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**Eric:**

Hello, and welcome to The Shared Mic! I'm Eric!

**Salima:**

And I'm Salima! Welcome to another episode.

**Eric:**

Today. We have Vicki and Marianne. Vicki, a legend of the Edmonton Folk Music Festival is a longtime manager of volunteers. And Marianne just became the manager of volunteers in 2019.

**Salima:**

So Vicki and Marianne will be talking about experiences, volunteering and working for the Edmonton Folk Music Festival.

**Marianne:**

So Vicki, you like, people know you've been with the festival for a very long time but when did you get involved? Or like when's the first year you went and then how did that, how did that move to you volunteering and getting more involved?

**Vicki:**

Okay. Well 1980 was the first year as I'm sure everybody knows. My husband and I went to the festival. We thought it was pretty cool and we thought it was going to happen once. And so the next summer we went away on a holiday and we didn't pay attention to 1981. I had gotten to know the woman who had been the volunteer coordinator. And when I got back, she was kind of annoyed that I hadn't volunteered. So the next year I jumped in and volunteered! And then between 1986 and 89, I was on the board and in 1989-90, there was no money to hire a volunteer coordinator. And since I'd done quite a bit of that kind of thing, I said I'd do it as a volunteer. And that's how I ended up doing that for two years as a volunteer.



And then Terry Wickham offered me the job, which I didn't really want to take because I was having too much fun being a volunteer, so that's how I came to--I actually worked for the festival starting in 1990.

**Marianne:**

Right. Yeah. And what like when you started volunteering though, you were on airport crew, right? It's a hard one to--it's a hard one to leave. I think for people even now, right?

**Vicki:**

Well, when I started doing it nobody wanted to do it. Like, it was sort of like, "we need somebody to do this and you can maybe have more fun working in the kitchen next year." I don't think that anybody really appreciated how much fun it could be. It was a great gig!

**Marianne:**

Yeah, for sure. Well, and I mean, when you started working there, like, you had been doing volunteer management elsewhere. I guess, like, before volunteer management was a career choice even--it wasn't like a full time job when you started with the festival, right?

**Vicki:**

No, I can't remember whether it was four months or six months. It was not a very long time. I had other things I was doing. But it certainly wasn't a full time job. And at that point I didn't expect to be doing it for what...what did I do it for? 30 years? That was not, that was not my plan ha!

**Marianne:**

I don't know if I've ever asked you this before, but I mean, when you were getting into it, cause it was a very different time for the organization too, did you ever think you would stop? Or was there a time where you were like, "I need to--I need to maybe reconsider?"

**Vicki:**

Several times. Yeah. Oh yeah. Then I started looking at the options and the other things that I thought I might like to do, and I just kind of really liked what I was doing. But it's been a very rewarding 35 years or whatever it is. I've been involved almost 40 I guess. It's been really fun. Yeah. It was a good gig.

**Marianne:**

Yeah, and I guess, because it's such...it was such a different time from when, like I just didn't start working with the festival...I mean, I hadn't even been to the festival or had



started working there in 2007. But I think when you got involved, the festival's kind of being built, right? It was becoming the thing that it would eventually become and it changes all the time. But that's such a different time to hop on. Like, you were really part of making--making the Edmonton Folk Fest, right?

**Vicki:**

But, but you know what. There's been a lot of changes. Like technological changes, but yeah, it is different and it has gone through different stages and it's really pretty much. I really felt that it was time that somebody younger and more tech savvy and more clued into the changes, I guess, the social changes that have happened in the last number of years would be much better suited to carry that forward because it has been evolving. Certainly it evolved from the time I started as a volunteer until the time I started being a staff person there and it's constantly changing. So, yeah, it was building but it's still building and we just don't see it. I mean, you really don't see it when you're in it.

**Marianne:**

Yeah. Well, and I think too, I mean, when it started in 1980, there, there were 300 volunteers. Right. So I think during that time you were in the role for sure. It just, like, expanded. It's much bigger. And that's a very visual representation, I guess, of how it changed for sure. But yeah, but you're absolutely right. Like the back end and all those things change year to year for sure.

