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Interview with  
Sandy MacIntyre

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Name is Sandy MacIntyre, born in Inverness, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, April 17, 1935. Lucy MacIntyre. I was born at Margaree Forks, 1937. Lucy Leblanc (maiden name). (moved) 1955 from Cape Breton. You went up in 1955 as well. Well the reason, of course, everyone left at that time. I graduated from High School there wasn't any work in Cape Breton. As much as we loved the scenery and the music and everything else, you had to live as well, so one of the greatest exports of Cape Breton has been the brains, I think, cause everyone who got, recieved their education either moved to Toronto or Boston at that time. We met up there.

Lucy - My sister was up there already and she wanted me to up wirth her so I went up and then I met Sandy I guess about a year later

041 - Cape Breton Club in Toronto

Lucy - Well Sandy use to run the Cape Breton dances up there. Sandy and I both and we use to and that's how Cape Bretoners would meet. There was so many people, couples that met and got married. Well, it doesn't operate now. We use to be at Liberty Hall.

Sandy - That's right. Liberty Hall on Dundas Street in Toronto and then a couple of years later at Saint Mary's Hall, downtown Toronto. And every Cape Bretoner who went to Toronto knew where Saint Mary's Hall was. We ran the club there for about ten years, bringing special guests there like Winston Fitzgerald, Buddy MacMaster, Angus Chisolm, Donald Angus Beaton. You are looking at, we started playing up there I guess about 1956, 57 and riding right through till about 1972. Then what happened was that I became quite involved with the ceilidhs on CBC television shows with Winnie Chaffe, the Cape Breton fiddlers and Buddy Mac Master, myself, Cameron Chisolm, and John Campbell. And we did something like twenty odd TV shows, shown on national television. So we got so involved with that and then at the same time Father MacWade from Prince Edward Island was up in Toronto working with the Maritime community up there and we turned the club and the dance over to the Maritime community people to run it. We ran it privately so we just turned it over to them so they took over the dances and it ran for about a year after. And then they eventually folded. That was our invovlement. There is a place, there are dances held in Toronto, they usually have them once a month. There is the French Club, they have a dance once a month in Toronto and there is the Yucker Club, they call it, which is another Cape Breton Club, sort of a French Club. Its run by the French but they bring in special guests from Cape Breton, same as we use to do. They have a dance about every month or so and every one gets together. You get probably 250 to 300 people of Maritimers who get together. French and English. The tradition down here,

the French and Scottish people living so closely and harmoniously together in Cape Breton has carried right through into Toronto. As you know from Cheticamp, alot of the people play the Scottish music beautifully. They have taken on the Scottish music, they play it and they just love it. So that has carried on through to Toronto and Boston and every place where Cape Bretonners have gone to. Interrelationship between the French and the English is very strong, French and Scottish music and people.

#### 125 - Figures at the French Club in Toronto

If you go to the Franh Club they do the Cheticamp and margaree type dances. French square sets we call them. When you go to the Yaker Club they do the Inverness style square sets. The French Club has a caller nomally but the Inverness sets, the Yaker Club, there is not normally a caller. The people just do the figures and they do them. Yes exactly the same. Dance with your corner. You go through, you split your other corner, come back. The second figure, the ladies in the centre, men on the outside. You dance with your partner. Four couples in a set. At most os these dances you start up with foru couple and end up with about ten couples in a set. Everybody just joins till you form a great big circle. Its hard to dance the actual square set per se. Everyone joins in and you have alot of fun.

#### 155 - The French Set

The French set, i have played for alot of them. Well ok Inverness or the Scottish type set, or the old time Scottish set, Mabou, Judique, we play two sets of jigs. A set of jigs for the first figure, a set os jigs for the second figure. And then a set of reels for the third. The Cheticamp palya a set of jigs and then two sets of reels. And its a totally different dance even things like chaining across. Chain you partner across. Dance around your partner. They have a different type of square set where you really have to have a caller beacuse alot of people other than French people go to the dance who have to do the calls. The French Club, how many figures would they know Lucy.

