



Wilfrid - a christmas story

It was a dark night in December, a few weeks before the winter solstice, when Andrea called. "None of the musicians want to make the rounds of the old-timers' homes this year.

"Can you?"

Winters in the Yukon are cold and long. And when you're old, they can be awfully lonely.

I play clarinet; not well, but good enough for near-deaf people. Andrea is a professional musician, definitely out of my league, but she asked me.

I said yes.

We played the rehab facility first; the audience strapped to gurneys or set up in wheel chairs. I remember thinking it went OK. There was some applause, from the staff mostly.

When we moved on to the main old-timers home, things brightened up. We played the usual holiday tunes, clarinet and piano. People got up and danced, Some sang along.

It felt good. We decided to wrap up the evening with Danny Boy/Londonderry Air. Not a christmas tune, but like many timeless tunes, a great melody.

It's the feeling, not the words, that make great music.

I nailed the tune pretty good, for an amateur.

As we packed up to leave, an old timer came up to us in his wheel chair.

"You must have practised a lot". I think he liked the tune. His name was Wilfrid, loved music, loved to dance. His legs had only recently given away. He couldn't dance anymore.

He wheeled away.

We went out into the cold dark night of a Yukon December.

A few weeks later, I saw Wilfrid's name in the news.

He had checked out of the home, wheeled his chair out in the snow to the millennial trail where the Yukon River runs.

Took off his clothes. Folded them neatly on the chair. Laid down in the snow.

(Londonderry Air)