

# BILL and SUE-ON HILLMAN: A 50-YEAR MUSICAL ODYSSEY

*50 Years on the Road with Bill and Sue-On Hillman*

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*Presents*

# Part VIII: Festivals and Special Events

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## FESTIVALS ~ GALAS ~ EVENTS

We have played an amazingly eclectic variety of festivals and special events over the years. Adventures from many of these gigs are described elsewhere in this tome. Others which come to mind however, are: a performance for HRH Princess Anne, The Call of the Wild Mountain Music Festival at Boggy Creek, Brandon Folk Festival, Neepawa Lily Fest, Christian Rock and Gospel Festival, Brandon Celtic Music, Oktoberfests, Cowboy Poetry Festival, Blues Festivals, Wally Byam International Airstream Gathering, Black Powder Festival, Lt. Governor's WinterFest, Winnipeg's "Getting Together" Festival on Portage Avenue -- a forerunner of Folklorama, and more which will probably be jarred loose from my memory as I jog along. Related to these events are the numerous music performance and research trips we've made across North America, Europe, and Asia.

### HRH Princess Anne ~ Royal Command Performance

[www.hillmanweb.com/cards/80/royalall.jpg](http://www.hillmanweb.com/cards/80/royalall.jpg)

Back in the '80s we did numerous stage shows as well as radio, TV and newspaper interviews for the promotion of the Call of the Wild Festival. In the summer of 1982, following one of our promo interviews on the CKX-TV Noon Show, we rushed down to the Brandon CPR Station, where the city had planned a welcoming event for the visiting Princess Anne. She was coming to the Wheat City to take part in the 100th Birthday Celebrations of the city.

We did a show for a contingent of "rather tipsy" media people, who fell out of the press bus in a somewhat disheveled state. A crowd of hundreds of Brandonites who had turned out to greet Princess Anne's train gathered around our stage at the entrance to the station. Sue-On, Kerry Morris, and I played welcoming music as the train pulled in and while the Princess and her entourage disembarked and were directed to a horse and carriage.

We then followed Anne over to the Agricultural Research Station grounds, where we performed before and after a "Royal Barbecue." The Princess is an accomplished rider, so respected in fact, that she had represented Britain in equestrian events at the '76 Montreal Olympics. The choice of the Ag grounds for this event put her very much at ease and she was a joy to meet.

It was a blisteringly hot July day, but the Princess managed to look "Royal Cool" throughout the afternoon. The highlight of this event was the long informal chat we had with Her Royal Highness during one of our breaks. She congratulated us on the success

of our recording and performing tours of England. We jokingly expressed disappointment that her mom hadn't invited us in for tea or hot chocolate when we visited Buckingham Palace. She good-naturedly replied that, "We wouldn't have been there. We spend the summers in Windsor Castle. You'll have to drop around there on your next visit : )" We had visions of wandering Canucks pounding on the Castle door shouting, "We're here for tea and crumpets Your Highness." That scenario never came about. . . well, not yet : ).

Despite the relative informality of her visit, protocol was a bit more formal in those days -- sadly the only good photo we have of the event was the one taken at the train station.

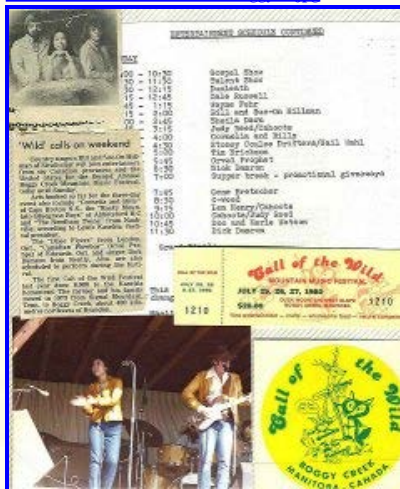
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## CALL OF THE WILD FESTIVAL - 1980-85

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### I. Boggy What?

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1980 marked a bit of a change in career emphasis for us. We were hired as a feature act, and later took on a multitude of additional important roles at one of the newest and biggest outdoor music festivals in Canada: The Boggy Creek Mountain Music Festival.

Back in 1973, Lewis and Linda Kaselitz packed up their kids and left their native Tennessee to emigrate to a homestead on Crown Land near Boggy Creek in Manitoba's Duck Mountains. Upon reaching this wilderness, their first efforts centered around clearing much of the land for farmland and an airstrip and to build a large, modern log home.

With this accomplished they had time to realize another long-time dream: to organize an outdoor music festival and to bring Tennessee mountain and bluegrass music to the "wilds" of Canada. As the event grew, so did the size of the sound and lighting systems, the size of the paid support and security force, the number of entertainers, and the logistics.

Sue-On and I missed the first festival as we were touring England in 1979, but during the remainder of festival's run -- 1980-1985 -- we became very involved in almost every aspect of the festival: entertainers, board of directors, advertising and promotion, programme book design, emceeing, stage direction, sound and recording, meal prep, security, TV specials, PR, etc.

During this time, Lewis and I also accepted positions on the board of directors for the Manitoba Association of Country Music Artists (now the MCAC) and often flew into Winnipeg for board meetings for that organization. Eventually the Boggy Creek event got too unwieldy to sustain in so remote an area and the Kaselitz dream ended in 1985... soon after, Lewis Kaselitz died of a heart attack. A tragic end to a good man's dream.

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### II. Call of the Wild Festival Stage and Grounds

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The first two festivals were held on a cleared airstrip area. The temporary stage, sound and lights were set up on one end of the strip with concession and craft booths lining the side of the grassy runway. Beyond this, pastures and clearings were used for parking and free campgrounds. Many of the entertainers and staff were fed and housed in or around the main log lodge and impromptu jam sessions popped up all over the site.

As the popularity of the event grew, big name acts were hired from all over North

America and the concert site was moved away from the airstrip to a nearby natural amphitheatre. At the bottom of this hollow Lewis built a permanent two-storey stage constructed with logs. The first storey was used as a dressing room / warm-up area, which also contained a rough-hewn narrow staircase leading to the upper stage area which was about 10 feet above ground level.

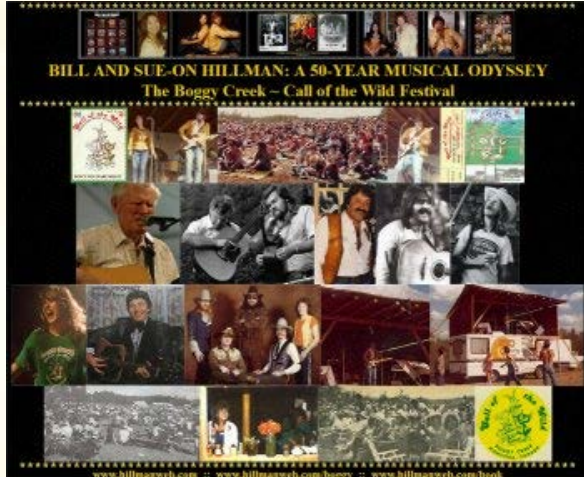
In front of the stage was a concrete slab for dancers, while all of this was overlooked by a huge natural grassy amphitheatre which provided festival goers an excellent view of the stage. At peak crowd times the hillside was completely covered with humanity... sprawled on the grass and blankets or perched in lawnchairs.

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### III. Boggy Creek Odds and Sods

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[www.hillmanweb.com/cards/80/callall.jpg](http://www.hillmanweb.com/cards/80/callall.jpg)



The Saturday Evening show of 1980 got so rowdy that I had to leave my backstage post. I donned an extra black "Security" T-shirt and jumped over the restraining snow fence to help keep over-exuberant fans from breaking through to the stage area.

One of the highlights of the 1980 show was meeting, jamming with and watching the performance of Doc Watson and his son Merle. It was with great sadness when we learned, a few years later, that Merle had died in a tractor accident on his farm in

North Carolina.