Lucy -

Its only three figures. The same thing all the time. I always get mixed up.

Sandy -

One you pass your opposite across the other side and you swing. This is the figure where you lead your partner across and you swing with all the ladies on the centre.

Lucy -

Sandy they don't do that now, they use to do it. Its more or less there will be a guy on this side of the guy and on the other side of the guy and they bring her over,. They leave you here. The amn with two women.

Sandy - I think they do the sets the same as they do them down in Cheticamp. They've carried that from Cheticamp. I can, we can do the sets if there is a caller. Cause we take Canadian style or Ontario style square dancing, well, it is universal throughout the world. We take that kind square dancing in Toronto and alot of the calls, some of the calls that we hear are alike, Cheticamp calls like chaining your opartner across to the other side. So we can get through those sets if there is a caller, but if there isn't we can't follow them to well.

214 - Teaches Step-dancing

Lucy.-

Sandy teaches step-dancing and clogging.

Sandy -

I teach step-dancing in Toronto. There again it is mostly people from Cape Breton who take the lessons. So we teach step-dancing every Saturday morning in Toronto. So the Cape Breton community in Toronto is quite active in dancing, step-dancing and square-dancing, also clog dancing. From the States, that isn't a Cape Breton style. Alot of Cape Breton people like to dance it though.

226 - Hockey

Lucy-

They have a hockey game going. Cape Bretonners. Cheticamp. They come down here and they paly Cheticmap once a year. And they paly the team in Cheticamp.

Sandy -

Sports. (Cape Bretonners) The ones in Toronto are pretty well spread out all over from Missasaga to Scarborough whaic is about thiry miles span. There is no one church that brings everyone together. (the one thing that brings everyone together) music and dancing.

Lucy - Yes and it isn't a club like the one in Waltham. Itas not active like the one in Boston.

Sandy -

The one in Waltham is more organized, more formalized.

Lucy -

Lots of parties.

Sandy -

Every New year's Eve there is a big New Year's Party somewhere.

Lucy -

And throughout the year we get together alot at different parties.

Sandy -

I have played alot over in Detroit and Windsor as well. I've palyd for the last five, up until the last New Year's, the last five New Year's in a row there. And play throughout the year there. All Cape Bretonners there. We both know all these people from the dances over there, all from the same neck of the woods. And once again its the dance that keeps everything together. its like a glue I think. (young people) yes. Toronto and Detroit too. And one of the things that gets so interestd in the square dancing is, the ones that are taking step-dancing love to go to square dancing. You can do all your step-dancing in the third figure. And its their chance to, and alot of the ones that i taught step-dancing to, the younger people are off to the dances and during the dance, they have individuals doimg step-dances all the time. And so these people, the younger people, they get out on the floor and they are just dying to show their stuff. And they are step-dancing. That kind of thing keeps the younger people coming.

279 - Alcohol at dances

Yes they do. The problem is

Lucy -

If the parents go they can come.

Sandy -

Ya, the people who run them are fortunately alittle liniant on that. They, if the parents are with them. These kids don't drink normally. They would not be served alcohol but they would be allowed in. What keeps everybody together would be the dances, the parties. Someone has a party you can be sure that it is going to be a packed house with three or four or five fiddlers, singers, guitar players, step-dancers.

295 - Smith party

I didn't know too amny of them. A knew a couple of them. Very few of

them. Like we had gone to Shirley and malcolm MacDonald's house in Scotville the week before and they had a house full of people and step-dancers and piano, fiddlers there. And we knew most of them at that party and they are a very lively bunch of people. These people don't get the opportunity much to take part in Cape Breton functions. They have come from all across Canada so we don't know what. So it wasn't the same.

Lucy -

It wasn't the same. There wasn't alot of dancing.

Sandy -

They just invited us to come and play and I said sure. We do this alot. At most of these parties there are more fiddlers. When we were out at Shirley's how amny were there? Four.

Lucy -

Four fiddlers.

Sandy -

You normally get three or four fiddlers. One at a time normally. But during the night somebody might say lets here two or three fiddles together, so we'd get a couple of fiddlers together and play. I was nineteen when I left.

