

**Interview with Normand “Husky” Poirier**

**April 19, 2009**

**At the Moffett House Museum, Berlin, New Hampshire**

**Interviewer: Ken Turino**

**Crew: Josh Silveira, Dean Zanello, Steve Rugoletti**

Q: The first thing we ask of every person we are interviewing is to say their full name and also to spell their name.

0:14 – NP: Normand Huskey Poirier. Normand N O R M A N D Husky H U S K Y I am known because I had a dog team as a teenager, Poirier is P O I R I E R.

Q: That was going to be my first question how did you get the name Husky and tell us about your dogs

**0:41 – NP: As a youngster I used to have six dogs and I fabricated my own sled. We used to do a lot of ice fishing and of course we didn’t have no wheels so the only way we could...especially carrying our gear we used to go to Head Pond which is about three miles from here and we had to travel on the railroad tracks so that is why I started a dog team. People then started to calling me Husky.**

Q: Was it good fishing?

**1:09 – NP: well it was good fishing for us as long as we had a few strikes during the course of the day we were happy.**

Q: What kind of fish were you catching?

**1:22 – Mostly pickerel.**

Q: Do you have a good fish story for us?

**1:27 – NP: Not too much because then on afterwards I concentrated myself on hockey so I had to abandon ice fishing.**

Q: Tell us first of all were you born here in Berlin?

**1:44 – NP: Yes, I was born in 1929 in Berlin on East Side three houses away from the Mill on Burgess Street.**

Q: What kind of a neighborhood was that?

**1:56 – NP: It was a friendly little neighborhood. It was all French speaking people that came from Canada and most of them worked in the Mill. In those days they didn’t have**

no plows. They used to roll the snow in the street so that gave us more or less a skating rink. That is why we started skating and we didn't have much equipment so we had to go in the woods and get a limb that was in the shape of a hockey stick and use that as a stick. For a puck we used to take a piece of a picket and slice it three inches in diameter to make a puck and we used to keep the catalogue and use that for shin pads.

Q: How old were you when you started playing hockey?

**2:51 – NP: I must have been six, seven years old then. There was nothing organized, just a bunch of guys. What you would call today scrub hockey.**

Q: How did you get involved with teams in Berlin?

**3:09 – NP: Here's what happened. I enjoyed the sport to begin with. It was in my blood I would imagine. We used to follow the Maroons and in those days we had a heck of a time to get into the ice area because then they were playing outdoors and it was just a limited room. So we had a hell of a time to get in on them. So, finally I was able to get in on as a scraper so that's when I really got organized. We made a team with a bunch of guys that were scrapers and we had a team and we used to play against other teams, some other teams that somebody else had organized. Then in 1944, 1945 we organized the first hockey team at Notre Dame High School.**

Q: So, tell us a little more about playing hockey at Notre Dame and what it was like.

**4:52 – NP: Really that this is what we get. We get involved with somebody else being organized and all I had to concentrate on is to play the game and to make sure that I was following the coach's orders. In those days Father St. Pierre was the coach and our General Manager was Father Armand Perval. We finally got the State, I don't know how you call it, but the head master's association of high schools, we finally got them to sanction hockey tournaments in the year 1947/48 and that is where we first captured our first state championship in 47/48 and we did the same thing in 47/48 and then I became a Maroon afterwards.**

Q: So tell us about the Maroons and tell us about the 1950/51 season.

**5:52 – NP: It was outstanding. I was finally playing for the big team so I enjoyed every minute of it. I remember we used to play these strong mashers of teams, these Canadian teams and I don't remember which year it was but we played the original Montreal Canadiens. In those days when they were going to Boston they had to travel by train and they were going by here, so somehow somebody, I don't know who it was, I don't know if it was Father Lauzere or somebody else that did get a hold of them and they stopped here for a game. So after the first period of course you know they were shellacking us by a great amount of scores so we swapped goal tenders and swapped**

**defensemen and that became a better game afterwards. I remember I played against the Rocket Richard and Toe Black and Bill Durnan and Al Arbor and Doug Harvey and all of these big Canadians stars of the past.**

Q: What position did you play?