I performed the 1981 weekend as a solo act as Sue-On was nine months pregnant. Earlier in the week we had fulfilled a contract with the Opry North network radio show in the Winnipeg Centennial Concert Hall. Sue-On didn't play drums on that show, but she made up for it with her a gung-ho stage moves which she carried off admirably. We agreed however, that wild remote Boggy Creek was not the place to be on the weekend as she was due any time.

The Harvey Henry Band backed me on most of my numbers and "Duck" Donald did a hilarious job of filling in for Sue-On on a few of the duets. I had just finished an afternoon show on Saturday and was relaxing back in our Funcraft Motorhome beside the lodge when I heard someone announce: "Bill Hillman ~ Your wife is having a baby!" Within minutes I had packed the motorhome and was speeding southward toward Brandon... and made it to Brandon General Hospital in time to welcome William Robin Li-Chan Monroe Hillman into the world.

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### IV. Maple Grove Stop-Overs

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Previous to one of the Festival shows, Sue-On and I picked up performers Orval Prophet and Wayne Rostad at the Winnipeg Airport and they stayed at our Maple Grove home before moving on to the festival site. I took some great video footage of both of them, including some of 6' 4" Wayne telling colourful stories while sitting on our handcarved Chinese coffee table. The storytelling and tape came to an abrupt halt, however, when the large glass that covered the table cracked from the weight. An embarrassed and gracious Wayne insisted on paying for the damages.

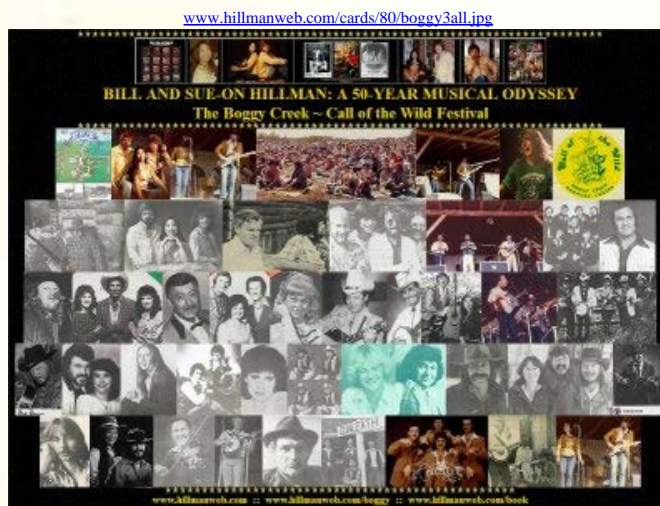
Later, a surprise visit at the festival came from my long-lost cousin Susan and her husband Paul. I hadn't seen her since she was a baby. Her parents Jim and Merna Grant (aunt Merna was my dad's sister) stayed at our farmhouse while uncle Jim was taking helicopter training at Rivers military base.

Aunt Merna was a fine pianist and singer and had offered great encouragement in the early days when I was struggling with mundane piano lessons. It was quite a thrill when Jim used to land his chopper in the meadow beside our house. Later when he was posted to St. Jean, Quebec, Sue-On and I stayed with them during our visit to Montreal's Expo 67. After the Boggy Creek festival Susan and Paul joined us for a few days at Maple Grove and we had a chance to catch up on family news and discuss our music experience at the Festival.

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## V. Boggy Bits

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\* A few California musicians were firmly convinced that their lives were in danger from a local Sasquatch they had been warned about back in Los Angeles.

\* I made arrangements for Century 21 Studios to do a remote taping of the festival. They had trouble with their main recorder however, and most of the footage was unusable. I did salvage enough however, to put together a pretty good live cassette album.

\* In 1985 we hired a Manitoba biker gang for security when various professional security outfits had trouble keeping order in the Party Campground. John Anderson band's tour bus arrived late... they had spent some time partying with the bikers. When they finally reached the stage well past midnight they put on a blistering, hot show.

\* Adrenaline flowed on the Monday mornings after Festival Weekends when I rode shotgun (literally) with Lewis as we sped to the bank in Swan River with the weekend's cash receipts.

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## VI. Canadian Country and Bluegrass Invasion

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A number of well-known Canadian acts entertained the crowd with their exciting brand of Canadian country and bluegrass -- most of them have had success in the Canadian recording industry over the years:

\* Dick Damron -- the Bentley Alberta native has had a long performing and recording career dating back to 1960. He had great tales to tell about his appearances on the Grand Ole Opry and across Europe and North America. In addition to his string of

hits, many of his songs have been covered by other country music greats over the years.

\* **Family Brown** -- we were excited to learn that they had played some of the same clubs that we had performed at in England's Northeast. They also had taken over from us when we left the Western Canada Treflan Chemicals rural demonstrations to tour the NW USA State and County Fair Grandstand circuit.

\* **Prescott Brothers** -- these guys had a real high energy country rock act. Randall eventually married Tracy Brown and went on to become one of Canada's top record producers.

\* **Marie Bottrell** -- somewhere in our collection we have a great photo of Marie and Sue-On preparing food for some of the entertainers in the kitchen of the Kaselitz Log Mansion. We first met Marie on an all-star Canada Country show that we did in the Winnipeg Centennial Concert Hall.

\* **Country/Bluegrass group Whiskey Jack** had a regular spot on the CBC Tommy Hunter Show and were a popular act at the Festival. They had also taken over from us on the Treflan Tour that we had worked a few years before. They needed transportation for the Treflan demo sites in our area so I supplied our equipment van and became a driver/roadie for a week on the same tour that we had originally headlined.

\* **Terry Carisse** was riding high with hit albums and singles. We've always looked forward to swapping albums with other entertainers and have gathered quite a collection of autographed LPs and CDs over the years.

\* **Singer, songwriter, and raconteur, Wayne Rostad**, went on to host a hit CBC TV show: *On the Road*.

\* **Ronnie Prophet and Glory-Anne Carriere** -- this pair have touched most of the show-biz bases. They had developed many entertaining routines for their long-running TV series which served them well in front of the Festival audiences. In recent years they appear to have found their niche in Branson, Missouri.

\* **Orval Prophet** -- Ronnie's cousin died a few years later. A fine person and longtime entertainer.

\* We have performed on numerous shows with Winnipeg acts **Errol Ranville/C-Weed**, **Len Henry** and **Harvey Henry** over the years. Many of their loyal fans made the long trip from Winnipeg to see them on the Boggy stage.

\* **Humber River Valley Boys** -- had done a bit of recording previous to their Boggy appearances, but were best known for their entertaining bluegrass stage act.

\* **The Dixie Flyers with Willie P. Bennett** on harmonica -- Willie died in 2008 but was inducted into the Canadian Country Music Hall of Fame during the 2010 Canadian Country Music Awards (CCMAs). The Flyers recorded some excellent albums on the Boot label through the '70s so they brought a strong repertoire to their stage act.

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## VII. Welcome to Canada

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Lewis Kaselitz used his Tennessee contacts to bring in some well-known feature acts from the US to entertain the Festival crowd. It was a real treat being able to chat with them and probe their memories for stories from their long careers as Grand Ole Opry stars and life on the road. Sadly, many of these music greats have passed on since we worked with them in the '80s.

\* **John Anderson** -- Grammy winner with his hot band put on a dynamic rousing show

which featured many of his recent hits such as "Old Chunk Of Coal," "Wild and Blue," and "Swingin'."

\* Jean Shepard -- widow of Hawkshaw Hawkins and one of the first country girl recording stars - "Dear John," etc. -- a Grand Ole Opry legend. She told us that she is Lorrie Morgan's godmother. We've seen her perform many times on the Opry. . . and even in Brandon in more recent times.

\* "Little" Jimmy Dickens -- Both "Tater" and Jean Shepard had great stories of the old days at the Opry and their tours with an unknown Elvis Presley and the Blue Moon Boys. The last time we saw him at the Opry in Nashville he was well into his 90s and still going strong.

\* The Whites -- the girls had great stories of the southern country and bluegrass scene and hubby Ricky Skaggs.

\* Lonzo and Oscar -- the original Lonzo died some years ago and had been replaced with a younger performer. This was/is one of the all-time great country comedy acts. It was quite a thrill working with an act that I had first enjoyed way back in the mid-fifties when they had a hit with "I Am My Own Grampa."

