

Clint Kirchoff Interview – August 28, 2017

CC: The date is August 28<sup>th</sup>, 2017 and we're at the home of Mr. Clint Kirchoff on Golf Course Road, here in Alpena, Michigan. Here with us, is his daughter, Sue Kirchoff Suszek and his son, Gary Kirchoff. With me also is Cindy Kus, and I'm Carole Cadarette.

Gonna start out by asking Clint questions about his long, long career in the music scene here in Alpena. Ah, he started out as a very young man, right? Or was ya, would you consider yourself a child?

CK: I would say I was, at the time I was about 10 years old, and I was given my first accordion from the Norwegian people out in Leer- presented this old accordion to me. It wasn't much good; but it was something for me to get started on anyhow, so- and that's the first accordion I ever got. It's an old button type accordion, is what the name of it was.

CC: Okay, and do you, did you, at that time, were you playin' music with your family?

CK: Oh no, that was my first, that was my first episode with, never had any-

CC: Okay.

CK: Never had any music, that's the first... that was my first accordion.

CC: Did you play music with your father?

CK: Yes, and then after that my dad invested in another accordion, a large accordion, that was a smaller accordion and then I got a larger accordion, and that was a 48, or 12 bass accordion, and that wasn't big enough, so he got me another, a 48 bass accordion.

CC: Okay.

CK: So at the time then, a few wedding dances come out, and I remember the first dance that we played at, it was out in Leer there. My dad and I and George Lewis, he was the guitar player. So I went out there, and I'll tell you what I made- I made four dollars. And I was really a rich boy.

(Laughter)

CK: After making all that money- of course my dad made, possibly about the same thing, so- it was very nice.

CC: That was your first instrument- the accordion; but I think you-

CK: That is correct. And then after that, I was still in high school, and then I, I took a years piano lessons from Mrs. Douville- That used to have the old Douville-

CKus: Bakery.

CK: Bakery, that is correct, yeah. It was located on North Second Avenue, right upstairs there –

CC: So, you actually learned to read notes then.

CK: Yeah, I did, I take a years piano lessons on the accord-, or on the piano. Mmhh.

CC: Okay.

SS: You had a lot, a lot of experiences playing with your dad- where did you play?

CK: Oh golly, ah, different, different wedding dances, I played at the, several dances out at ah, out at Ossineke, the old Ossineke Hall out there. At the time, they were still opening up the old Ossineke Hall- they got a new hall out there now. But there were several people got married that one summer. That was a year before, I think, I went sailing, I started sailing in 1949- on the cement boats. So then ah, as time went on, we played at different places-

GK: Long Rapids Hall?

CK: Long Rapids Hall, there was many, we played many weddings out there, also too, so...

SS: Wilson Hall, Eagles...

CK: Wilson Hall, yeah, a lot of birthday parties.

CC: I know you were always kept busy, especially when you were off the boats, when they were laid up for the winter.

CK: Correct, and then later on, I was laid up in the wintertime, we played up at Rogers City, I played with the Cadarette Boys. Your Uncle Don and your Father, Henry. Played up there-

CC: Where at Rogers City? Do you remember?

CK: Kelly's, I think it used to be Kelly's up there at the time.

CC: Red Top?

CK: Red Top- that is correct, yes. Mmmhh.

CKus: Did you ever play accordion on the boat?

CK: Oh, we had accordion, we always had a little band going on the boats. Going down the river you know, if I was off duty, we'd get, if it was a nice afternoon, nice evening, we'd get, we had three or four piece, you know, we all got –

CKus: Instruments, yeah.

CK: Correct, we all got together and played. Of course we had music going right along the side of us, they wanted to hear our music, so they were travelling right along side of us, You know, going down the river-

CKus: Wow.

CK: St. Claire River, Detroit River. So that was quite educational too, so.

SS: Did you play at Bolton Bar, didn't you tell us kids that?

CK: Yes. Bolton Bar, too.

SS: And who was in that band, do you remember?

CK: Oh geez. Quite a few of them, four, five, six of us.

SS: I thought you talked to us kids about-

CK: But was a little bit too young, so. Cap Wixom, he was president of the, The Boys-

CC: The Boy's Club.

CK: - the Boy Scouts. He said, "You're a little bit too young to be playing out there," so, I never played any more out there. So that was the end of that. (Laughter)

CC: How old were you- that you were too young?

