? With any particular performer?

DM. Oh

CC. Or year, or -?

DM. Hm. Kenny Rogers changed things. He was a crossover, wasn't he?

CC. Yes.

DM. 'Cause he started playing with the First Edition.

CC. Yeah.

DM. And I . . .

CC. He was a crossover.

DM. Right. He did some really nice country, though.

CC. Yes, he did.

DM. But more and more artists started doing that crossover, and . . .

CC. Yeah. I felt like it was Garth Brooks

DM. Probably. Talk about a screamer. (laughs)

CC. Yeah, I know. I know. Uh, ok. So, thinking about, what were your influences in, in – was it Neil, was it Sam, was it all of that, all of the above?

DM. It was all of it. You know, of course it was Neil, because he and I played together, he taught me . . .  
uh

CC. Did your mother and Dad, or any of your siblings?

DM. No. Nobody played.

CC. Ok.

DM. My mother died when she was like 56 and before I started playing, and she would have loved it because she did, she really enjoyed music, and so . . .

CC. Ok.

DM. But, mostly Neil. But you know, you're influenced by everybody you play with – every group you play with, every person. You know, I've been influenced by you, by Carol, eh, Caroline also, Sam, Greg – this is a big change for me, now, doing a lot - we're doing a lot of John Denver, but we do a big variety of music, we try to do a little bit of everything, so.

CC. My understanding is, from what Greg said and . . .and uh, I'm sure you've seen it – where you'll add to your repertoire because somebody's asked for something, and you may not do it right away, but eventually, if they ask enough times, you're gonna do it, because obviously you need to, right?

DM. Oh, yes. Yes.

CC. Ok. Places to perform . . .

DM. Oh, dear.

CC. Back then and now.

DM. Oh, back then. Well, there were a lot of places to play – every bar and dance, and (coughs) – excuse me - every Saturday night there was a wedding party to play for, you know, and they all had bands um . . . graduation parties, a lot of things. But at the time when we were playing the Eagles Club, there was the music at Club 32 – what was it called then?

CC. Jack's Bar, at one point.

DM. Oh, I'm -- that's before-

CC. Am I going back too far?

DM. -that's before my time. (Laughs) But anyway, there was music there, and at the Adobe Room, 19th Hole had music - I don't know what they were called then . . .

CK. Twin Acres?

DM. Twin Acres, yes.

CC. Twin Acres. And the ones over – uh, they call - ended up callin' it Red Piano, and whatever – the bar that's The Corner Bar.

DM. The Corner Bar.

CC. They had a band.

DM. The Hideaway.

CC. Hideaway.

DM. So, you know, there were a lot of places, and . . . a lot of places to play, and most of those places had music every weekend.

CC. Every weekend, yeah. Every Friday and Saturday and sometime on Sunday.

DM. Right, right.

CC. And now, Diane?

DM. Now, let me see . . . Maplewood has music. (Laughter) That's about it. And in the winter, well – I don't know, does the Holiday Inn have music? I think it's karaoke, maybe.

CC. There is where it really started to change for us, Diane.

DM. Right. Right.

CC. I've never said it, but I'll say it now. Because I never thought about it, but it changed with the advent of karaoke.

DM. Right.

CC. And with the disc jockeys.

DM. The disc jockeys, oh yeah.

CC. They can now, they can now um – go out and play what it used to take maybe three, four, five, six musicians. They go out and play the gig, and they're getting paid well for it.

DM. Oh, yes.

CC. More than what we can get as a live band.

CK. Mm hm.

DM. Yes. So all they needed is a good PA system - and well, they have an investment there, in the PA and all the discs that they have. But, yeah, that was the big - the biggie. You know, and weddings, strictly DJs now.

CC. Yep. 'Cause the bride and groom pick specific music that they want, and you can bring it up right easy, and, you know - so . . .

DM. And when I played with the Versatones, we used to play every weekend – we played weddings.

CC. Yes.

DM. And we weren't the only wedding band in town.

CC. No.

DM. So, it's interesting. So there are . . . Where do you go to hear country music now?

CC. Maplewood.

DM. Maplewood – and not in the winter.

CC. And not in the winter. So. What ya end up doing is what we end up doing, is we go out to somebody's house and have a jam session. Just to keep our fingers in it and - and keep our sanity, because when we're not playin' music, right –

DM. Right. (Laughs)

CC. Everybody's in trouble. (Laughter)

DM. I am getting my – uh, I do

CC. You are getting your fix a lot - every week you are, with playing with Greg, yes.

DM. I am. I would love to play, the hard part is setting up and tearing down, setting up and tearing down, you know, but . . .

CK. Where do you play, now?

DM. We play at – every Monday we play at Turning Brook in the Alzheimer's building.

CK. Mmhuh.

DM. And once a week, Mon --, we play in building two for them, and we go once a month to Greenview, and ah, sometimes we go to – what's the other one? Tendercare.

CC. Tendercare, yeah.

DM. And . . . where? We play a lot. Oh, we go over to one on Wilson Street.