**7:02 – NP: I played right wing.**

Q: What was the 1950/51 season like?

**7:09 – NP: Well, that is the year I just mentioned, I don't remember if it was '52 or '51 that we played them. I know in '50 we won the New England's in '50. In '51 I think we duplicated or we lost I am not sure now what happened then.**

Q: So maybe you could tell me a little bit about those two championship years.

**7:58 – NP: Well, like I said we played at Concord, Sacred Heart in those days in New Hampshire. I think we played also the Sea Hawks out of next to Hampton there. The Seahawks, I don't remember the town. I will probably get it later on but we played against the Seahawks. Our greatest rivalry was Lewiston, it was known as Bates Manufacturing and Waterville, Maine.**

Q: How popular was hockey here in Berlin?

**8:48 – NP: To tell you the truth that year, the first year that I played we won the New England's we were playing the second game in the afternoon, the qualifying games, and we were sure to be in the final game. We were still playing in the qualifying game and people were lining up outside to get in for the final game at night, so you can imagine the... and the arena was packed of course. They had to do that because a lot of them didn't have a chance to get in the building.**

Q: Which arena was this?

**9:27 – NP: This would have been '48, '49, or possibly '50 also.**

Q: Do you have any favorite stories about hockey in Berlin or you're your years on those teams that you want to tell us about?

**9:52 – NP: My biggest remembrance is that when we played the Olympic Team. OK we had The Riley Brothers were from Dartmouth College and Bruce Mather was and that was their top line then and Al McHarten was their goaltender. We lost the game 6-5 and I remember Jack Riley telling me he says hey kid, you are quite a digger and he says if you had an axe I wouldn't have no legs. (laughs)**

Q: That is a good story. I am going to ask you a few of questions about Berlin and the city and what is was like growing up. You grew up in a French neighborhood you said?

**10:39 – NP: Yes.**

Q: You grew up in a French family?

**10:41 – NP: Yes.**

Q: What was that like growing up in that neighborhood and in a French family?

**10:49 – NP: It made it a little easy because way at the beginning I could hardly speak English and I was more or less an oddball because there were some Italian people close by that would speak English. TO get into the clique I had to excel myself so I started playing ball, baseball. I became a decent ball player so I was able to join them and so that made me part of the clique. It was the so called clique in those days. I was growing up and after that it was clear sailing as far as that you just play baseball in the summertime and hockey in the wintertime. In those days my goal was to become a ball player. As I grew up I went to different tryouts and more or less I was invited to what they call they would pick up players from the Northeast and then we had a game in Nashua. The Nashua players in those days they were the farm team of the, Nashua Dodgers were the farm team of the Brooklyn Dodgers. Them guys were coming back up north from the south. They had played ball all winter long. They started early in camp and they played against us. That is where I found out I had to do something else than baseball because they beat us 17-2 and I said this is not for me. I might as well stick to hockey.**

Q: Tell us a little bit about your family. Were your parents from here, from Berlin?

**12:55 – NP: Both my mother and father were from Canada.**

Q: And they came to work in Berlin?

**13:00 – NP: Right. At that time the mill was expanding and there was a big demand of workers so that's how come they came to the States.**

Q: Did you end up working in the mills?

**13:14 – NP: No. Excuse me, I worked three years in...I started working at a tender age with my father but in those days come Thanksgiving there was no more work, too cold. We didn't have what we have today you know. We didn't have heaters and things of that nature to survive through the winter so there was no work until the following April. So, when I first got married I said I got to find something so I went in the mill then. The job I had in the mill I was able to work nights. The shift was 4-12 and I was a wood scaler. From there during the day I could work carpentry. Three years after that there was too much demand, so I had to drop the mills to stay in the construction business and I have been in that field ever since.**

Q: Tell me specifically what job you did in the mill, you said a wood scaler?

**14:21 – NP: I was a wood scaler. Measuring wood as it came in from the trucks or cars, but mostly trucks.**

Q: At that point they weren't using the river?