Lucy -

I was eighteen.

324 - Growing up in Cape Breton

Lucy -

Lots of dances. Every night of the week. Fifties. Every night except Sunday.

Sandy -

In the fifties.

Lucy -

Yes, Wednesday night was Southwest. Saturday there was different dances.

Sandy -

There would be more than one dance in one night. You'd have a choice of

about three or four places to go to. Every night you could go to Whycocomagh, Judique, Inverness, Cheticamp, Margaree, Dunvegan, Broadcove. You'd have a choice of dances. And

Lucy -

There was always weddings, showers and weddings where there was music as well. So there was always something going on.

340 -

Everyone comes home in the summer to Cape Breton from all over the world, back to Cape Breton in the summer. And you have volumes of people who are just dying to get to a dance because you see in Toronto the dances are finished in April because we knock them off for the summer cause its so hot up there. so you don't have any dance from April through till about October or about November. So there is a whole void in there. So by the time they get home in June, July, they are just itching to get to a dance somewhere. And of course the dances are all. Mostly the people who come home from away, that's really support these dances. I'd say by September they start going down because people are back to their jobs.

361 -

Look at the trend today why the dances are so busy in the summer time, the ones who are coming home, our age group, people coming home were accustomed to going to all these dances. That has died off a lot here as far as the younger people going to dances. Sure, I believe that and the ones that come home are all people that, the ones that come home to these dances are the ones that came to Saint Mary's Hall in the sixties and seventies when we ran the dances in Toronto. Very, very, great dance goes every one of them. And I remember growing up in Inverness when Winston Fitzgerald came in to play for a dance, the halls would be jammed and I remember sitting on the corner of the stage, listening and watching the dancing all night. I'd be 14, 15. No liquor or anything and the hall was packed. Today you seem to have to have a bar and all that before you can get the crowd.

376 - Bars at dances

Lucy -

Only the last few years here.

Sandy -

If we go back to Toronto, the crowd started to go down a bit going into the late fifties, going into the sixties. And so we had thought that we should be doing something a little bit different. Having a bar for the people. Because what was happening is that people would come with there

own bottle to a dance and they would get feeling good alot faster cause they are not enjoying the drink. They are just going out to have drinks. So to avoid that and to have more coming to enjoy themselves we went through a period in Toronto where we got a liquer liscence. We were the first ones to get our liquer liscence for maritime time dances. So we went and got a liquer dances. At that time we also had a restriction at the door. You either wore a shirt and tie or you didn't get in type thing. People with jeans and tee-shirts, there could be trouble cause they are not too concerned when they are dressed that way and drinking. So we did quite a change in the whole dancing in Toronto by getting the liquer liscence. We always had a supply of ties at the door. So if anybody came without a tie we said here is a tie and away you go.

Lucy -

That's the reason for not having any dances around here anymore. There are ceratain places that they can't have any dances because there is always too amny fights.

Sandy -

Is that right?

Lucy -

The younger crowd. That wouldn't be square dancing. They drink too much.

Sandy -

I find that square dancing has really cleaned up as far as trouble, problems. At one time there were alot of problems with liquer because people would come to the dance and they would have a bottle in the car. They would just keep going out drinking it straight. When we went in to having a bar and proper mixes and everything the thing seemed to calm don and you got alot of the people back, who would go to other bars to hear maybe Country and Western music, they could sit down and have a drink and listen to country and western. Because alot of Cape Bretonners and Maritimers love Country and Western music as well. So I think the bar brought them back, it really did. I shouldn't put it that way, but at leats they could sit down and relax and have a drink and listen to the music or get up and dance. They ahd a choise.

Lucy -

We had really good dances. People really enjoyed themselves.

Sandy - Excellent.