\* Jack Greene -- a man with many hits and a great vocal style who got his start in the business as Ernest Tubb's drummer. We had performed his hit, "There Goes My Everything" in our shows many times so it was a real treat meeting and working with the man.

\* Kitty Wells and Johnny Wright -- What a thrill it was working with "The Queen of Country Music" and visiting her and husband Johnny in their tour bus parked backstage. Much later, shortly before their deaths in 2012 and 2011, we saw their show in Brandon where they headlined a show with Roy Clark and Jean Shepard. They were still doing commanding performances well into their 90s.

\* Needham Twins -- originally from Cleveland, but more recently based in Mesa, AZ are well-known across Manitoba and always put on an entertaining act. Their brand of rock, pop, country, folk, and humour went over well in the afternoon shows.

\* Elmer Bird -- "The Banjo Man from Turkey Creek" came up from West Virginia to entertain the crowd with his "double drop-thumb" banjo style.

\* The Kendalls, Stonewall Jackson and Billy Walker -- were originally booked but had to bow out for medical and business reasons.

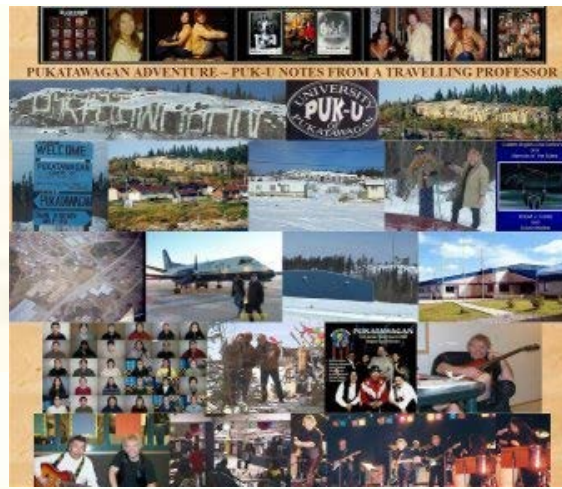


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**Puk-U Happy Birthday**

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Not long after the 9-11 terrorist attacks in the US I was hired by Brandon University to teach courses for four months in their remote classroom in Northern Manitoba at Pukatawagan First Nation. I would fly in for 10 days and fly home for 5 -- and teach a class of 30 adults all day.

I got off to a shaky start at Winnipeg International Airport. The diligent Security squad confiscated my mom's key chain with tiny pocket knife which had sentimental value -- she had died just a few weeks before. I was then threatened with arrest when they caught me taking photos in the secure area -- I like to document everything with photos.

My guitar and I arrived safely at the BU mobile home digs assigned to me, but there was no sign of my huge duffel bag full of clothes and frozen food. I ain't no chef, so Sue-On had lovingly prepared a 10-days worth of frozen Chinese dishes that were ready to cook in my rice cooker each day. But. . . my luggage was misdirected to Churchill, where it sat in cool storage for a few days.

When my duffel bag, full of partially thawed food, finally arrived -- on my birthday -- Sue-On phoned to suggest that I cook it all up before it spoiled. I spent many hours cooking up batches and packing the dishes in my fridge. Temperatures suddenly dropped to 40 below that evening and my phone, which was also my pipeline to the school's satellite Internet service, went dead. All of Sue-On's attempts to reach me via phone and e-mail were unsuccessful. Her imagination ran wild and she had horrific visions of me slumped over my computer with the phone knocked off the hook -- a victim of food poisoning. She tried frantically to reach me all evening and phoned every few hours through a sleepless night.

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### **Wanted by the RCMP**

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Meanwhile, up in Puk, I was unaware of Sue-On's panic and I was determined to celebrate my birthday, somehow. Since I couldn't contact Sue-On by phone and the Internet was down, I spent the evening preparing lessons on my laptop and cooking food packets in my rice cooker. For entertainment I strummed my Yamaha acoustic and tried to do some songwriting.

In early morning she finally got through to the Puk RCMP detachment. She had no address or description of where the University mobile home was located -- only that my BU classroom was in the school. Since I hadn't yet been assigned the code for the school alarm system, I couldn't get into my office to use the still-active school phone or Internet until doors opened next morning.

I was about to contact Sue-On when two RCMP officers knocked on my office door. "Are you Professor Hillman?" "Your wife is trying to contact you." I arose from the



dead to communicate with my worried mate. Things could only get better in this teaching job so far from home . . . and they did. It proved to be a fine experience, which led to me being taken on soon after as a full-time professor on the Brandon University campus -- with my own office and two computer classrooms of 50 computers.

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### **Pukatawalkin' Blues**

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There are very few vehicles in Pukatawagan so nearly everyone walked. . . and walked. . . and walked. This First Nations settlement is strung out along a single road which parallels the Churchill river. My daily walks to the University classroom in the ultra-modern K-12 school and to the Hudson Bay and Co-Op Trading posts took me over many miles each day, usually in very frigid weather. I had been warned to carry a stick to beat off the stray dogs on these walks. In fact, a major event in Puk is an annual dog shoot which culls out the many stray dogs. These dogs were often a nuisance and even got into any garbage I put out, so I'd throw the bags of refuse up onto the roof to await the irregular pickup by the garbage man.

One break I had from the walkin' was the day one of my students picked me up in his truck and took me on a long trip along the winter ice road over the Churchill River. People in Puk look forward to the rivers and lakes freezing over because the plows can then open a route over the ice all the way south to The Pas. This year the severe freeze-up held off until January and a truckload of my students had a near tragic experience on this road a few weeks before I arrived. Their crewcab truck hit a thin spot in the ice and started to break through. Five of them crawled out through the truck's windows in time to see the vehicle sink to the bottom of the river. They would return in the spring to drag it out. One of the songs I wrote that came out of these experiences was the "*Pukatawalkin' Blues*."

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### **The Hollywood Sign . . . North**

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I had about 30 adult students in my BU Communications and Journalism classes in Pukatawagan and a number of them had been winners in a recent Puk talent contest. The prize was a recording contract with Winnipeg's Sunshine Records for a Puk compilation CD. It was great fun mixing music in with my classes and jamming with some of the artists who had appeared on this CD. I even did guest guitar and vocals with a local band at a dance in the community centre.

The CD tracks received much play on CBC and the NCI (Native Communications, Inc.) radio networks, which broadcast across much of the north. Many of the network broadcasts were relayed from the local station which also played a few hours of local programming. I took numerous hikes up to the station which is perched at the top of the famous Pukatawagan escarpment. This escarpment is well-known, as it has sort of put Puk "on the map." Years back some industrious people painted the word 'PUKATAWAGAN' in huge letters across the steep rock face. It is known by the locals as their Hollywood sign -- and there is quite a resemblance in a rugged sort of way.

The cliff has achieved some notoriety, however. Many disturbed people have committed suicide by leaping off the rocks to their deaths -- an event that happens all too regularly. There were a half dozen such deaths during my four-month stay in the community and some of my classes were interrupted by wakes held in the victims' memory. These ceremonies were rather evenly divided between those holding traditional native beliefs and those who still showed the influence of the long line of Catholic missionaries, who have preached in the community for many decades.

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### **The Pukatawagan Song Hits the Charts!**

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The most played song featured in the *Pukatawagan Original Song Winners* CD was the *Pukatawagan Song* by Sidney Castel. Sidney was a colourful Puk native and was a regular visitor to the school and the health centre where he loved to do volunteer work. The school had an unused Bear Pit amphitheatre that I cleared out and used to hold many of my classes featuring presentations, music and improv by my students. Sidney's son was in my classes and through him we coaxed Sidney, Sr. to join me in a guitar pull in front of the students.

Sidney had performed in many pubs across the North over the years and had many fascinating stories to share with the class. One real crowd pleaser was his telling of the reason he no longer owned a guitar. His wife kabonged him over the head with it during one of their tiffs. During our sessions in the Bear Pit we swapped a surprisingly eclectic mix of songs, but the most popular, of course, was his *Pukatawagan Song* -- a really off-the-wall and unexpected hit that had attracted both embarrassed and proud fans of the ditty.