**14:31 – NP: They were still using the river but the river was just for soft wood that came to where they call the upper bridge where they pulled the wood out of the river and piled it. From there they used it in the mill afterwards.**

Q: What years was that?

**14:55 – NP: That was 1950 to '53.**

Q: Speaking of the fifties, we heard from a lot of other people that in the fifties and sixties Berlin was a booming town. Was that your memories?

**15:12 – NP: Yes.**

Q: What can you tell us about what it was like?

**15:14 – NP: There is what happened. That is the reason why I had to drop the mill because there was too much demand. The service men came home and they get settled and they all wanted homes so we had...there were three other men in the contracting business building homes. I started at what they called the Green Acres in that era back in '53, '54. There was so much work that we had to work around the clock almost to keep up.**

Q: What was the downtown like? What was going on there at that point?

**15:57 – NP: Downtown was really booming. We didn't have in those days no shopping centers so everything had to be purchased downtown. You had small grocery stores. Jeezum crow I can't even remember. On the east side you had one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten grocery stores at least. We got about five bar rooms (laughs).**

Q: That is pretty good! OK, the fifties and sixties were booming here in Berlin so what changed? What happened?

**16:39 – NP: Then there was the drop in the mill. They had to drop almost five hundred people. I had a seven man crew then so I had to go out of town to get the work to be able to keep my men so they would be able to feed their families. That was when I started to go out of town. I went to North Stratford. They were booming there. They were plywood factory then in those days. They needed homes so I built a few homes there.**

Q: So that must have been a hard time for people.

**17:16 – NP: Yes. It was harder than it is today because we didn't have...there is a lot of things going on today. They would never would have had a welfare program. We didn't have a welfare program in those days and there was no, I don't think there was no unemployment compensation involved. If there was I don't remember it because I wasn't involved with that. If there was it must have been just a small amount that they could issue.**

Q: Do you remember when the urban renewal came into Berlin?

**17:53 – NP: Yes, I remember when they started tearing down sections in town and trying to modernize it, put new buildings on or else take some of the areas and make parking lots out of it and better streets and sidewalks.**

Q: What did you think of that?

**18:17 – NP: Well, at the beginning I didn't think too much about it because I thought are they destroying our areas? I said to myself afterwards I said it is starting to look good, better and we had to keep up with times. We can't just make it stop. We don't want to be known as a ghost town so we have got to keep up with what is going on with the rest of the world.**

Q: So, do you think it was successful?

**18:46 – NP: Yes.**

Q: We have talked to a lot of people and get different opinions. People talk about the parking lots that are downtown now and the urban renewal just came in and wiped out buildings, but in the long run you think that it really did help the downtown, the urban renewal?

**19:38 – NP: Well, it limited the merchants. Some of the merchants had to give up because there was no more...they could not afford...they didn't have the facilities to keep an inventory like the shopping centers were doing. That kind of put a stop to some of the merchants. Other merchants stayed there but they had to keep up with the inventory. That's why those are there now because that is what they are doing. You still have people that don't have cars to go to those shopping centers so these people have the chance to get their necessities of life the goods that they need to keep on living decently right here in downtown.**

Q: Where did they build shopping centers?

**20:36 – NP: Well, towards Gorham. The biggest one was started down there and we still have the Super WalMart now and further down the highway where the former WalMart**

was there used to be The Globe and those things. That's where they started back in, I don't remember the year. It must have been in the seventies I guess, probably '75/'80 when they first put the first one in. We had to keep up with the world because in the state primarily North Conway was beating us and so a lot of people were going to North Conway to shop so we had to improve our business world in this area to compete with those towns.

Q: So, did you get married here in Berlin? Did you marry a Berlin girl?

**21:48 – NP: Yes. I got married in 1949.**

Q: And do you live in the same neighborhood where you grew up?

**21:54 – NP: I grew up on the East Side, what we call the French Area right next to the mill. I built a house a couple of streets up and the house was too small when I started my family increased. Then in those days I started the Green Acres Development and I built a house there and that is where I am living now.**

Q: Tell me a little bit about Green Acres. I am really interested in that. How big was it?