I was doing production when I started the first four summers and then I came to work for you. And then maybe a couple years in, you kind of asked if I would be interested in stepping in, which was daunting to be asked that. Because, you know, you've been doing that work for a long time and, like, obviously you did an amazing job and, and people know you and your work. But were you ready to step back from it personally as well? Like, regardless of wanting somebody younger to come in and thinking about the long-term for the organization, were you personally just ready?

**Vicki:**

Yeah. I mean, as you well know, having done it for a fair number of years with me and now on your own--you know how demanding it is. I mean, it's emotionally demanding, time consuming. You're sort of like a social worker, a guidance counselor, you know, like help organize it. There's a whole lot of balls to keep in the air and it is a hard, hard job. Although it's a lot of fun, it's hard. And so I was looking for somebody that had...and I have to say this--you were perfect. I watched you and you had a really good work ethic and the volunteers really liked you. You just had all the things that I was hoping I would find somebody to take on the role.

But I have to tell you, you're saying that you thought that you were scared of me or you're intimidated. The first time I met you, Don brought you into the office to introduce you. And I thought, "what a bastard! He's taking this poor little girl and he's going to throw her in with those people who are going to eat her alive!" I was so mad at him. I thought, "you were so mean," and then I was--once you were doing it--, "she's doing okay." I was so mad at him!

**Marianne:**

I do remember my interview with Don was like, I mean, I came to the AGM and he didn't ask me any questions. I just sat through the AGM. And then at the end he said, what's the last book you read? And it was 1984. And he really liked that, so he hired me. But I think, at the time, like, it was 2007 and it was kind of the boom. And I think I was actually the only person who had applied for the job.

Thinking back now, like, I think I've been thinking about this quite often because you know, like, the festival's not happening this year. So you're thinking about the history of it and stuff. I was so green and young. Like I had no idea what was going on. (Vicki: I'm so scared for you) Oh yeah. I would be, if I saw me at that time--I would be scared for me, for me too. I was very like quiet and shy and I don't know, like, I feel like probably a different person almost entirely.

**Vicki:**

Yeah.

**Marianne:**

Well yeah, I guess, I guess I understood that from working on site, maybe that the, like, social work or, like, emotional support aspect of being involved with the festival. Because you really do find out a lot of things about people or their lives or, or challenges they're facing. I mean, sometimes people want us or expecting us to step in, which is interesting. I mean, I think we've dealt with a number of things together and the issues, I don't know, have maybe changed or evolved over the years? But I was kind of wondering--when you took it on in the eighties, what, like, was it the same? Were people still coming to you with those things? (Vicki: They started to, yeah.) It started to become expectation then...that you were like "the rock."

**Vicki:**

Yeah. It's sort of like, you're, you're the constant--the person who was doing this as the constant. And it's really weird because it's basically a four-day event. So you wouldn't have thought that that would become so important. But yeah, that's another reason why I thought it would be really important to have somebody, like, sort of have a succession plan. There's a lot of stuff that people tell you that you can't write down. I can share it with somebody, but I have to be careful who you know? There's just things that you can't really just tell everybody or write down.



So it helps to have somebody working with you that starts to understand which people need extra attention and, and that sort of thing. Yeah.

**Marianne:**

You really have to build those personal relationships, and we had that long overlap. We really needed to just have a lot of these types of discussions where we were talking through things or talking about history with people or experiences you'd had with, with volunteers that I could take with me because it's not written. I guess it also took a long time or I needed all that time with the organization to also, I think, get people's trust. It was so interesting coming in too, because a lot of the people have been volunteering for a long time, and lots of our volunteers are also older than me. So coming in as a younger person, there was a lot of different things happening there. So having that transition, and, I think, people knowing that you were okay with me coming in and doing stuff was so important.

**Vicki:**

One of the things I was very concerned about was whoever was going to step into this role--know that the volunteers were comfortable with that person and that they knew that that was the person that they were going to be dealing with. And that did take a couple or three years. There were a couple of people who just kept saying, "well, you'll still be there won't you?" I'm going, "oh eventually, I'll be happy to leave ha." Most of those people have actually retired. I mean, it was time anyway, but many of them have just found that after they got to a certain point in their lives, they were moving away or, you know, doing retirement things once there's something else. But it took two or three years, eh?

**Marianne:**

I think, yeah. I remember, I mean, when, you know, when people were calling at some point and they would just want to talk to you and I think eventually they just had to talk to me was how we dealt with that, right? So okay, now you've retired. I guess we, unfortunately, of course, we're supposed to do a retirement party for you this year.