CK: Oh, I don't know- sixteen, seventeen, something like that,

CC: That would have been the old Bolton, before –

CK: That is correct.

SS: You mentioned, you mentioned the name of Barney Morey....

CK: Barney Morey, yeah he was the headman, Jack Hepburn, a different one, Tom Hepburn, yep-

SS: And something, you told us kids before about The Madcaps,

CK: That is, that was their name. Their name was The Madcaps at the time.

SS: Ok.

GK: The Hepburns.

CK: Yep.

CC: Clint, would I be wrong in saying that because you were on the boats, and you were gone a lot, that at times rather than being in what was kind of an organized band, when you were in town, they'd hire you on, or get you to come and play with them.

CK: Oh certainly, absolutely.

CC: I remember it that way.

CK: And then several times we played out the Maplewood, out there, you know, with your, your dad and your Uncle. A few other sit-ins that we had out there, you know, so.

CKus: And for you, was it always the accordion? Was that your instrument?

CK: Well, I played, I had that year on the piano, lessons on the piano and I, I played some old square dance pieces out at, at the old Bolton, but I played the piano at the time. Because the piano went in with the fiddle and the guitar and all that stuff. So that worked out very good.

CC: You played a little bit of fiddle yourself.

CK: Yeah, very little. Fiddle a little bit, little bit too tough for me, so.

SS: And you also talked to us kids about playing one night a week on WATZ radio.

CK: Oh yeah, and maybe before all this happened, I played over the radio with Bud Davis. Bud Davis had the old O.K. Ranch Boys out there. So it was one night a week we played out there. Not one night a week, it was one morning a week. Yeah, I think I was in high school at the time.

CC: They taped it and put it on-

CK: Correct.

CC: - or did you do live?

CK: No, it was live. Actually, it was live music. We played right there.

CC: We're talking 1940's here?

CK: Yeah, I was in high school, '49, '50, somewhere in there. '48 maybe, cuz I graduated in '49.

CKus: It would be wonderful to hear recordings of that, if they had them anywhere.

CC: Well, you've named a lot of musicians Clint, ah, and I think we've established that you was probably, would slide right in there with the already established bands when you were in town, um, is there any other names that come to mind besides those, that you've already named?

CK: Not at the present time. I don't know if I mentioned that Busty String Band, but I didn't play very much out there, they played at the ----on the 32 out there.

SS: Little Town Lounge?

CC: Jack's Bar?

CK: No, where they're playing out there now- what's the name of the place?

SS: Little Town Lounge.

CK: Little Town Lounge. But that was, very few times I played out there.

CKus: You mentioned Saul Saretsky?

CC: Yeah, Saul Saretsky, we were in high school about the same time, yes. He was a drummer; he was always a drummer around town a very nice man, yeah. A lot of those old timers have passed away already, so....

SS: And during the holidays, he played for Christmas, every Christmas-

CK: Oh yeah, we always had a house full here, you know?

SS: Christmas music...

CK: Yeah.

CC: Well, over the years, things haven't not really evolved that far with your music, you, you went from a, a, from a unamplified accordion, to an amplified accordion-

CK: That is correct- yeah.

CC: You never played a cordovox, you always played an amplified accordion.

CK: Yeah, I can play a cordovox, if, ah, somebody put one in front of me, I could do that, yeah; but my accordion is all electrified, you know, so-

CC: Mmhuh.

CK: Yep.

CC: If you had to say what style of music you played Clint, could you put a style name on it, or...?

CK: I would say mostly country music. It's mostly country music. That's what I was always interested in.

CC: I think there's some polkas in there, don't you?

GK: I was just gonna say-

CK: A lot of polkas, yeah, I was always into the polkas.

CC: Polkas and waltzes and obereks.

CK: That is correct.

CC: I'd say you're pretty versatile, Clint.

CK: That is correct, yeah.

CC: Some easy listening-

CK: And then I played some at Posen when they had some of their anniversaries there, yeah, I played some of the parties there too, so. With different people, of course.

CC: Think of places that you performed back then, and now, today, have things changed a lot?

CK: Very much so. Very much so. The music has changed, and ah... More up to date. I'm kind of one of the old timers from way back, you know, so. And I play most of that stuff, mostly today when I do play.