**22:25 – NP: Well, it was a former farm that my brother in law owned and he turned that to put a street in and we started putting homes and now we must have about twenty five, twenty six homes in that area. It is all flat ground, there is no hills to climb and it is very...not too far from town. It is right across from the 12<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge almost next to the hospital.**

Q: And what year did you start building there?

**23:01 – NP: We started there in 1954.**

Q: What kind of houses were you building?

**23:08 – NP: In those days it was mostly what we call a Cape Cod, unfinished upstairs because it was all freshly married people that were coming in. At that time money was hard to get in those days from the banks. Of course you had to keep the mortgage at what the bank wanted to loan we could not finish the upstairs. What they did, the people would buy it and it had two bedrooms on the first floor and there is an area with two more upstairs down the line when they started their family grew bigger and a lot of them did the work themselves so they were able to have a decent house after five ten years after the original purchase of the land and then there was enough room so that their family would have a decent bringing up. It was a single home, not a tenement.**

Q: I will have to take a ride down there. I am curious. Did you have an architect you worked with on the design?

**24:23 – NP: I had to pick up prints that were available to Federal Housing Authority in those days. It was the FHA we used to call them. At the beginning I had to take stock plans from a lumber yard, lumber dealer, but then the bank, I could not get any money until the house was done, so it was pretty hard to survive there and have payroll to keep the guys. Lots of times I could not afford to pay the guys on a weekly basis. Finally when the federal housing came in the picture I was able to get prints from them and then after the inspection of a foundation and the framing and the completion I would have three payments. I would have to have the different phases inspected before I could get payment but at least I had money coming in before the project was done.**

Q: How long a period did you build over? You started in 1954 and you continued for how long there with Green Acres?

**25:39 – NP: I was there until the sixties and that is when the city started going downhill. The minute the Brown Company laid off that killed the economy. So, that is when we had to go down the...**

Q: So you saw that change when the Brown Company started...

**26:02 – NP: Yes.**

Q: One of the things we wanted to ask people is are there any particular stories either from your experiences with hockey or to building or downtown where you liked to hang out as a kid or with your wife or whatever that we haven't talked about that you could tell us more about?

**26:27 – NP: I hate to say it but I was the originator of the Berlin Youth Hockey. It all started when I get done playing with the Maroons. I said to myself these kids have to have somebody to teach them how to play the game. I didn't have the chance of getting somebody to teach me, I had to do it by my own so I said from now on I am going to organize kids so that we can play competitive sports with other towns so that then we can coach these kids, get them better skilled players so they can probably progress to at least be on high school and probably have a college scholarship for hockey or part of it. I started that in 1962 with the Peewees and then down the years that followed we established teams at all age brackets. At one time we had 14 youth hockey teams playing and eventually I followed the Peewee, as the kids grew up I stayed with them and followed them so that every year every two years it would jump. It would jump to the Bantam, and then it would jump to the Midgets and then the Juniors. Back in 1972 when Notre Dame High School closed there was an abundance of players available so that is when I started the Junior team and at that time the Maroons organization they could not find teams to play against so they had to more or less had to quit, the Senior Maroons. So, the Juniors came into the picture and that is where we had those outstanding years. In fact we were the New England Champs in 1974 and from there then some of the players, five players went to what they call the Junior**

**Majors in Canada which is the farm, that is where the NHL drafts from, the Junior Majors in the Quebec League. I had five that went to Division I hockey and then there was a bunch that went to Division II and Division III in those days, the hockey. So, a lot of them got more or less a chance to go to school with almost nothing to pay. They got scholarships or they got grants that you know they didn't have to pay back. That was my goal and I am still now involved. We are starting a Junior program. We are starting this year hoping that we can get enough players. Right now we are recruiting two players in the Quebec League. That is where I should have been today but I had this commitment here. We are recruiting so we can get our team started for next year for this coming season.**

Q: That is quite a long run and you must have affected a lot of boys lives.

