

Betty Cody (a.k.a.) Rita Cote / Rita Binette

as Interview by Ann Breau April 10, 2000

Introduction...

1. I understand that your family came to live in the United States from Canada when you were a young girl. Would you share your impressions of this event with us?

Je suis sous l'impression que votre famille est venue du Canada pour vivre aux Etats-Unis quand vous étiez une jeune fille. Partageriez vous vos impressions de cet événement avec nous?

Betty... Yes, I arrived in the United States at the age of nine months. I don't remember (of course) I don't remember, but I remember how my mother and my father told us what it was like to cross over arriving in the United States ((in English) and all that). ... (laughter)...

Ann... (English) That's okay, part of what I'm talking about in my paper is that we tend to flip between French and English... (We speak French) and then we speak English...and that's fun too...

Betty... (English) Ya, so, I started remembering being in the United States from about the age of four and (aah...) See, I was the seventh one in the family so we were all Canadians at the time and (aah) all the oldest... all the ones that were born before me all became citizens, and I never did, I don't know why, I never did...

Ann... Betty, you aren't naturalized?

Betty... No...I had gone to Portland to initiate the paperwork and I fell on the stairs, the large marble staircase. And I hurt myself quite seriously.

Ann... Your back? Or...

Betty... My leg... I almost broke my leg. I was almost two months limping... (ya know) and I never went back... (laughter) I decided to remain Canadian. I'm settled in the United States as a resident.

Ann... And what of your sisters and brothers?

Betty... They are all naturalized...

Ann... And your parents?

Betty... My parents were naturalized... no... my parents remained... just a minute...just a minute, I'm not sure if my parents were naturalized. The boys (*brothers*) all of them went into the military so automatically they became citizens.

Ann... (English) Now how did that effect your work? In order to work you didn't t have to be naturalized? They didn't have things like work visas like they do now?

Betty... No, the only thing that was needed was a visa in order to come to the United States and the papers to establish residency... no problem.

Ann...Was your community (*neighborhood*) was it all French, and French speaking?

Betty... Where I was brought up... yes. It was all french, and I attended a French Canadian school that was headed by nuns.

Ann... St.Mary's?

Betty...No, St. Louis.

Ann... St. Louis in Auburn?

Betty... Yes, in Auburn and it was all French. We were instructed in English but we didn't speak in English.

Ann... All of the subjects ... were they (*also*) taught in French?

Betty... In French and in English... but we didn't speak English, the nuns spoke to us in French. So we were able to read and write and count in English but we didn't practice speaking in English. As a matter of fact, I didn't begin to speak English until I was about 16 years old.... Ya...when I first met Lone Pine I had some difficulty communicating with him.

Ann... (English) Did you have friends that were English speaking ?

Betty...Not that I recall... not that I recall. No, where I was brought up in Auburn it was all French Canadian people.

Ann... Betty, what area of Auburn were you from that was all French ?

Betty...It was in New Auburn. Where we were from it was all large families of like twelve children (laughter)...

Ann... Ummm... Is this part of New Auburn still French today?

Betty... Why yes...they still live there but the young ones don't speak French. They don't practice... they don't practice speaking French... but the older people... the grandmothers and grandfathers have not lost their French. ...Not any more than I have (laughter)...

2. As a young Franco-American girl growing up in Lewiston during the depression, what was your vision of the future? Was that vision different than or similar to the attitudes of that time period?

Comme une jeune fille Franco-Américaine grandissant à Lewiston durant la Dépression, quelle était votre vision de l'avenir? Est-ce que cette vision était différente ou semblable aux attitudes de cette période?

Betty... Those of us that were living during the time of the depression, we developed coping mechanisms. We were a large family of twelve and we were accustomed to the situation... (*let me put it this way*) we were not spoiled and we practiced familial cooperation for survival. We really didn't have a hard time. Our mother was very... she had a talent for frugality... we always had good food and we always had nice apartments and we never stayed in places like we saw in Auburn that were old run down buildings. And we always had a nice place to live. It was clean and we considered ourselves well off.

Ann... Very clean...

Betty... Yes, yes and we found ourselves well. We didn't consider ourselves disadvantaged. We didn't even feel like we (*the country*) were in a depression. We were young, we were all fortunate. (*lucky*) There was a lot of music in the family...