SS: But he does enjoy watching a person that's just starting out on an instrument. He likes to watch them learn an instrument. My sister tried to learn the guitar, wasn't it?

CK: Yeah.

SS: And you helped her a little bit with that.

CK: Audrey, yeah.

CC: So did any of your children move on to music along with you, or did they just kind of?

CK: Well they tried it. They didn't get too far into the music business, so they both dropped it.

(Laughter)

CC: Did they figure out there wasn't too much pay?

CK: The pay wasn't that great, no. They weren't too satisfied with the pay so.

SS: We figured out that our father played faster than we did.  
(Laughter)

CC: Alright. Is there any, any, ah, special memories, special stories, that come to mind, probably without usin' names, that come to mind for you, as far as something special that might have happened...surprises along the way.

CK: Not by playing, everything always went very well with us, you know. I made sure I knew who I was playin' with, you know, they was all nice fellas, all good musicians. And I enjoyed it very much, you know so-

CKus: Did you travel at all, did you go outside of the area?

CK: No. No, always right around this area here. Yes, maam.

CC: Could I tell a little story about Clint?

CK: I'd appreciate it if you would. Go ahead.

CC: We talked about Clint, about you being gone a lot in the summertime; but I can remember it would be great excitement at Maplewood when Clint got into town. How they ever found out that you were in town, I'll not know. But my Father and my Uncle would put their heads together and forever the amount of time that he could give us out at, at Maplewood or someone's house, we always called Clint and got him

to play a little bit, ah, of music. And ah, he always was kind enough to do that, course that left your kids and Winnie at home; but sometimes they came with ya.

CK: Yes, maam. That is correct.

CC: It was great excitement for me, and I got, I tell ya, this man, Clint Kirchoff is the reason why I wanted to play an accordion. And I got mine when I was fourteen years old and I still have it and Clint has played it on occasion. He'd like to have it, I think. But he's the reason why I wanted to play an accordion. And I did, in a family band. So-

CK: Yeah, that's true.

CC: So in other words, Clint has played music with my dad, and now with me and my brother.

CK: And your uncle.

CC: My uncle.

CK: Uncle, yeah.

SS: I think you played a total of seven decades of music dad.

CK: Is that right?

SS: Yes.

CC: Seven decades!

GK: You might want to mention him playing at the nursing homes a lot.

CK: Oh, I played several times at the nursing homes for the elderly people too, so.

CC: A lot.

CK: Quite a bit.

GK: A lot at the nursing homes.

CC: Much and, much today.

CK: And then there, I still sat in eventually with bands that they had over there, they give me a call, ask me if I'd help them out, I'd say sure, certainly, I'd be glad to.

CKus: Yeah, that seems like that is some of the most meaningful.



CK: Correct.

GK: Yeah, people there enjoy it...

CK: And the elderly they people really enjoy it. You get 'em out there dancing and having a good time, you know, so. And I enjoyed it too- I still do. You know, like I say, I don't do much as I used to, occasionally, I go over there and play. So-

SS: But I think a lot-

CK: Kind of made the rounds.

SS: I think our, our whole, our family has a lot of good memories of dad playing in the back, he has his piano in the back room. We'd walk in the house and hear him playing the piano and, music is always very uplifting for our family.

CK: Correct, yeah.

CKus: And probably, instilled an appreciation of music.

SS: It is, it is.

CK: Certainly, certainly.

SS: And even now, during the holidays, it's just not the same without him playing the accordion or piano for a few tunes, you know, so...

I think dad, you should talk a little bit about the story that you told us various times about when you played with Grandpa Kirchoff and Aunt Viv out at Wilson Hall and you played out there for a wedding and Aunt Viv was a little bit slow on the piano, and you were, had to call out the chords to her.

CK: Well sometimes Aunt Viv didn't know the changes, you know, making the tune sound properly, and I'd say "Viv, you got to go G to C, C to D" and all that stuff, you know. Tell her the changes, you know. She got used to it and everything went fine after that, so.

CC: Well let me tell you, today there are musicians that he's introducing that kind of idea to. He'll play a song in one key, and he'll change it to another key and so, that's being taught yet today. (Laughter) As a bass player, way back when I started to play bass, I said, "I will think I know how to play bass when I can play with Clint and keep up with him."