I have a number of photos of this event which are displayed in this book's Photo Section and in a collage featured in this chapter. Sidney's song has been posted on YouTube many times and amusingly, the photos chosen to accompany the video are ones of Sidney and myself that were taken in the Bear Pit. Sadly, Sidney Castel was found dead a few months after our school gig. He was 68.

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### **Bobby Curtola or Bust**

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Around the time I was teaching Brandon University courses up North in Pukatawagan, Canadian pop idol Bobby Curtola moved to Brandon, where he sank roots for a few years. During that time we got together many times, chatting over Sue-On's home-cooked meals. Since two of Bobby's back-up bands from the '60s had been from Brandon: our Dovermen and The Challengers (renamed the Martells while on tour), we planned a "Sock Hop Reunion" Show at Brandon's Keystone Centre.

My students in Puk heard all the radio promos and all 30 of them started to raise money to attend the show and see their old prof in action. They held money-making events: fish derbies, bake sales, garage sales, raffles, etc. I sweetened the pot by giving them 30 complimentary show tickets courtesy of Bobby.

On the day of the show they took "The Bullet," a slow train to The Pas (spring weather had made the winter roads impassable). At The Pas they crowded into vans to complete the trip south to Brandon. The show was a sell-out and it was a treat to see my Puk friends reel in' and rockin' near the front of the stage all night. Our original band members, Warren and John flew in for the reunion gig and my jam buddy Doug Matthews played keys. Sue-On rounded out our sound by joining us on congas and vocals.

I had to make the trip home from Puk a few days earlier for press and radio interviews and to help with the planning, but ran into a major problem. A blizzard hit. My teaching stint at Puk had just ended and I had to get home. All flights out of Puk were cancelled. A few of us managed to talk a daring pilot into flying us into the teeth of the storm to reach The Pas for a connecting flight where the weather had cleared a bit. The Pas has two airports and after a white-knuckle flight we landed at the one miles from where the departing plane was waiting for me.

I hired a cab to rush me over to the other airport. The obliging cabbie broke all speed limits to get to the waiting plane. We slid to a slippery stop in front of the terminal and I jumped out just as a hose broke under the hood of the taxi. I left the poor driver scratching his head, while standing in a billowing cloud of steam and swirling snow. A

few minutes later we were in the air and headed for home. Goodbye Puk -- Thanks for the great memories and friendships.

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### **Tying the Knot Up In The Air**

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Through the years we've played for a good number of weddings held in an almost endless line of eclectic surroundings -- churches, halls, homes, gardens, parks, beaches, tents, military bases -- ceremonies and/or dances. We've even played two or three times for the same persons for whom original unions didn't work out.

Most memorable have been the ones we have performed for family -- our nieces and son Ja-On. In some of these we were thrilled to have our kids join us -- Robin has played bass and China-Li has amazed the guests with her triathlon of musical instruments: bagpipes, piano and harp.

One of the most unusual wedding gigs took place on tour. Appearing at some of the summer fairs and exhibitions we performed at was an aeronaut, Cowboy Blue, who piloted a hot air balloon -- CF-Blu -- I think as a promotion for Labatts Blue beer. Caught up in the excitement of the wild, waving crowds which his flights drew, Captain Blue and his fiance decided that their wedding should take place far aloft in the balloon gondola. We were asked to provide music. As hot air filled the balloon, the two lovers and the preacher rose above the crowd, while we sang and picked some appropriate love songs from far below.

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### **Riders of the Purple Sage**

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We've rubbed shoulders with many cowboys -- rodeo riders -- on our Western Canada and US tours. In fact while working as a rodeo band we've provided a great many 8-second -- or less -- music bits to accompany bronc riders as they burst from the bucking chutes, struggling to stay glued to fiery rodeo mounts.

We even met a few "cowboys" in Western Clubs in England -- at least they looked like cowboys, but I'm sure most had never ridden a horse. It was always a treat to come across real cowboys who loved and performed cowboy songs.

Almost as entertaining are cowboy poets and the numerous Cowboy Poetry Festivals that showcase both poets and singers. Most of these poets have the look and sound of these romantic riders of the purple sage. Their presentations are entertaining and their poems touch on topics of the old. . . and new West: clever, gripping tales full of humour, adventure, sadness, nostalgia, and inspiration.

Sue-On and I have been invited to perform songs at festivals such as Doc Hayes' Brandon Cowboy Poetry Gathering. One of our all-time favourite entertainers is singer/songwriter -- and real cowboy -- Ian Tyson. Since we perform many Ian and Sylvia songs we feel quite comfortable doing short sets featuring some of their material. It really is a great experience singing these song poems to such an audience. We usually end our set with Ian's "Four Strong Winds" and the very touching, "Someday Soon."

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### **Pine Falls 4-P Festival**

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We played in Pine Falls arena a number of times -- for both the Abitibi Pulp and Paper Company's huge "Appreciation Party" and the four-day long 4-P Festival. The "4-P" represents the four cornerstone industries that surround the town: Paper mill, Pickeral fisheries, Power from the hydro dam on the Winnipeg River, and Peas from a nearby famous pea farm.

On some of the shows we performed alternate sets with the Beatles/Elvis tribute band, *Free Ride*. The *Winnipeg Blue Bomberettes* cheerleading group added a bit of pizzazz to our shows as they danced along to the music and went through some of their cheerleading routines.

These were huge events for which many hundreds of party-goers were packed into the arena and they were a lot of fun to play. As a fringe benefit the Abitibi guys gave us a huge roll of felt material that was used in their mills for the paper making process. We squeezed this massive roll into our van above the instruments and took it home to use as a carpet underlay in our new music room. It's still there and works fine.

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### **Invasion of the Airstreams**

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When the Wally Byam Airstream Club held their International Rally in Brandon we performed for them at the Keystone Arena. These unique aerodynamic aluminum Airstreams revolutionized trailer making with an amazing list of innovations. It is hard to travel anywhere in North America without seeing these premium road yachts on the highways. They have even been featured in countless documentaries and Hollywood films.

Slightly puzzled Brandonites were proud to welcome the thousands of Airstream enthusiasts and hundreds of Airstreams and let them set up camp on the North Hill. The aerial photo of their encampment is very impressive. . . it seemed to stretch for miles. We were honoured to be invited to perform for them at the Keystone arena for a day's entertainment and they proved to be a very enthusiastic and responsive audience.

The Keystone was packed as we made a rather unusual spectacular entrance. We and the band tried to keep our balance on a moving wagon while belting out Russ's always-popular "Federal Grain Train" song as a team of Clydesdales pulled us in circuits around the arena floor. The Airstreamers seemed to enjoy it. At one time it was our dream to become proud owners of an Airstream motorhome, but we had to settle for not-quite-so-elegant Volkswagen Westfalia and Ford Econoline conversions.

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### **Here Come Da Judge**

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I've had the pleasure of serving as a judge in a great variety of talent contests over the years. Perhaps the best known contests have been the ones held at Heidi and Scott Howarth's North 40 Saloon in Brandon. Their main search for talent contests started over 25 years ago - namely the Budweisser contest for adult performers and the Orange Crush search for younger talents. Many of the over-1000 performers from these events have gone on to very successful careers in music.

Those who reached the finals were backed by one of the live bands that were booked at the club that week. Sue-On and I, along with some of the other judges who were also musicians, even did guest spots during the final night of the contests.

I have fond memories of helping in some way to encourage new performers to pursue their careers. Many of the contestants had come out of the music programme at Crocus Plains High School where teacher Gerry Perkin had organized a course in which students played in a rock band called CP Express. All three of our kids - Ja-On (sax), Robin (trombone) and China-Li (keys) -- had played in that band at various times. Various line-ups of the band played at the Brandon Summer Fair many times. This was interesting to see since we had played many similar gigs at the various Fair venues so regularly -- but over twenty years earlier.