Ann... Betty, did your father have a career? (*or, what did your father do for work*)

Betty... My father... it was like a profession... He used to build beautiful houses and it was he who... .. how do you say design...

Ann...(English) He would manufacture the designs for homes?

Betty... Ya...He made his own plans and he made his own blue prints. He had talent. He didn't have education but it didn't show, (laughter) he was very smart. (Ya,)... And my mother she never worked, she took care of the children and the house and she never worked.

Ann...Did you have ten or eleven children in the family?

Betty... Twelve children... One that died young so that we were eleven always around the table ... thirteen with my mother and father. (laughter)... We were never lonely.

Ann...(English) And you also said that there was a lot of music...

Betty... (English) Music ya... my father was a fiddle player played fiddle he made his own violins... when he didn't have any work he would make his own violins and (aah) he was a tap dancer and my mother had a beautiful soprano voice. She'd sing quite a bit to us, and it was quite a, ... an entertaining family.

Ann... (English) Betty what I'm wondering about is how your talent was, was nurtured.... Because your telling me that you were brought up in a time when people were very pragmatic, like your mom was very efficient and your dad... and, and you had a wonderful place to live and good food to eat and people worked hard. How was it that you were allowed to develop your talent? Was there something different in your family or your culture or ... what was it that allowed you to move forward with that.

Betty... (English) Well, do you want me to answer this in French or English?

Ann... French

Betty... Fraincais?

Ann... Or both...that's okay...

Betty... (English) Well I'll say it in English first... (Aah) ...My parents were very understanding people. They were not that old fashioned, it was a funny thing, and they understood...(aah,) that the public wanted me to entertain for them and (aah) they said why don't you go... they, they really urged me to go on and participate with different stage plays. First I was in stage plays and I had to sing in french and all that stuff and that's how it developed. I didn't want to go but they... my mother said, "Why don't you go? ... Why don't you go?.. I remember once , my father... I was about 15, and he wanted me to go sing in the beer joint (laughter)... and that's when I said, "Oh no, you won't get me to sing in a beer joint" ... and he said, "Well I'll be there". He wanted to take me on Lincoln Street and Lisbon Street...there was a lot of beer joints then and I said, "Oh no, no that's not for me, that's no, no, not the career I want". ...

Ann... So it sounds to me like they were really (...aah...)

Betty... They were open minded.

Ann Ya, ... they were very... they had a different mind set. Maybe...

Betty... Ya, we were not ruled, my family. We were very very open minded, very religious and very trusting. They trusted and they could almost tell (ya know) who I should be with and I could too, also. .So they never worried about me.

Ann... And again in french, how was that vision different or similar to the time period like other girls your age

Betty ... Ah, compared to today

Ann... Oh no, just like then... back then... (ya)

Betty... (English) Well like I said I had the freedom. My mother trusted me and I had the freedom and I was always accompanied by someone who could take care of me. My mother saw to that, and most of the time I was with my brother Paul and he would follow me and I would say, "Don't leave me now, I'm with strangers" and all that it was all french again but sometimes we were invited to different parties and it would get pretty rough. People drank a lot of beer then and I was young and... (umhn) I didn't like that you know, and (aah) sometimes there would be some a little bit of fussing around with men that used to overdue with their drinking and I'd say to my brother Paul, "Hey let's go, let's get out of here." I was always scared so I was...(aah) my mother like I said, she'd let me go she'd trust me and I was with my brother Paul..

Ann... (English) Now what I'm wondering is... and this kind of ties in to the next question so I'll say it as... were these primarily these types of revignon type of events.. And I'll ask you the question in English and then in French and if you could respond.

3. It is my understanding that during this time period Lewiston was a thriving community rich in cultural resources and opportunity. How did this condition effect your direction in life? At this point in your life did you feel that your Franco-American heritage was an asset or a hindrance to your musical career?

Je suis sous l'impression que durant cette periode, Lewiston était une communauté riche en ressources et opportunitées culturelles. Comment est-ce que ceci a influencer votre direction dans la vie? A ce point dans votre vie est-ce que vous sentier que votre heritage Franco-Americain était un avantage our un désavantage au regard de votre carrière musicale?

Betty... It wasn't a ...(the french) it didn't hinder me in terms of a career in french, ... it helped me. Because I could sing the French in English when I first began to sing which was at about the age of 14 or 15, and it was then that I first came to sing in English and sometimes circumstances would necessitate singing in French because I knew the two, and it would help, yes it would help me because I was Franco-American

Ann... Were you much in demand as a singer?

