For Matt and myself, Fel is like an old friend. We have recorded him four or five times before; he's played for one of our public meetings; another time he located some Finnish singers for us; and I see him around town every now and then. Good humored and hearty, although somewhat abrupt and forceful in manner, he is always fun to visit.

We arrived on Tuesday a little later than expected (I'd been held up by questioners following a talk at Rotary). Fel was in his kitchen frying up a batch of potato pancakes in bacon grease (the way his mother made them). Naturally, he offered us a plateful and we gobbled them down. Meantime, Fel complained that his 60 year old accordion was leaking and wouldn't hold air. Matt fetched his more recent Holmer two row button accordion. Unfortunately, this instrument lacked a thumbstrap and Fel reckoned he couldn't play too well without one. Matt apologized that he'd been meaning to put one on, but lacked the tools - whereupon Fel led us into his basement shop.

As I noted in an account of an earlier visit, the basement is where Fel makes lures for fishing and cleans his catch; it is also a place where his tools and equipment are hung or racked neatly along the walls. Grabbing a hacksaw, Fel cut and pried off a screw in the accordion, drilled new openings, then (using his wife's heavy duty sewing machine) fashioned a canvas thumbstrap. He riveted the strap onto the instrument and Matt was delighted with the result. It fit his thumb perfectly. Fel's thumb, however, was a lot bigger and it would not go in. We tried stretching the canvas by twisting screw driver handles through it and soaking it with water. No luck. The only thing to do was cut the strap in the middle and sew a new piece into the gap. Fel did that and Matt had a sloppier but functional strap that his big handed friends could use. I commented: "So this is what you call the 'Polish thumb strap.'" We all laughed, and then went upstairs to record.

The recording session was pretty straightforward. We had long ago plumbed the depths of Fel's repertoire, so it was simply a matter of asking him to play numbers we knew he knew. The high point was the multiple recording of "Wajna Skza" - a peppy Polish dance piece particularly popular at old house parties. While in the thick of playing Fel let out some wild whoops common to Polish parties.
I neglected to mention that, earlier in the afternoon (while Matt was fetching his button accordion), Fel told me a few more Scandinavian dialect jokes in his enthusiastic style. Both were highly localized, yet both are widespread tales:

1. Lena comes over to this country and gets a job as a maid. The boss shoes her a bed and asks if she knows how to make the bed. Lena doesn't understand the language so, after a few minutes thought, she answers, "I don't know about makin' the bed, but I'm a humdinger in the grass."

2. John was going out with Lena, but Ole stole her away and soon they were married. At the wedding festivities everybody was happy except John, who moped in the corner. Ole said, "John, what's wrong with you? There are other fish in the sea." John said "Yeah, but I hate to lose 'em after I got the hook in two, three times."

Someday I'll have to tape Fel's jokes. As we departed, we reminded Fel that Bruno Synkula would like to get together with him and play sometime. He seemed to think that was a good idea.