One stand-out Orange Crush winner was Amanda Stott who is daughter of Cyril Stott

who did stints in two of the bands I was in back in the '60s: The Flamingo Combo and Dovermen.

A few of the other contests that I remember were at the Minnedosa Rock Festival, the Manitoba Provincial Exhibition, and the search for Chinese acts to perform at the Lt. Governor's Winterfest. The waves of performers that passed by our judges' table through the years are a bit of a blur, but fortunately I kept detailed performance notes for most of them. Always great fun to dip back into the past.

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### Gospel Rock Festivals

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The only music festival shows I have done without Sue-On by my side -- and ones in which I stayed in the background playing only lead guitar -- were with a local gospel music group. It was an interesting departure for me -- a lifelong atheist. Performing as the Christian rock band, *One Body*, we rehearsed all the current pop music hits played on Christian radio.

Many of the songs featured fairly elaborate chord changes and harmonies which demanded fairly regular rehearsals. We did gigs in Catholic and Mennonite churches all over Manitoba -- and even headlined some outdoor gospel rock festivals in the Brandon and Winnipeg areas. It was the first time I had the opportunity to see how a combination of music and religion can reach people -- a very different type of audience.

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### Portage Avenue - No Cars Allowed!

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In 1972 we played the "Getting Together with Winnipeg Festival" -- sort of a forerunner of what would later become FolkFest. Portage Avenue was blocked off from traffic and the street was teeming with people. We set up on a stage in front of Eaton's department store. It was almost surreal looking down Portage Avenue and seeing shoulder to shoulder spectators as far as we could see. We did our show. Applause and audience participation was good.

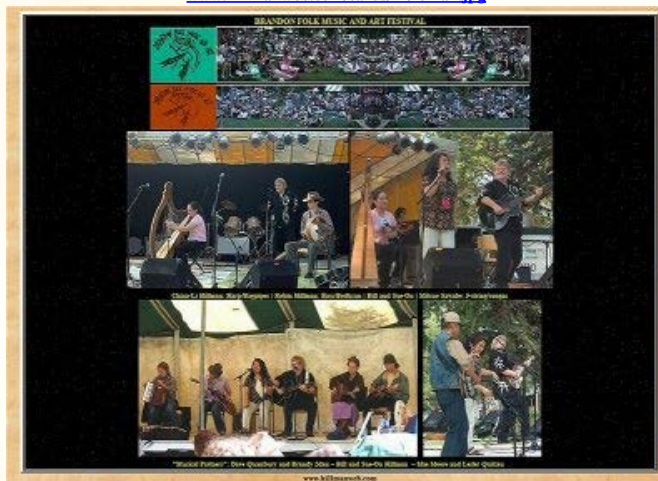
We then made a hurried exit and drove non-stop all night to the Peace River Country where we were booked for a fair parade and dance the next day. Barry Forman, Kerry Morris, Sue-On and I all took turns driving through the night. As what so often happens, when Sue-On took the wheel a torrent of rain descended. This coincided with the beginning of road construction. We slept while Sue-On guided the slip-slidin' vehicle through a quagmire.

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### Sharing Our Music Roots at the Brandon Folk Festival

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When we played the Annual Brandon Folk Music and Arts Festival our daughter China-Li played Celtic harp and electronic bagpipes with us. Son Robin played bass and Bodhran drum. Guesting on our show were Jim Andrey on drums and Mitsuo Sawabe, a bluegrass 5-string banjo and conga player, from Japan.

We were booked to do one set on the main stage, but ended up doing two so as to fill in for an act that didn't show. We always welcome a chance to return to our musical roots so we prepared a Folk Odyssey set tracing the evolution of folk music as we know it: Celtic & Scottish ~ Old English Hymns ~ Aboriginal ~ Maritime ~ French ~ Cowboy ~ Appalachian ~ Afro-American ~ Blues ~ Contemporary Folk ~ and Gospel.

On the day following we participated in a "Musical Partners - Musical Friends" Workshop under the Big Top. Joining us were Mae Moore and Lester Quitzau plus Dave Quanbury and Brandy Zdan. We all swapped original songs that we had written and performed over the years.

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### **The Soos Blues Wokkers**

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Blues has always been at the core of our music, whether we are playing rock 'n' roll, rock, country, gospel, pop, originals, or our own version of traditional or rocking blues songs. The three-chord structure of blues is perfect for improvisation. Extended blues improvs have always been a part of the weekly jams at our Soo's Restaurant Show Hall, the Cantina, bars, or many of the conventions we've attended in Chicago, LA, Minneapolis, etc. We were very pleased then to host one of Brandon's first blues festival nights in the show hall of our Soo's 265-seat restaurant.

We had a staff of around 30 at Soo's and many of them were fine musicians -- including our three kids. We formed a blues band for the event -- a motley crew that we called the Soo's Blues Wokkers. This launched the start of annual blues festivals in Brandon, many of them hosted by Brandon University. Sue-On, son Robin and I were always excited to play at these functions -- and for some of them we invited our Cantina buddies Jon and Doug to join us.

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### **What's Up Tiger Lily?**

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Sue-On is an avid gardener and our home is surrounded by arrays of beautiful flowers - - inside and out -- and many of her green-thumb projects have been shared on her Website. She has always looked forward then, to our appearances at the Neepawa Lily Festival.

The festival's main raison d'etre, of course, is to showcase and celebrate the many types of lilies raised in the area, but the festival weekend is jam packed with a variety of entertainment and attractions such as art and craft shows. We've played numerous venues in Neepawa over the years -- our daughter China-Li has even played harp there for social functions.

The Festival big-top tent, set up on one of the main streets not far from the Roxy Theatre, contains a dance area, food and bar service, tables with seating, and a stage. Entertainment on this stage has included Elvis impersonators, country acts, local bands, folk and choir singers, etc. It is on this main stage that we have performed. Our son Robin -- a regular member of our band on bass and drums -- has appeared with us on these shows, as he has done in all our appearances over the last dozen years.

For one of the shows, Mitsuo Sawabe, helped add a bit of variety with his driving 5-string banjo, as well as filling in on congas. On another show, well-known Manitoba musicians, drummer Doug Sullivan and keyboardist/guitarist Tom Dowden, augmented

our sound.

The audience covers the full spectrum of ages and musical tastes and are always a great crowd to play for, especially when the sun goes down and the dancing begins. Sue-On always insists that we pull into town early so that she can take me in tow and lead me through long exciting guided tours of the spectacular lily gardens.

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### **"Heeere's Alex!"**

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We've appeared on the stage of the Brandon Centennial Auditorium many times for a great variety of events. I've even sat on that stage with my fellow Brandon University professors overseeing grad and initiation ceremonies. But the most unusual gig was probably during the time when Johnny Carson was still hosting television's Tonight Show.

As a bit of a lark and fundraiser, an imitation of this popular show was staged in Brandon. The retired base commander of CFB Shilo, Col. Alex Matheson, took on the role of Carson. The Ed McMahon second banana seat was taken by broadcaster Ron Arnst who opened the show with a "Heeere's Alex" intro.

Alex followed a short monologue by bringing on guest performers. We did a musical number and then moved to the couch where we engaged in typical talk-show chatter with Alex and Ron. A real fun experience.

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### **"Green", White and Blue at CKX-TV**

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We had the honour of being asked to do the first live colour broadcast out of CKX-TV studios. Wanting to look good, Sue-On and I wore white outfits with some colourful trim embroidery. After setting up in front of a new colourful studio backdrop specially designed for this gala event we changed into our our flashy outfits and proudly, but naively took our places on the set.

The producer gasped in shock. We didn't know at the time that white is one of the hardest colours for television cameras to handle. The show couldn't go on until we changed into something more suitable. All we had was our set-up denims so that's what we went with.

This was also one of our first experiences at lip synching. We had brought a backing tape from one of our English recording sessions which allowed us to concentrate more on our struttin' and grinnin' and doing live intros and on-camera chatter between numbers. I think we carried it off fairly well and the 3/4" U-matic video tape we have of the show makes for a great souvenir of the event.