414 - Dance and priest

Sandy -

Oh yes i heard alot of stories from my parents. One priest where was it, Judique or mabou, or Port Hood, there was a priest out there who wanted to burn all the fiddles. Actually he proceeded with that and saying that it was the instrument of the devil. And my parents told us lots of stories about that. They never really gave us the rational for that. But I honestly don't know the reason for that. But I know it was, they were trying to ban it down in Cape Breton at one time. Much before my time. This is the stories that my parents told me (from their experience). Now of course today the priests of course are alot broader minded on many of things, alot more permissiveness, and of course the violin should never have been banned because its the most beautiful instrument. And the Scottish music, the whole thing. But today alot of priests play the violin. And it is played in the church. I played for a funeral, at a funeral last, just this past week down at East Margaree. So its quite, Cape Breton fiddlers are playing for weddings, funerals and everything. Its fortunately, of course that there has been a turn for the better. Very widely accepted in the Church now.

#### 442 - Dances in the fifties

This was all year round. You could find a dance somewhere almost everywhere throughout the winter. Not as many as the summer. There wouldn't be as many. Slot earlier in the summer than now, like maybe the later part of June, July, great for dancing. I'd say from about April, May on we use to get dances. I'd just don't feel that there are as many local people going to dances. The ones that are coming back and they are starving to hear the music and do some dancing.

#### 455 - Phenomenon of returning to Cape Breton

Well I think if you look around at the scenery, the music of the people, you can't beat it anywhere. Everyone that I know comes back. Regardless where they live come back in the summer as long as they have relatives or. Every year we are back several times a year.

#### 463 - Consider a move back to Cape Breton

Oh everyone usually moves back eventually. Everybody does.

#### 466 - Strength of dance in Cape Breton

There is alot of people who can't wait to get, Francis MacDonnell and all that, chaps that come down. They just can't wait to get down. Even though the same fiddlers play in Toronto for dances or you get special guests up from Cape Breton. Its still, there is something a little bit more magical about getting in a small school house hall or something. It brings back alot of memories I think for alot of the people. Dances we use to go to.

476 - School house dances

Oh ya there was alot of dances in school houses and school halls. That would be the early fifties. School dances.

482 - Other occasions for dancing

Lucy -

There was always a Valentine's dance, Easter, Xmas, New Year's.

490 - Began to play the fiddle

Well I could play a very few couple of tunes before I went up to Toronto, believe it or not, but my parents played. My brothers and sisters played. My mother is an excellent fiddler. Excellent. We always had about three or four fiddles around the house. So I always played the piano or guitar, were my instruments. And when I moved to Toronto in 55 I started to miss the Cape Breton music and went down town and bought some music books and in my little room I learned how to read and write music. That's how I learned music. Well, I didn't have a fiddle when I went there. But going to work one morning, we just got out of our apartment and walking out to the main street and in this garbage can was a fiddle and a case, in the garbage can. And I couldn't believe it. We couldn't believe it. We couldn't afford to buy one at the time. So I looked at that and I couldn't believe it. Took it back in my apartment and it was a French violin, a dark colour violin. I'll always remember it. And it had strings in it but it didn't have a bow. So I picked up a cheap bow for about thirty five dollars, picked up some music books and started to learn from there, started to play from there. I could play a few tunes. It served the purpose very well. It was a fairly good fiddle. It seemed to be at the time. I don't know how I would measure it today but when you are starting out and when you haven't got a fiddle, it was like a Strad to me at the time, cause I was able to learn from it. And from there we have just gone on and just kept reading and playing and composing music. And playing for dances. I think within a couple of years playing at dance sup in Toronto. Just mushroomed from there. (he composes) Ya, quite a number of pieces. My first album there si about six numbers that i composed were on that first album. (other people paly them) Oh yes, quite a number, Buudy Macmaster plays them. Other fiddlers play them. Winston Fitzgerald played them when he was playing. I heard, I was down at the Doryman's last Saturday, we were down there with Joey beaton and Angela, and Donnie Le Blanc was playing this rel and Joey Beaton sais God that is a nice tune. And I said ya that is familiar and I said that is on my first record. I composed it. I hadn't pleyed it since i composed it since I put that record out in 1973. Now I'm starting to play it again cause I had forgotten about it. What I am planning to do is compile all the tunes I composed and maybe eventually put it in a book form. I'd expept to do that one day. I have composed quite alot of them. Well, I'd say about 75

or so. I just composed a jig, a straspey, and a reel.