**29:57 – There are kids now that I see and I don't remember their faces and I have to think "who in the hell is that kid? Who in the hell is that kid? I don't know." Especially out of town all these kids are grown up and most of them had to move out of town because there was no more work for them here especially in the education and the college levels there is no work for them so they had to go out of town. When I travel I see them out of town and they say Hey or else I go to a hockey game, the Monarchs or the Boston Bruins. Speaking of the Boston Bruins I had my nephew is Assistant Sports Trainer for the Boston Bruins, Derek Repucci.**

Q: Did he go through your program?

**30:48 – NP: No. He moved to Rochester but he started here in a bit of hockey and in his latter years when he came out of St. Thomas High School he came here and lived for a little while with his grandparents and he played for the Maroons a few games and he practiced with the Maroons. I was instrumental in getting him into Springfield College to get his education in what we call the sports medicine field.**

Q: That must be really satisfying to you.

**31:30 – NP: Oh yes, yes.**

Q: One of the things that we like to ask people is, you have stayed in Berlin. There have been ups and downs, what makes Berlin special?

**31:44 – NP: I think, they might think I am foolish, but I think it is because of hockey. We spread the hockey as far as playing the game itself. If you go to every town that has a program today, somebody from Berlin was there to start it off. To me that was a remarkable thing. We used to be called Hockey Town USA and we lost that title so we want to regain it again. The is one of the reasons we are starting with this Junior hockey team. Here is our goal. We are going to take players that have graduated from high school and colleges don't want to take anybody in their program unless they are**

twenty years old. So, between the ages of 18 and 20 there is about two years. So what we are doing is bringing them in here and the first thing we insist of is education. We have a program set up with the Community College here in Berlin and Martha Laflamme is going to be our academic advisor. She is going to take each individual one on one, ask him what his goal is life. She is going to direct them into that goal, take the subject that he needs to attain that goal plus she is going to supervise them to make sure that he progresses satisfactorily. This way he will be able to enter college with no problem because he will be qualified and if he has a chance he can pick up an extra degree because all of the degrees will be transferable from this college here so he will have an extra degree. Especially in Division I hockey is so demanding that sometimes they have to slack off on their academics. I know because my young son went to Clarkson so he had to go to summer school twice because of that. So, we want to make sure that this particular kid or all of the kids on that team has that goal. Of course he has to be a hockey player, but his goal is to, especially if we pick Canadian teams that they come here most of them have a hard time in English and we want to develop them in English so they would be bi-lingual and in good shape to have a chance to get something else in life rather than hockey because you can't all be hockey players. You can be hockey players but I meant you can't all be paying hockey players. This way, once they are out of college if they have a good education they will have a field where they want to go to make a living. The other thing that just slipped my mind is that they learn how to live away from home. This is a big big factor. You can't find that in books. Once they are away from home there will be no drinking, no drugs are available and they will have to be decent people. They will have to do volunteer work in town. We want them to be models and if they have free time, they will have free time, we will bring them to youth hockey boys and girls and they will help out in the coaching area. It is going to be a great thing and then we are going to be affiliated with nine other teams from here Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Vermont, New Jersey and New York we are involved with. It is going to be quite a program if we can get it off the ground in good shape. It is hard for the first year to get it going but we've got good people working with us that are going to help us out. We are doing this for the kids. They think we are in it for the money but we are not. The only people that are going to be paid is the coach and the rest of them is all volunteer help. It is just to help the kids. That is our goal is to help the kids to stay on the right track so they will become good citizens throughout their lifespan.

Q: Sounds like a really good goal. That sounds like a really good project and goal. Good for you. Let me ask you this are there any stories or anything that I should have asked you about? Are there any stories you want to tell us or anything we should have asked you about?

**37:35 – NP: I think you covered all the bases as far as the questions.**

Q: We didn't know if you had any good stories you would like to share. We heard a really good hunting story from Bob downstairs that was really fun and I can imagine in all of your experiences you probably have one.

**38:20 – NP: I am not a story teller (laughs). I enjoyed hunting also.**

Q (Josh): Huskey can I ask you a question?