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### **It's the Grand Ole Opry . . . North**

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After winning the Manitoba Entertainers of the Year Award we seemed to be very much in demand for network TV and radio broadcasts. The most exciting series of radio shows we did emanated from Winnipeg's historic Playhouse/Pantages Theatre.

Since this theatre opened in 1914 it has featured world class vaudeville acts (Buster Keaton, Laurel and Hardy, Houdini), classical performers (Vladimir Horowitz, Paul Robeson, Lawrence Tibbet, Jascha Heifitz), jazz greats (Ella Fitzgerald, Buddy Rich, Ray Brown, Oscar Peterson, Dizzy Gillespie, Stefan Grappelli), pop stars (Ann Murray, Elvis Costello, Duran Duran, Guess Who), movies, ballet . . . the list is endless.

We were awed by the still-lush interior of what is one of the few remaining showpieces

of the once revered North American Pantages chain. This theatre's twin is still a popular landmark at Hollywood and Vine in Hollywood. The backstage dressing rooms had seen better days, but even this we welcomed since they hadn't been botched by some modern make-over.

The shows we did from this hallowed stage were for the cross-Canada radio show: Opry North. It was a thrill to swap tales and jam with some of the top entertainers from Winnipeg and beyond. We managed to preserve a few of these broadcasts on tape.

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### **BU Trilogy: Blues . . . Party Time . . . SUDS**

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In my years while serving as a professor with Brandon University my guitar and music were often welcome allies. A guitar was always in close reach in my office and it often travelled with me to locations both on and off campus for education-related activities.

**Episode 1:** A popular component of Professor Bob Ford's music course is the study of the history and importance of American Blues music. Knowing my interest in blues from the times he had joined us at our SOO'S jam nights, he invited me to do a live performance for his class at a nearby coffee house. I asked popular local musicians Poor Boy Rodger and Mo Karrouze to join me on guitar and congas.

I based the performance on an information sheet I had prepared in which I traced the roots, singers, and many styles of blues. . . along with the impact of this genre on other popular music forms. The class was made even more entertaining when Professor Ford joined us on stage with his sax.

**Episode 2:** Each Xmas a different university faculty or organization is chosen to plan the entertainment for the special BU Holiday Party. The dining hall staff always prepares a fine traditional meal for the event and the dining room is filled to capacity. There is always an abundance of Christmas and holiday music, prizes, games, and a chance to enjoy the camaraderie of others in the campus community.

When our Faculty of Education hosted the event, Sue-On and I had a great time adding our music to the mix -- Sue-On sang White Christmas, we dueted on a few popular holiday songs, and I even sang *The Pukatawalkin' Song*, a novelty ditty that I had written during my 4-month stint at Pukatawagan Reserve a few years back.

**Episode 3:** A short time after I had returned to work following my sick leave for a cancer operation, Education colleagues Romeo LaMieux and Denis Rondeau asked us if we would entertain their Quebec French exchange students.

This was a very informal event held at S.U.D.S. - the student union bar. We invited Kenn Jarvin to play keys, Sue-On played drums, and the gig was made even more special by having Denis join us on bass. Quite a few years back Denis had joined Sue-On and me in backing Barry and Kent Forman on two fiddle albums. For me, it felt really good to be back in front of a mic after a hospital stay and long recuperation period.

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### **Meeting Les Paul at the Iridium Jazz Club on Broadway**

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[www.hillmanweb.com/guitars/lesfxall.jpg](http://www.hillmanweb.com/guitars/lesfxall.jpg)





While in New York covering the Broadway Premiere for the Disney stage production of Phil Collins' *Tarzan The Musical* we had time to attend some other music gigs. At the top of our list of NY events was a visit to the Iridium Jazz Club on Broadway.

Guitar and technology legend Les Paul played the club every Monday night -- a regular gig that he enjoyed until his death at age 94. A guy seated at our table was much better prepared for the evening than we were, however. He brought the pick guard from his Gibson Les Paul guitar for Les to autograph.

We did, though, briefly meet the 91-year-old "Father of the Electric Guitar" off-stage and got some good photos. The photo we treasure most captures Les good-naturedly giving me the finger when I told him I played a Fender Telecaster Guitar. Gibsons rule the Iridium stage.

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### **Too late for the Beatles. . . How about Phil Collins?**

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While in New York we also re-visited some of the city's attractions that we hadn't seen for many years. Something new for us was a visit to the David Letterman Show in the old Ed Sullivan Theatre on Broadway.

This is the historic theatre where the Beatles had made their first US television appearance. We were seated close to the band led by Canada's Paul Shaffer -- a really hot group of musicians. Surprise guest on this show was Britney Spears, who was making her first appearance since her notorious head-shaving episode at the Tarzana beauty salon next to the ERB, Inc. offices -- the offices where we have spent so much research time while working on our ERBzine.com Websites.

Famed rocker, Phil Collins, wrote the soundtrack and an Academy Award winning song for Disney's animated *Tarzan* feature film. He later expanded his score into a major stage musical. We were invited to attend premiere nights for this production on Broadway, as well as in Holland and Hamburg.

They were all unbelievable gala events and one of fringe benefits was the meeting and partying with Phil Collins at the after-show parties. Although conversation was often difficult over the bombastic music that filled the red carpet and party areas, it was fun comparing notes with Phil about some of the places and musicians we had encountered on our tours of the UK.

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### **Reeperbahn Beatle Boot Camp**

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At the invitation of Edgar Rice Burroughs, Inc. of Tarzana, California, and Disney Theatrical, NY, and Phil Collins, I flew to Hamburg for a 10-day stay in October 2008.

This was one of the few such events that Sue-On couldn't attend. She had to stay behind to teach her University courses. The extended stay gave me time to explore Hamburg before and after the main focus of the visit: the German Premiere of Phil Collins' *Tarzan Musical* at the Neue Flora Theatre.

We've been Beatles admirers since the early '60s, having performed many of their songs in our stage act, and I've even played in a Beatles tribute band. It was natural then, that I take advantage of the opportunity to study the Beatles' early influences in Hamburg's Reeperbahn district.

I explored most of the Hamburg locations that had been frequented by the rather inexperienced 5-piece band from Liverpool from the time they arrived in 1960 through to 1962. Most of the Beatles activity back in the early '60s was concentrated on two streets: the Reeperbahn and Große Freiheit. The Beatles legacy is preserved at this location with large display of five sculptures of the Beatles.

The band played in a succession of clubs here starting with the Indra and moving on to the Kaiserkeller. After taking a break to return home to play Liverpool's Cavern they returned to play the Top-Ten and record with Tony Sheridan. They later did three stints at the Star Club. I spent time at all the existing clubs or locations doing research, taking a multitude of photos and doing interviews. A great lesson in Beatle music history which I've shared, in part, on our Website.

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### **Che Lennon**

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When the Beatles weren't playing their nightly non-stop 7-hour gigs in the Reeperbahn area clubs they explored the strip clubs, peep shows, sex theatres and the more distant harbour area and even the circus grounds. It was a much wilder scene in the '60s than now and much of their audience was made up of rowdy sailors, transvestites, prostitutes and gangsters. It is still a rough area with an interesting street crowd, but it's much safer now that it's been partly taken over by tourists.

The exciting area holds many attractions for visitors who are fascinated by the neon lights, sex and souvenir shops, risqué clubs, ethnic and fast-food restaurants, Internet cafes, and ribald entertainment of all sorts. The girls of the night are limited now to a designated street not far from the police station.

When not exploring the Beatles landmarks, which I documented on our Website, I spent much of my time in a music store on the Reeperbahn trying out their guitars, surrounded by Beatles memorabilia. While waiting to see the band that was booked into the surviving Indra Club I had an interesting chat with a promoter from St. Petersburg who was planning to bring in a Russian Beatles tribute show: Che Lennon.

The huge Kaiserkeller Club featured two American bands and was packed with partying Germans -- everyone in the standing-room-only crowd jostling to get closer to the stage, while holding a mug of German beer in each hand. An exciting place and an exciting musical experience which took me vicariously back to another time 50 years ago.

