Meet the Directors, cont’d.

Kevin Alstrup: I studied for an undergraduate degree in music, with specific interest in ethnomusicology, at Queen’s University. I completed my degree in the summer of 1993, and have spent the past year collaborating on a project with Mi’kmaq poet Rita Joe and Dr. Gordon Smith (Queen’s University). Presently I am living in Peterborough pursuing an interest in traditional and “old time” fiddle and accordion music as well as frequenting my favourite pub, The King’s Arms, on Sunday afternoons, where the weekly traditional/Celtic jam happens. And happen it does; there are some incredible old time players living in this region, and every Sunday is a surprise … you never know just who will show and what will happen! For the future, I hope to continue studies in ethnomusicology as well as maintain my own interest in playing and learning traditional musics.

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(In case readers have forgotten, the EFLs were never meant to be a column by Judith Cohen, but a feature open to all members. One of the Bulletin’s co-editors is finally taking up Judy’s lead. It’s your turn, next.)

Calgary, Alberta
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Dear Judy,

When I was gathering background material on Stan Rogers for the last issue, I ran across a story that was, I guess, new only to me—about a New England sailor who was overturned in the proverbial icy Atlantic and kept himself fighting back by singing "The Mary Ellen Carter" over and over for several hours. I gather that this happened during the last year or so before Rogers died and was—quite properly—one of the major experiences of Rogers’s career. It’s set me to thinking about a couple of times in my life when music has meant a great deal to me.

There’s a line in a song by the Incredible String Band, from the 60s; if memory serves, it was one of Mike Heron’s, though I don’t remember the title. I believe the song’s persona is singing to some new-born puppies (actually, "Puppies" may have been the title), and he refrains, "Music is so much less / than what you are." I was in those days a bit more inclined to the a r s g r a t i a a r t i s school than I am now, and I must confess that I had a hard time with that. It’s taken a few blows for me to come to understand that art, like business and a few other activities I can think of, should serve life, not the reverse.

At any rate, I thought I’d like to share a couple of my favorite musical experiences with you, and maybe some of our fellow Society members will remember some of their own tales for us.

The first occurred when I was living in Montréal in the early 70s. Late one fall afternoon, my son, who was about 6 years old then, came howling in from the yard with a gash under (and dreadfully close to) his left eye. I swooped him up and took him to the hospital. Well, I suppose they probably gave him a once-over in reasonable time, but once they determined that it could wait a while, of course it did have to wait a while.

I have no doubt that whoever got sliced open or stitched up while we waited was in more immediate need than was Stephen, but a 6 year old does get nervous, cold, hungry, and just plain scared. To keep him entertained, I launched into a little racist ditty I’d picked up from a Carl Sandburg record years before, which I’d previously used merely to amuse:

My name is Yon Yonson
I come from Visconsin
I vurk in de lumbermills dere
Ven I walk down de street, all de people I meet
Dey say, Vat’s your name?
And I say....

Of course it goes on until performer or audience have had enough. I don’t know what our tolerance level had been when I sang it just for fun, but on this occasion, not only did I not dare give it up until Stephen