**Vicki:**

(Laughs) I've been avoiding that and then look at what happened...COVID!

**Marianne:**

Then COVID happened and you got to dodge it, but I guess we did the same, like with the role changes, we didn't announce it. We didn't announce that you were retiring. I just kind of slip it in places like AGM or I'm like, "oh, Vicky's retired." Then I guess this is your first, this was your first year of being fully retired. How was that? How was it kind of stepping out that way?



**Vicki:**

It was kind of weird because...it was weird because of what has happened with COVID. I was on coming and volunteering this year and I thought I'll just talk to you and see what kind of needs you had--what I could do without having to take on all the responsibility that you're taking on. But this kind of threw a spanner into it.

I really feel strongly about the organization still. You know, I wanted to be involved in some way, but not as a staff person and not in any role where people could come up and ask me questions about volunteering. And actually, it was interesting, because I was at the member's event. I was just there handing out glasses to people and saying "hi" to the people and a couple of volunteers actually had the nerve to come up and ask me questions about their crew. I had to say, "this is not a good idea." You know, "go talk to Marianne or talk to Elka."

So it will take--I think some people a little while to really figure out that I'm done. I'm done there except maybe in a helpful way next year or the year after--whenever we can do this again. But it's been odd. And part of it, the reason I was needing to get out of it was because it's such an intense thing. And you're so used to working at a certain level that you think you should be doing something. Like you don't need to be.

**Marianne:**

Like the pace of it--it's so it's fast and it is, it's so condensed. Even right now with COVID, I started with the festival and I was 19 years old. So this is the first time I've had sort of like free time and the summer to be going really hard right now, you know. I've been like going on long bike rides and doing things that I just probably wouldn't do if I was, obviously, doing my usual work. Like, did you fill your time? I guess you filled your time with kind of like travel and stuff because you need to yeah. You need to transition from that pace right?

**Vicki:**

Right. So yeah, I was doing a lot of traveling until this hit. Yeah.

**Marianne:**

Yeah. Last year was the, I guess, the biggest transition. 'Cause you just came in for, like, a two-month kind of contract and that was fine. 'Cause, yeah, I guess that's the thing I was wondering if, like, normally Vicki, you would know everything...like everything that was going on. And so I was wondering...(Vicki: I didn't know anything ha ha)

**Marianne:**

You didn't know a bunch of things, I guess, like, to that point. And I just (laughs), you were telling people not to ask you things.



**Vicki:**

No, that was actually, that was fine. Actually. It was--it was probably good in a lot of ways because people were starting to get the idea of, you know, I was there for a short period of time. I actually---until something happened with the trip--I was planning in the summer. I probably wasn't planning on even being there for the last day of the festival. So it was kind of really bowing out, but I have that sort of task to do and occasionally people would ask me something and I just go "Huh, I don't know....ask Marianne!"

**Marianne:**

Sure yeah! You were, you were like, okay not being the "go-to" I guess?

**Vicki:**

I don't think, I can't imagine ever not being somehow involved with the festival in some way, you know, not as a staff, but as a volunteer.

**Marianne:**

Well I guess last year we talked about that and you did end up doing the new volunteer tours. And so that was, well, it was great. It was good to you, too. 'Cause, you know, answers to things I don't (laughing). It's just kind of a hilarious situation in some ways, but, but fitting, it was for sure.

**Vicki:**

As long as they've got the stuff in place. I can find it.

**Marianne:**

Yeah. Like the tents are up and all those things are in place. Well, it's interesting to get to the end of being in one role with the festival and then, and then it's like, you still want to be involved, but try to figure out different ways, right? There will always be lots of that when we're able to get back to it again.

But yeah, I was going to say too is, like, the COVID thing's kind of interesting. Talking about things that have come up that we think are maybe insurmountable issues, but then we deal with them and, and get on with it. COVID has me convinced the first thing we've encountered, like, one of our coworkers in March, like, kind of at the start of he said, "oh, like, I wonder if we might not be able to go because of this, this year." I was like, "oh, there's no way. There's no way that that would affect things that much, that the festival couldn't run."