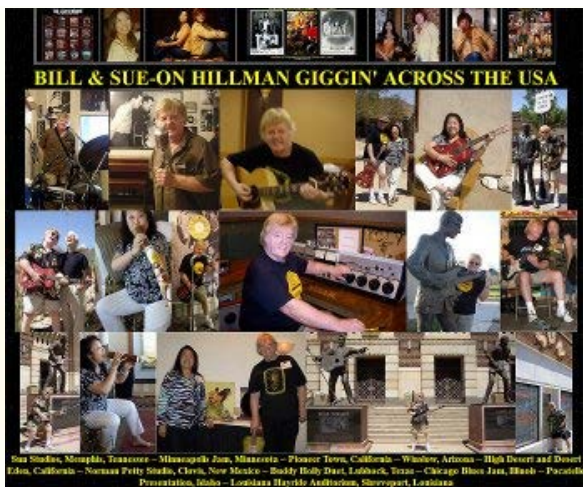
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### **Jamming on the Trail**

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After so many years of playing the music and styles that audiences and dancers expect, we appreciate more and more the chance to play what, where, when, who,



and how we want to perform. Jam sessions provide the luxury of playing more off-the-wall music and a chance to improvise non-rehearsed material with a variety of musicians.

Probably the most satisfying jams have been the regular gigs with my jammin' buddies and visitors at Ken Daniels' Cantina. But it's always challenging to

participate in impromptu jams at some of the most unexpected places. A memorable one was at one of the hotbeds of American blues in Chicago, while we were attending an Edgar Rice Burroughs convention. Our friend Joan Bledig generously lent us some of her departed husbands' rare guitars, including a Grammer flattop. Joining Sue-On and myself were Dr. Bob Zeuschner - fantastic acoustic blues player and Thomas Yeates - a fine singer and picker and one of the best contemporary comics artists around. (Thomas is currently illustrating the renowned Prince Valiant Sunday pages.) Inspired by all this picking we followed up the jam with a Chicago Blues club crawl accompanied by our ERB, Inc. friends.

Another fun session was with another fine artist at a Minneapolis convention: Mike Hoffman. Farther West, Sue-On and I had fun incorporating some Western ballads into our presentation at Pocatello, ID. And farther south, author Robin Maxwell, whom we had assisted with presentations in Tarzana Centennial celebrations, invited us to their California High Desert retreat. Between visits to Frontier Town and Joshua Tree where we visited the motel where Gram Parsons had ODeD (a long story around this event), we picked and sang with Robin and her yoga master husband, Max Thomas. Back in the '60s they lived in the Topanga area of California so they had some great stories to tell about the "hippie" scene back in the good ole days.

The only jam events where Sue-On couldn't join me took place up in Manitoba's Pukatawagan First Nations Reserve, to which I flew in to teach Brandon University courses.

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## Rhythm and Brews

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Since 2000 I've made many trips to Tarzana in California's San Fernando Valley. I have

worked very closely with author Edgar Rice Burroughs' grandson, Danton Burroughs and ERB, Inc. The result has been the creation of over 10,000 Webpages on my Burroughs Websites. But even while working on these projects music has always been on my mind.

Since I have a consuming interest in vintage guitars, a must-stop during every California visit is Norman's Rare Guitars on Ventura Blvd . . . not far from Danton's house and the ERB, Inc. offices. During one of my week-long Tarzana visits Danton was called away on business for the weekend. Since there were to be so many rock bands at the Rhythm and Brews Festival on the Corriganville Movie Ranch film location in nearby Simi Valley, I stopped in to Norman's to get a bit of background on the bands. . . and of course to have another look at their huge rare guitar inventory. Part of my master plan was to document the weekend, so I asked Norman and staff to pose for some photos.

Norman knew my interest in guitars and music-related gear since I liked to try out the guitars and had even had purchased a Fender embossed leather sport jacket from them during a previous visit. He generously gave me a "Rare Guitars" T-Shirt to wear to the Festival. The Festival was an unforgettable event.

I divided my time between mingling with the musicians, drinking fine beer from the many micro-brewery tents under the trees and exploring the many familiar landforms in this famous movie location. During breaks in the music performances, former extras and film historians shared tales and led me around the famous location sites: Silvertown with its frontier streets, saloon, jail, etc. as well as nearby Fort Apache, Robin Hood forest, giant rock cliffs and caves, trails, RR tunnel, and the "cement pond" where surface and underwater scenes for Tarzan and other great adventure movies were filmed. Hollywood and music magic.

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### **Jukes, Jazz and Jams**

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Danton Burroughs, grandson of the great SF/Fantasy Adventure writer, Edgar Rice Burroughs, inherited the role of keeper of the massive Burroughs archives and the task of keeping his grandfather's legacy alive. But Dan was also a great lover of music.

At one time he had one of the world's largest collections of vintage jukeboxes which ringed his massive living room. He would dazzle visitors to his Victorian-style mansion by throwing a switch that would light up every one of these beauties, creating a spectacular light show accompanied by music from some of his favourite early blues, jazz and doo-wop 78 RPM discs. Entertainment media did many features on these jukes as well on his massive record collection -- all of this a treasure trove that I spent many hours exploring.

On the last evening of what turned out to be my final visit with Dan, his close friend, John Westervelt, a retired university professor, drove up Dan's long driveway in one of his vintage touring cars. It was a warm California night and we celebrated my coming departure by pulling John's guitars out of the back of the car.

The three of us sat on the low stone wall of the driveway and picked and sang blues and all the old songs into the wee hours. The next morning Dan saw me off at LAX. It was to be the last time I would see him in person. A few months later I flew back to Tarzana to give a eulogy at his memorial service. The old songs have been a little bit sadder since.

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### **Shakin' All Over . . . without Queen Elizabeth**

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We took time off from our busy schedules in Brandon to visit our kids in Winnipeg in the summer of 2010. It seemed like an excellent way to spend a long weekend, since Queen Elizabeth II was visiting Winnipeg and such royal visits are always a special occasion.

Earlier in the week, John Einarson -- author, educator, rock guitarist . . . and curator of the *Shakin' All Over* exhibit -- had encouraged us to visit the main display room in the Manitoba Museum since Sue-On and I have spent about five decades as Manitoba-based performers.

The museum displays were very creative and promised to represent a wide swath of Manitoba entertainment history: Rock, Blues, Native, Jazz, Opera, French, Folk, etc. On the eve of our trip into the 'Peg we came across a YouTube video showing some behind-the-scenes work on the exhibits and were happy to see that we were featured in the Country section.

Although we were excited to see the artifacts from the many other artists we had worked with over the years, we naturally were drawn to the pod display in the Country section first. We were delighted to see our record and CD albums featured beside a Manitoba Entertainers of the Year Award trophy - an award we received in 1980.

An added thrill was seeing huge blow-ups of one of our 1974 tour photos covering two of the display pod panels. Another surprise was seeing our *No. 9 On Tour In England* album in the display of recordings by Manitoba artists. I took many photos of all the pods which I later featured on our Website. We spent so much time excitedly exploring all the other pods that we never did get to see the Queen.

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### *Shakin' All Over Redux*

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John Einarson's *Shakin' All Over* Exhibit at the Manitoba Museum (Museum of Man and Nature) in Winnipeg featured "pods" displaying artifacts from every genre of Manitoba music. But the exhibit wasn't restricted to only static displays.

Manitoba music played non-stop over loudspeakers, and historic videos were shown all around the room. The ambiance was further enhanced by a constant round of visits from famous personalities, media coverage and by a series of live concerts in which Manitoba musicians entertained sit-down audiences. Since the event was named after the classic Guess Who hit -- and indirectly from Einarson's book on the importance of Winnipeg rock -- it was appropriate that Burton Cummings made an appearance.

