

George Myren and Joyce Smith

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Interviewed by Brooke Leifso by phone.

[The transcript is based on Brooke Leifso's notes from the interview, which was conducted by phone because of COVID. The transcript has been heavily edited to regroup topics discussed, as well as for clarity]

Living in Jasper Place

My parents [Joyce's] lived in Jasper Place when I was 14-15 years old. It was an unfinished house on 163rd Street, and the roads were just horrible, the ditches were 6 feet deep; it was awful. The ditches were there to drain all the water. It was in the country then. We took the Diamond Bus lines to go downtown; we walked from my Mom's and Dad's house, and it was so mucky. Back then, Jasper Place was a separate town. There wasn't much. I was there in about '49, '50, '51.; 156th Street was still open country and the end of Jasper Place. I remember the Royalty Service Station, Green Gables, and the rest – you were in the country.

After that, the city grew and 170th Street was a country road. Willows grew in the ditches and locals called it "Lovers Lane"; there were trees on both sides. We'd go over there and drink beer.

We've [Joyce and George] lived in JP all our married life, and still live in Jasper Place in Lynnwood; we bought a house when it was new. We bought our first house in Mayfield, sold it, and then moved here. At that time, we had the two kids, and it was starting to get small.

Most of the houses in Mayfield were basement-less because of the ground. At one time, it was a big swamp.

Playing at the Jasper Place Hotel / the Klondiker

In 1966, we started playing full-time in the downstairs of the Old Jasper Place Hotel; it was the first hotel to have live entertainment full time. Within two months every bar had live music, and every hotel in Alberta opened a bar for entertainment. When we went into the club, we went in there for a week.

In the beginning, there were a lot of couples in the bar downstairs in the Klondiker, and it was a nice neighbourhood bar; the room was nicely lit with linoleum floors, and it was peaceful, though there were scraps.

Upstairs at the Jasper Place Hotel was a place where working men stopped off for beers after work, often still in their work clothes.

The downstairs changed in the 1970s to be more rock focussed. Bikers and tough guys, they didn't want country. Being a woman in a band, it helped that they didn't attack the band. One of them dropped their drawers right in front of me in the middle of a song. George kicked him and hit the drum cymbal, and everything went crashing down. It wasn't a pleasant thing. They were really rude speaking to us. They thought all musicians were weaklings and could get away with stuff. George never missed a beat and kept playing.

Playing at the New West Hotel

The New West, when it was built, was on the outskirts but when we played, 170th Street went over Stony Plain Road, but you had to go 111th Avenue to that corner; there was houses but it was the end of the city after that. Now the city is west of Winterburn Road, it's really built out. It has grown, we're talking 50 years.

The New West always had good country music. We played a few times there. It was the greatest social gathering place for musicians to visit and listen to music and catch up to the latest gossip. Everyone went there to BS and just visit with each other. It's really being missed. We would, you know, in the later years of the New West... it was fun actually – mostly country and western and blues guys. We all like other music and I can appreciate what they do. A lot of rockers and blues guys. Steel guitar players would come to visit and fiddle players. Lots of singers. Couple of bands, stand up and electric bass. Several people say, "Are you going to play the stand-up bass when you come?"

The New West never changed; it played country the day it opened until the day it closed. It was mostly Traditional Country, but there might have had a country-rock group once in a while. We had a few great episodes when you think about it.

Edmonton tears down buildings that aren't that old – like the New West, it's such a thing that belongs to the city and Jasper Place, too bad it's gone. New West wasn't a dump; it was built in '55. It's a shame because people that owned it previously had done paintings on the walls of Nashville artists, Johnny Cash, Elvis, Dolly Parton. It was really neat. The new guys didn't let anyone in there. One guy tried to buy it, and they wouldn't let him in. The last painting was a Stompin' Tom, Merle Haggard, Dolly and George Jones, Willie Nelson – fantastic. They just tore everything out of there. But I suppose they got what the people wanted, and money is a thing that talks. I don't know what their plans are, adding an extra floor too. Country Kitchen, several people from the New West moved down there. For New West, there looks like there are offices on the main floor.

[Other Music Venues in Jasper Place: The Saxony, the Continental Inn, the Legion](#)

Jasper Place also had The Saxony, the largest bar in Edmonton, with 1,000 people on the main floor—played that one a lot too.

Continental Inn had a nightclub downstairs – something like the Rodeo Club – and there was a tavern upstairs too. It got so popular that they were packed every night and they opened the lounges up to play.

We also played the Jasper Place Legion, 156th Street and 103rd Avenue, across from the Saxony hotel, upstairs and nice venue. People were older and came to dance and have a good time.

Joyce's Career and Other Music Venues They Played In

I met Patsy Cline, saw her at the Edmonton Gardens in 1956. My sister was driving, and we talked to them after the show. They were waiting for a cab, and we said we could drive them back. I told her I wanted to be a singer and she wrote [on an album], "Please continue with your music and good luck." It's a real honour; she was a big star then.

[On Patsy Cline's recording of "Leavin' on Your Mind"]: we were both in the studio [in Nashville] the same week [in 1962], [we had the same producer]. She came in and she wanted to immediately record it. He didn't let her do it until a year later. We did pretty good with it, sold over 150,000; that's a pretty major thing.

[In Edmonton]: Music started in the bars in 1965; it was for Klondike Days only, and we first played the Highway Motor Inn. There were lineups of people blocks long who were trying to get into the bar. We played at 8 pm, the lineup started at 7 pm. Live music in bars was new to everyone and they wanted to be there.

I played Sherwood Park at the old Wye Hall with the Rodgers Brothers; people would drink in their cars and dance. Every third Saturday night, the RCMP would raid that place, give a bunch of tickets out and be on their way.

[In Stony Plain]: Kelly's Hall had a show every Saturday night. Kelly's Hall was on Main Street, above the red and white store, a dance hall with 300 people. We used to pack it every Saturday night before the liquor change. In those days it was illegal to drink in a dance hall, [people] just came to dance; the dancers would go out to their car and have a drink – gopher holes, fence posts, and favourite spots to hide their drinks. By the end of the night, they'd be feeling pretty good. I went to the States, and they got another girl to fill in.

[In the United States]: We lived in Ft. Worth, Texas for a while, and Nashville for a while. Nashville, 10-15miles out of town but now, the city is right up to the airport and past it. In Fort Worth, we worked at Panther Hall, played with local house band there. We were going to work on 4-lane highway – so different, I don't like living in that, driving is just insane.

We played all the nightclub venues, traveled a lot in those days, and were on the road for a number of years, so didn't play Edmonton for 15 years between the '60s and the '90s. We were able to buy a house and raise kids. We quit the road when our kids got to be older, we wanted to be home with them. When on the road, Grandma babysat them when we were gone, and we'd be back on Sunday.

We'd clean up in places like Ft. McMurray and Thompson. In Grande Prairie, it was 50 below zero, cold up there! After that, we said, "We're not going north," so next year we played Medicine Hat. And it was 40 below! We played the Sands, New West, Cook County,

Ranchman's, Medicine Hat. Saskatoon had the best club in Canada and would only use Canadian talent. Ranchman's' in Calgary ended up creating their own agency and most of their musicians came from US. The club right next to the Ranchman's was called the Long Horn.

[Back in Edmonton]: Another hotel we played at was the Bonnaventure, and a place on the Yellowhead called Nova Hotel – Yellowhead and St. Albert trail. Played on one on 104th Street and Jasper Avenue.