Like I couldn't even fathom...what would affect...what would affect things so much that the festival could not run? Yeah--and this was it. This was, like, a problem. We couldn't, like, we couldn't think our way out of this or deal with it logistically or with people. 'Cause, I mean, when we canceled, even I got responses from, you know, a number of volunteers saying, you know, "we would be there, you know, we would be there to make it go faster."

**Vicki:**

Yeah, people risk their lives!

**Marianne:**

Yeah, obviously that kind of support is--it's amazing. Like it feels amazing and we know it's there. Obviously the health and safety of people is more important. But, yeah, I think for a lot of those volunteers to this, you know, when we have a problem, we often--we go to our volunteers and say we have this issue and they always step up. And this was, like, the one thing for everybody that we could make go. We're doing other things during the dates of the festival, but it's not the festival in Gallagher Park. It's strange times. But outside the festival...let's talk about some of the things. We were going to talk about other things, some of the things that aren't Folk Fest related. I mean, I don't know when it started or how we figured out that we were both into beer, but we, at some point we, we figured that out.

**Vicki:**

Was it going for the rides on the rail cars or?

**Marianne:**

Oh yeah. Maybe because Beer Geeks, I guess. I was kind of going to Beer Geeks.

**Vicki:**

Yeah. You were going to them when they were on the South side.

**Marianne:**

Yeah. Like at Wonder Bar. Yeah. Maybe we were just talking about that. And we figured out--we figured out that we were both very into beer and so we started drinking beer together. I think in, like, a work situation, like I worked for you and then we switched roles and stuff. But I think the fact that we became kind of, like, drinking partners was kind of hilarious. It was like a fun, a fun outside thing to work too.



**Vicki:**

And we went to Holland and Belgium too together. Drank a lot of beer! Ate a lot of food!

**Marianne:**

That's a lot of beer we drank. I guess we went to Calgary last year and did the beer tour there in the fall too. Like, the number of beer events we've been to? I feel like we started doing that maybe a few years into me working with you. I think when I was working on site, I didn't really work with you very much. I was not scared of you, but you were Vicki and I would never have imagined that I would be, like, sitting in Amsterdam and Brussels with you, eating some pate and drinking beer. It was just so far from what I could have imagined. I mean, good thing Edmonton is bursting with breweries right now. I don't know--we can do a bike tour. A bike tour of Edmonton or something! Try to make it happen ha!

**Vicki:**

Yeah!

**Eric:**

I love that episode. I've got a connection with the Edmonton Folk Music Festival. It's being held in the neighborhood that I live in. And I've also been a volunteer there. But one of the interesting things about what Vicki was talking about was that transition to retirement and not only having to make an adaptation for herself, but also the people that she worked with and the volunteers had to make a transition as well.

**Salima:**

I don't know if you know this, Eric, but I haven't actually retired yet, even though you've got me looking forward to it--it sounds amazing! But it reminds me of when I've moved--and I moved away from family and friends and jobs. And it's interesting to leave and then you see these relationships last and those connections maintain. But then it's always--when you go back--everything's, like, a little bit different. It feels like everything's shifted a little bit. And I imagine that's probably what it's like to retire when you see people you used to work with.

**Eric:**

Yes, very much so. And those relationships that you mentioned, that was another thing that was really interesting. One of the things that makes the Folk Fest, such an amazing experience are the relationships. And I heard Vicki talking to Marianne about being aware of the different requirements of different volunteers. That every volunteer is treated as an individual and that's what makes it so special about volunteering at the Folk Fest



**Salima:**

And we both volunteered at Folk Fest, but on different crews and we had different opportunities to interact with artists and patrons. I think that that relationship-building extends so far and so wide at the Folk Music Festival that it's so special. And the other thing I really liked when they were talking about relationships is their friendship. Vicki and Marianne are an intergenerational friendship. And I love that they've bonded and they have found common ground and they go to each other and they've traveled together, Eric, which we have not done.

**Eric:**

Okay. When are we planning the next road trip?

**Salima:**

Who's in charge of the maps?!

**Eric:**

You!

**Salima:**

No, that's not a good idea. We'll be lost!

**Eric:**

Okay! So, 'The Shared Mic' is an initiative of Age Friendly Edmonton, which is a project between The City of Edmonton and the Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council. We'd like to remind everyone about the Seniors Information Line 211. It connects seniors with organizations and services. If you need to find resources, it's a great place to phone. They can tell you where you can find help on many different fronts.

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