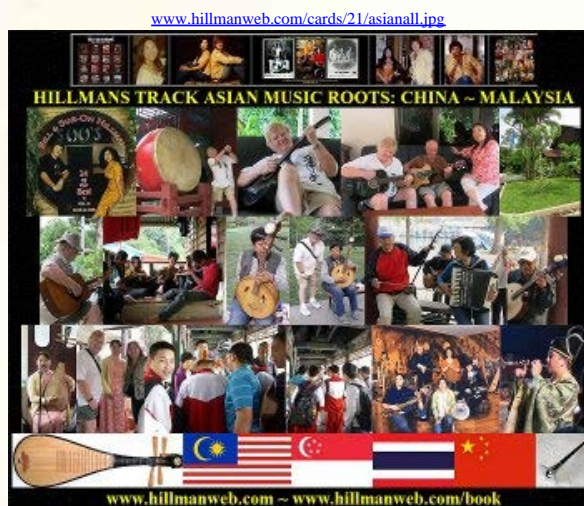
We felt honoured to be invited to perform at one of these concerts. Sue-On played drums, our son Robin handled the bass, and I played guitar. In keeping with the many music styles showcased around us in the room, we decided to perform music drawing from this eclectic mix. We had prepared a set list of blues, country, folk, rock, and Indian songs. Sue-On even sang a song in French and I sang an original number from one of our albums.

The excitement generated by this event set in motion a movement to establish a permanent museum dedicated to showcasing the rich Manitoba music scene -- past and present.

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### Following The Muse Across Asia

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During our two-month visit to Asia in 2013, music was never far from our minds. It was fascinating to view and listen to the many traditional instruments in Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and China. Every ancient city in China seemed to have bell and

drum towers, which were built to announce special events or to warn the city of impending attacks. Nearly every one of the countless museums had displays of ages-old instruments, and musicians playing these traditional instruments appeared in the most unlikely places. But it also seemed that almost everyone appeared to have some knowledge of, and fascination with, music forms from the other side of the globe.

**Episode 1:** Through the month of April we had a wonderful stay with Kerry and Edah Morris, who have a beautiful winter retreat in Edah's tropical homeland, Malaysia. Kerry had played drums and bass with us for many years and it was a real treat to reminisce with him about the good ole days. This led to jam sessions in the fan-cooled outdoor sitting areas, which always drew an audience of local neighbours and members of Edah's family.

**Episode 2:** While hiking through the surrounding Malaysian rainforest and trails, Sue-On and I came upon some local teens playing very out-of-tune Yamaha guitars. They were lounging in a sheltered sitting area along the front of a typical village house and were attempting to play tunes they had heard on their iPods. My offer to tune their guitars led to an unusual West meets East jam session which was recorded and photographed by curious local spectators, who crowded around us with smart phones in hand.

**Episode 3:** While visiting the historic Summer Palace, a short distance from central Beijing, we came upon musicians performing in a bandshell-type structure overlooking the Palace's Kunming Lake. I mentioned to our guide that Sue-On and I had been long-time musicians back in Canada. He asked if we did any John Lennon and Beatles music.

I casually mentioned that we play many Beatles songs and I had even done a stint as John Lennon in a Beatles tribute band. He asked if the electric guitar that accompanied the traditional instruments behind the vocalists singing Chinese folk songs was similar to the one I played. When I mentioned that it was, he became quite excited and tried to persuade us to join in with the entertainers. We of course declined.

**Episode 4:** Later, as we strolled along the half-mile-long corridor by the Summer Palace lake marvelling at the 14,000 thousand pieces of art on display, our Chinese guide entered into conversation with a crowd of Chinese university students. I'm not sure what he told them -- obviously something was lost in translation.

I was suddenly swarmed by a crowd shouting "John Lennon," waving papers for autographs and thrusting cell phone cameras in my face. I signed a few autographs and then beat an embarrassed retreat through the mob. Sue-On, laughing off to the side, recorded the whole "Hard Day's Night" scenario with her camera. We were only able to lose the crowd by ducking onto one of the lake boats, which was just leaving for a cruise across the lake.

**Episode 5:** While taking a short break on a park bench, after strolling through a scenic lakeside park in Shanghai, a group of musicians appeared with cases containing unusual percussion, flute and string instruments. They set up next to us and started to tune up. I was fascinated by one of their guitar-like instruments and through body and sign language asked for a demonstration, indicating that I played guitar.

This led to the musician playing a song that was completely unexpected here in China on a hot 34 degree spring day: *Jingle Bells*. The frets were well raised above the fingerboard, allowing him to press down for string bends similar to that done on an Indian sitar. Added to this was a drone note -- all of which made for a most unusual -- but very captivating -- rendition of the old winter time/Christmas standard. I couldn't resist and joined him by singing a few verses of *Jingle Bells* in English, to the delight of our party and others in the park.

***Episode 6:*** The Grand Canal, the longest artificial waterway in the world (1,776 km), was created many centuries ago (dating back to the 5th century BC) at the cost of many lives and years of hard labour by four million workers. The canal allowed the emperor in Beijing to travel to the southland on a much shorter and luxurious journey than one taken overland.

We cruised part of this canal through Suzhou -- "The Venice of China" -- on a large cruise boat. While admiring the ancient houses and alleys lining the canal, we were entertained by a Chinese opera singer dressed in a traditional silk dress. We were excited to see that she accompanied herself on a pi pa, a stringed instrument which hangs on the wall of our music studio.

During a break, I dug out one of our CD inserts, which displays the instrument hanging among our guitars. The entertainer was intrigued by the photo and asked if I would like to play her instrument. I declined, explaining through her interpreter that my instrument was mainly for decoration. After the boat docked and the other passengers disembarked, Sue-On and I stayed behind and had some neat photos taken with her and the pi pa.

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### **Same Club On Richmond :: 1993 Band Reunion ~ 2013 Jam Session :: 20 Years Apart**

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Over the years we've played for many openings for businesses, clubs, restaurants, and special events. A memorable one was back in the '90s.

Sue-On and I had recently bought the Choy family's downtown Brandon Chinese restaurant (SOO'S) from brother Kenny and sister Sue-Sem. Kenny was involved in many business interests, but since he seemed to find it hard to get restaurant fever out of his system, he opened a restaurant on Richmond Ave. He asked us if we'd play for the grand opening in the large dining room. We offered to play if all proceeds would go to the Cancer Society and we called upon our music buddies to join us: Barry Forman, Kevin Pahl, Kerry Morris and Jake Kroeger -- all of whom had served as a "third man" in our band over the years. It was a fun night and a great chance to get these former bandmates together.

During the next 20 years this restaurant changed management a few times. We didn't get around to playing for the new owners through the coming years, but our son Robin played there with the Peech Brothers blues band a few times. For the 20th Anniversary of the establishment, however, when the current owners were gearing down, it seemed like a good idea for us to return to that stage. The original crew weren't available - even our son Robin, who is our current "third man," was tied up with computer business in Winnipeg. The logical thing was for Sue-On and I to do a guest spot with their house band. After 20 years, we felt a touch of *deja vu* and it was a fun night. Our English musician friend, George Norton, even came up to sing and play bass on a few numbers. Snippets of the performance somehow found their way to Facebook.

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*Gig Notes VIII: Festivals and Special Events*  
**SUPPLEMENTARY RESOURCES**

Related features with expanded notes and photos that we've created on our main site:

**[BILL and SUE-ON HILLMAN ECLECTIC STUDIO](http://www.hillmanweb.com)**

[www.hillmanweb.com](http://www.hillmanweb.com)

[Entertaining HRH Princess Anne](#)

[Boggy Creek Festival](#)

[Pukatawagan Adventure](#)

[Brandon Folk Festival](#)

[Tracking the Beatles in Hamburg](#)

[Fab 4: Post Hamburg](#)

[California's High Desert Eden Adventure](#)

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[Adventures in Malaysia and Singapore](#)

[China Adventure](#)

[Rhythm and Brews Festival at Corriganville Movie Ranch](#)

**GIG NOTES CONTENTS**

[www.hillmanweb.com/book/gigs](http://www.hillmanweb.com/book/gigs)

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2. [The Swinging Sixties](#)
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4. [Prairie and USA Tours](#)
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**BILL and SUE-ON HILLMAN: A 50-YEAR MUSICAL ODYSSEY**



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