**38:30 – NP: Yes.**

Q (Josh): You can direct your answer to Ken here. You said you wanted to coach the hockey players because you didn't have any formal coaching. You conducted practice and you taught them. If I were to show up to your practice tomorrow morning how would you teach me? What were the techniques that you taught the kids? What was important to be a good hockey player?

**38:54 – HP: The initial thing was they had to learn how to skate properly and then once they achieved that which is a thing that was very essential but was very hard for the kids to understand at a young age. We have to try to make fun out of it you know and it was hard because we had to start them on chairs for instance pushing a chair on the ice. The kids they wanted to play so we had to get them with the puck and start working. The beginning was real hard but as they grew up then we went to the technical part of it, position hockey; turning the right side, facing the puck all the time, how to shoot which angle to pick on when you are shooting on net and things of that nature. So that is the thing that I never had as a youngster. Nobody taught me so that is why we wanted to do this. That is why we started this hockey thing. I had lots of help. I didn't do that all by myself. I had a lot of people that helped me out throughout these years and I still have the same thing now. I am too old now to get on the ice. I have somebody else now that is going to go on the ice to do the same thing.**

Q (Josh): Do you remember one player that just excelled? You don't have to name his name if you don't want to but was there one player that you just said that is a true hockey player. Can you remember a player like that?

**40:38 – NP: (laughs) Oh yes. To me my biggest thrill was to see a fellow that could have gone to the NHL but most of them did not know how to live away from home. One was Ray "Weasel" Roy. Another one was Alan Demerse had a girlfriend and she put a lock on him. Another one was Johnny Normand. He finally went to Division I hockey. All of these players could have gone more. Frankie Roy was a good kid. He graduated from the University of New Hampshire. My own son Butch could have made it also but he was another boy that did not know how to live away from home, so that is why I am stressing this point right now. See they were all brought up in Berlin these guys and they played right here in town so they didn't have to stay away from home. Once they got away from home a while they felt liberty. Partying was their top object in those days and some**

**of them got involved, really seriously involved, with girlfriends and at that age you cannot have friends, especially friends that are not hockey players. If you follow them then you are going to leave your desire to become an NHL player.**

Q (Josh): Husky I have another question. What was your best game? What was the best part of your hockey game? When you were at your best what was the best part of your game?

**42:37 – NP: My best part of the game was when we played the Olympic Team.**

Q: What was your strength? Was it skating? Was it shooting?

**42:46 – NP: My skating was digging the puck out of the corner. (laughs) If there was a couple of guys there I would come out with the puck. Like I said I used my stick quite a bit. Sometimes illegal! (laughs) They used to call me The Hatchet Man (laughs).**

Q (Ken): How did you get that?

Q (Josh): Did you make enemies because you were The Hatchet Man?

**43:14 – NP: From the visiting teams yes! But not the local team! (laughs) I was part of the team then (laughs).**

Q (Josh): Husky the major reason for this project is to preserve twentieth century history from Berlin. In your opinion what is in danger of being lost from the twentieth century? What is being forgotten if anything?

**43:52 – NP: What is happening right here, this building here whoever is responsible for that they are putting an awful lot of time into it and they are preserving history. That is...I never, this is the second time I have come to the building. I should be ashamed of myself. I came here with Bruce Valley a couple of weeks ago and I saw things here that really impressed me. I said somebody is volunteering their work to preserve the original Berlin. They used to call that Berlin Falls years ago. So, I am very thankful to all of the people that volunteer their time keeping this active and they are planning to have a hockey exhibition at St Keiran's Church down the line and people are really dedicated to this. Especially Walter, he showed me the old Berlin Reporter they had. He has to handle it carefully because the pages are getting apart before they get a chance to have them copied. That is demanding, very demanding. He must put in an awful lot of hours and then all of the other help, all of the other people that are helping out. I am very thankful that these people are doing it that preserve the hockey history of Berlin.**

Q (Ken): I want to say thank you. This has been really good and it was a pleasure to meet you.

**45:32 – NP: Same here.**