Betty...Not too much, no... it was more like the outsiders who would come to Lewiston and Auburn and put on a (*spectac*) show (a show is a *spectac*) and at these shows I would be asked

to perform in French and English around the age of 15. Also, quite often I would be asked to perform for the parish. They would put on shows in the church basement and I would be engaged to perform for these during the evening. I used to do these but I had no plans of continuing. (laughter) I used to enjoy it but after that I was very happy when it was over (laughter)

Ann... That sort of ties into the next question too...

4. Early in your career was it your intention to pursue a national following in terms of audience or did that just evolve naturally? (sounds like not)... Did the scope of your popularity surprise you?... What was the greatest factor in the appeal of your music?

Au debut de votre carrière, est-ce que c'était votre intention de poursuivre une audience national ou est-ce que ce fut une évolution naturelle? Est-ce que l'étendue de votre popularité vous a étonné? Quel était le plus grand charme qui attirait les audiences à votre musique?

Betty... (laughter) Well... I don't know how to answer that...like I said, it was not my plan to make music a career but at the age of 17, I saw that the audiences liked Betty Cody and...I began to be known in public and I began to be in demand and at the age of 17 that's when I met Lone Pine and after that I was on the radio and it continued. We were married and started to play everywhere in Canada, and it's then (*during that time*) that the French became .. How do I say that ((English) how do we say that)...

Ann... It was (aah).... I don't know what could you substitute for that, (aah) (not facile) (aah).... I don't know, ... some things don't translate, right? (aah) so you feel ...another question was...

5. Was their enough of a local market to support your music or was it necessary to branch out?

Est-ce qu'il y avait un marché locale assez grand pour soutenir votre musique ou est-ce qu'il fut nécessaire que vous vous ramifier?

.....

The remainder of the interview is in English.

6. Your career obviously took a new direction when you made the decision to join forces with Hal Lone Pine and his band. How did you come to be introduced to Lone Pine, and at this point what direction did your career take?

7. How did this new identity effect your perception of self and your connection to your Franco-American heritage?

8. Was the establishment of your large and loyal Canadian fan base directly influenced by the fact that your were of Franco-American descent?

9. After parting with Lone Pine you embarked on a successful and varied solo career which endures to this day. Would you share some of the highlights from this rich musical adventure?

10. To this day you continue to inspire, awe and dazzle fans with your in- exhaustible talent. To what do you attribute the longevity of your popularity?

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Interview Agreement

I, ANN BREAU, in view of the historical
(Interviewer: type or print)
and scholarly value of the information contained in the
interview(s) with BETTY CODY
(Interviewee(s): type or print)
and designated as accession number _____, knowingly and volun-
tarily permit the Franco-American Collection of Lewiston-Auburn
College the full use of this information, the tapes and transcripts
and all other material in this accession, and hereby grant and
assign to the Franco-American Collection of Lewiston-Auburn College
all rights of every kind pertaining to this information, whether or
not such rights are now known, recognized, or contemplated, except
for such restrictions as are specified below.

4-10-00
(Date)

Ann M. Breaux
(Interviewer's signature)

Restrictions:

Understood and agreed to:

Madeline C Roy
(Director)
5-22-2000
(Date)

Franco-American Heritage Collection
Lewiston-Auburn College
51-55 Westminster St.
Lewiston ME 04240

In consideration of the research the Franco-American Heritage Collection of Lewiston-Auburn College is conducting to collect and preserve materials of value for the study of Franco-American history and folklife, I would like to deposit with them for their use the items (tapes, transcripts, photographs, artifacts, etc.) represented by the accession number given above.

This tape or tapes and the accompanying transcript are the result of one or more recorded, voluntary interviews with me. Any reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of my spoken, not my written word and that the tape, not the transcript, is the primary document.

It is understood that the Franco-American Heritage Collection of Lewiston-Auburn College will, at their discretion, allow interested individuals to listen to the tapes, read the transcript and use them in connection with their research or for other educational purposes of a university, school, or organization. It is further understood no copies of the tapes or transcript will be made and nothing may be used from them in any published form without the written permission of the Director of the collection.

Interviewee Signature: X Betty Cody (Benette)
Date: 4-10-00

Understood and Agreed to:

Interviewer: AM Bean

Date: 4-10-00

Director: _____

Date _____