CK: You just made my day there, Carole. (Laughter)

SS: I guess I have another story, when we were, um, us kids were in ah, third, fourth and fifth grade, my sister and I took, (TELEPHONE RINGS) and I was playing the flute. We were, my sister and I were in the fourth and fifth grade and we, I started taking flute lessons, my sister started taking clarinet lessons, and my cousins were playing horn instruments. And we had the neighbor kids also playing horn instruments. And, it was, we're all, like I said fourth, fifth, fifth grade, well we all came over here, and my mother, um, tried to have all of us kids get together and have my dad accompany us on playing *America the Beautiful*. Well, it didn't work so well with my dad playing *America the Beautiful* with seven kids in the fourth and fifth grade; but he tried. It was a good memory.

CC: A good memory, for sure.

CK: Certainly.

CKus: So there are some other Kirchoff's' that play music, is that true?

CK: They're all my relatives, yep, mmhuh.

CKus: Okay.

CK: They're my cousin's children, yep.

CKus: Okay.

CK: Their father was a musician too, Alfred.

CKus: And that's your brother?

CK: No, he would be, their father would be my cousin.

CKus: Your cousin.

CK: That is correct.

CKus: Oh, okay. And how many children do you have.

CK: Three. I have three children.

CKus: Gary, Sue and Audrey.

CC: If there's anything else you'd like to add, Clint, we'd, we'd love to hear it.

CK: Gee, I think...

CC: Otherwise, we'll thank you very much for giving us an insight to your life and music, ah, and we'll say that we're glad that you got over the period of time, twelve accordions, and you've ended up with a really good one. So sir, thank you very much for doing this.

CK: Well thank you, thank you all for coming over and convening here with me. I appreciated it very much too.

(RECORDER IS TURNED OFF, THEN TURNED ON AGAIN)

SS: I think you can sing a few tunes of that.

CK: Oh no, I don't want to get into that. But my old favorite, everybody likes to hear that old *Bummin' Around*, and I still play it, you know, so-

CC: Key of C.

CK: Yeah, they wonder what key it's in, I say "Key of C," so they all know, so now I sing that song.

CKus: It's called *Bummin' Around*?

CK: *Bummin' Around*. That was my old favorite, you know.

CKus: Who, who made it popular?

CK: I can't think of the fellow's name now. I can't think of it right now.

SS: Was it Hank Williams?

CK: No, no. No it wasn't, so...but I've always got to play that.

CKus: Do you sing at all?

CK: Oh yeah, I sing a little bit too. Yeah, yeah.

SS: Dad, what song did you play a lot when you were teaching yourself the accordion, you said you used to...?

CK: *Bummin' Around*, that's as old as the hills. It's quite old, yeah. I can't think of anything else, so, believe me.

GK,:(singing) "I ain't got a dime..."

CK & SS: "I got an old slouch hat, I got that roll on my shoulder, and I'm as free as the breeze, and I'll do as I please. Just a bummin' around."

CK: Short and sweet. (Chuckles)

(AT THIS POINT THE GROUP GATHERS AROUND THE KEYBOARD IN ANOTHER ROOM)

(INSTRUMENTATION)

CK: It takes a minute here, to get this thing going here.  
(Instrumentation, then sings)

I got an ol' slouch hat,  
Got a roll on my shoulder,  
Oh, I've got nothin' to lose,  
Not even the blues,  
Just a bummin' around.

Got a million friends,  
Don't care where I'm a going,  
I've got nothin' to lose,  
Not even the blues,  
Just bummin' around.

Oh whenever worries start  
Botherin' me  
I'll take my coat, my ol' slouch hat,  
Hit the trail again, you see.

Well I ain't got a dime,  
Don't care where I'm a going  
Oh, I've nothin' to lose  
Not even the blues,  
Just a bummin' around.  
Oh, I've nothin' to lose,  
Not even the blues,  
Just a bumming around.

CK: How was that?

CKus: That was beautiful. Thank you.

CK: You're welcome, dear.

CKus: You made my day.

CK: Did I?

CKus: Yeah, you made my day, Clint. Thank you.

CK: Sometime I get the accordion and this thing going and I'm in here all by myself, you know.

CKus: Yeah, well you've got a grateful audience.