Lucy -

And he composed a nice song about the Maritimes.

Sandy -

That's a different thing.

535 - Work in toronto

Well I worked with Air Canada. I was an airline salesmanager for many years and I took an early retirement package to become involved with more things I wanted to do. So I took an early retirement package three years ago wasn't it? Now I'm a little bit more into the music and dancing. Made another album. Formed our own company to make the albums, to distribute them. Got our own business as far as the albums are, that's actually a little side line business right now. Distribute them to all the various places. So and that has worked out extremely well.

546 - Church picnics

Oh gosh we use to have alot of picnics in Inverness.

Lucy -

Ya we had them here as well. I forgot about that. Dancing from morning till night.

Sandy -

We use to do it in Inverness. I don't know how you did it down here, we didn't know each other here down here. But in Inverness you'd get a fiddler at the picnics, there would be one or two fiddlers. In Inverness you'd have whole week of picnics. We'd have a whole week. And dancing every night up at the race track. They had a big stage outside and you would pay to go in on the dance floor. You'd have a great big outside stage. To go up on the dance floor, the dance would cost you maybe 10 cents. You'd pay ten cents to go in. Of course the floor was full all the time. And of course you'd have your step-dancing, you'd have your step-dancers the same as you do now. You'd be dancing square sets. That was all the way through till I went up to Toronto in 1955. That is as far back as I can remember. Every year for a week. You'd have all kinds of games. Like Under and Over, Crown and anchor, tossing dimes in dishes. Well and then one of the biggest things, the baseball game, many things going on. Horse races. Not only every evening but all day and all night dancing. Oh sure.

Lucy -

We would have them down here as well. i remember my sister danced twenty-four sets in a row, Mary, twenty-four sets, in one day. They started early in the morning. It was Ethel Cormier that was on the piano. Twenty-four square sets. East Margaree. It was about four or five days. Maybe it would have bee a week. It was right next to the church. And they would have it every year.

Sandy -

They use to have bingo as well.

580 - Weddings

Oh well it is still very strong today.

Lucy.-

Sometimes it would go for two days. Not so much now.

584 - Wedding reel

Sandy -

Oh yes those were the old reels that Angus Allen Gillis and Dan J. Campbell use to play. And I think that we have all learned them from their records. And of course we have got the music of them since. These were traditional type reels that were handed down from generation to generation. They were called Old time wedding reels, a ceratin set of tunes that they ahd on one of their records. And they were played at weddings. Like my mother use to paly an awful lot at weddings. She played from the age of 13 up till she past away and she was about 75 at that time and she played right up to the end. The wedding reels were tunes that they played for square dancing. The first dance would normally be the wedding party. The bride and groom, their parents and that type of thing.

Lucy -

Just the family.

Sandy -

That's right, today normally at weddings that I play for today they normally have the waltz for the bride and groom to begin. We play a waltz and it is followed by a square set. Normally the ones in the wedding party up front and anyone else that wanted to form the square set also get up and dance.

606 - Scotch four

Actually the Scotch Four as it is known today is people getting up to do the step-dancing. Its really what it is. No (he doesn't know what it was before)

610 - Eight-handed reel

The special wedding reel you mean. No.

614 - Set typical of Northeast Margaree and Maggaree forks

Lucy -

Yes, it was like three times around your corner partner. That would be the last figure. The first figure wa about the same as what we do.

Sandy -

Who use to prompt the square sets there. If you could get to that person. They do something different. Very nice square sets too. Very nice square sets.

Lucy -

Archie Neil Chisolm would know, Tommy Murphy would know. He is the caller now. Danny Doyle use to call. He is up in Toronto now. The second figure was dance with your corner partner. Alex Murphy for the North East set. Cameron Chisolm would be a person to interview.

Sandy -

His mother would probably have very valuable information on dances. Why don't we call Alex Murphy. If he can remember this older chap, he ws about seventy, and he came up calling the square sets and he was really good.

END OF INTERVIEW

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