CC. Ah, the big building? Or the -?

DM. Yeah

CC. Ok.

DM. The apartments over there – Luther Manor.

CC. Luther Manor. Ok.

DM. And that's the type of thing. And we never turn anybody down, we play for everybody.

CC. Yeah, I know.

DM. So we get a lot of playing in.

CC. And that is not paid.

DM. No, no.

CC. Seldom is it paid.

DM. Once in a while we get . . .

CC. Yeah, once in a while, or you get dinner, or whatever.

DM. Yeah, I'd say we've gone to the, uh, cookies and tea portion of . . .

CC. Yeah. Yeah. You, uh, you want to talk to us a little bit about, uh, uh, you and Neil's, um, children? That they've - how many of your kids have taken on the music scene?

DM. Well, we have five kids, and two of our boys play. Bob plays bass, he's our oldest son, and Peter, our next oldest, and he plays drums. Aaand . . .

CC. He can play bass also-

DM. Oh, yes, he can. And Bob can play drums, too.

CC. Yeah, they can switch back and forth.

DM. Right, yes they can do that. And, uh, very good singers. And right now they're playing with Danny Hartman, so. But sometimes they play with Danny Ager and Lloyd Douglas, and that's a fun band to listen to. They are. Really fun.

CC. The Damm Band.

DM. The Damm Band, yeah.

CC. D-A-M-M.

DM. Yep.

CC. And another generation?

DM. Yeah, my grandson plays, CJ, that's Bob's son. He is an excellent drummer, and an excellent guitar player. So, I'm looking forward to see where that takes him.

CK. How did your sons get their music education?

DM. Well, they didn't listen to anything we told them. (Laughter) We had drums and amplifiers set up in our family room, which is outside of my kitchen. Um, and they just basically taught themselves. Now, the only thing my husband did, he wrote on the wall, he put a picture of this guitar and he named every note – he said, that's the only thing he insisted, was that you learned to know – you knew what chord you were playing in, uh, yep, and they did.

CK. Were they involved in music in the school system at all?

DM. Nope. No.

CK. It was all self-taught.

DM. Yes, mostly.

CK. Mostly?

DM. Yeah, and then they'd have – I remember Pete had a band that would come over on Tuesday after school. They were loud, very, very loud. Uh, jeepers. Roy Damrose and Paul Wisniewski, which have both - both of them have passed. And there was one other which I don't remember now, but one day they were so loud, and I said, you guys have to turn that down, you know, that's not good – we have neighbors. So they turned it down for a minute, and then it was right back up. So I went out and I hit the, uh, switch, turned the power off in the garage, and they split just like that. Bam! (Laughter) And they never came over again.

CC. Yeah, they do have close neighbors by them.

DM. Yes, yes. And they were always very good, you know, because the boys were very good about not playing late.

CK. Mm hm.

DM. And my daughter said, "You know Mom, we're probably the only kids that had to tell our folks to turn the music down so we could do our homework" (Laughter) when we would practice. So.

CC. It was definitely a house filled with music - that I remember.

DM. Oh, yes.

CC. But I do remember that before either one of those - your sons - played music, I remember 'em not - and they were roadies.

DM. Oh, yes. Yes they were.

CC. For - for their dad's band. They were roadies. They would haul the heavy equipment in, set it up at the Armory.

DM. And they would run the lights for - for them. And, uh, well, that was sometimes their only incomes, you know, when they were, before they started playing.

CC. Sure. Well, Diane, is there any other special memories? Uh, ah, I'm thinking about, uh - we talked about Sam, and we talked about your children and music in the garage - um, any other special things with Neil, or ?

DM. No. He was easy to work with, but sometimes he was a little bit difficult, but we always had a good time, he could always make me laugh.

CC. He was a funny man. Her husband, Neil, was a funny man and he could parody a song right off the top of his shoulders. I mean, right out, right now. He could parody anything that he knew the melody to and the words were there and he could just parody it and - and everybody'd be laughing so hard, they'd about fall on the floor, he was so funny.

DM. Right, then they'd say "can you do that again"? Well, heck no, he couldn't remember what he'd just done.

CC. Special memories, of which you and I have a lot of 'em, too.

DM. I have way too many, I think, I don't remember anything in particular. (laughs)

CC. Ok.

CK. Do you have any involvement with the Thunder Bay Folk Society? Are you involved in that at all?

DM. We played for . . . this past, what - three weeks ago, we played there.

CK. Ok.

DM. But that was it.

CK. The festival.

DM. Yeah, the festival. Yeah.

CC. Well, Diane, thank you very much for coming and helping us out here, with what I think is going to be one of the most wonderful projects the, uh, Alpena County Library has taken on - I hope you can see that right now. Um, anything that you'd like to add later, I'm sure Cindy'd be open to that, and, ah - thank you very much.

DM. Oh, you're welcome, it's been fun.

CK. Thanks, Diane.

DM. Thanks, Cindy.

CK. Nice to meet you.

DM. Thanks, Carole.