

Paul Chartrand Interview by Spenser Thibault, November 20, 2021

What I was going to do was mention a couple of the examples of the expressions that Cha-Bay used, to show, very adequately, why I say he's by far the best storyteller I ever heard. And I'm not just bragging about him because he's my cousin. I think if you took a poll amongst the people who have heard him and you understand, that everybody would agree, I don't think there's anybody else who... Oh! I just remembered another story! I'll tell you after maybe. Here's one he was telling one time. I'll tell you in English then tell you the expression in our language. I'll tell it in English. It'll come easy and then I'll point out the expression. It's about Halloween.

In the old days, on Halloween night, boys used to go out and do tricks. It was trick or treat. It was really the days when there were tricks. It wasn't really related to whether people treated you or not, it was just a night for mischief. Halloween was a mischief night, so out in the country, you know, scattered houses and gravel roads. One of the standard mischiefs, was to topple over the outhouse. You know, that was the standard. You would be really lucky in the old days if your outhouse survived Halloween. You expected your outhouse to be on the ground, the morning after Halloween night.

Cha-Bay was telling this story one time. Some guys that dragged an outhouse onto the road, and he was describing it. I forget the details of it. It was just hilarious, but I just want to give you an example of his skill in describing things. You can picture an outhouse, lying on its side like that, on the road, right, and the way he described it, he says **[speaks Michif]** ... that's what we call an outhouse. It comes from French, but I don't think they use that word either. So it's a French word, but it doesn't mean what it means in French I think, but **[speaks Michif]**. That's the funny one, you know. So, he's describing that outhouse, lying on the road, and it's got two seats there. So, what he's saying **[speaks Michif]**. He says kind of, with his eyes wide open, that the outhouse had its eyes wide open. So you could see the two holes there. That's just one expression I remember to give you an idea of what he used then.

I remember another story, that shows to me ... how he was able to use ordinary words to make you see and hear things. I went and visited him. I hadn't seen him for a long time. I think I was living in Australia at the time and I was visiting. I went to see Cha-Bay, and he's telling me what he did that day. By and large it was, a run of the mill day, like you and me would tell it, and nothing interesting happened, but he told me what happened that day. It was just ordinary stuff, but he was extremely interesting! He told me that one task he had was to empty a dugout, empty the water out of it, and he used a pump, some kind of pump to pump the water. But he had his big hands and his fingers, demonstrating how he was trying to get the damn motor to work and pulling on the cord. And that, he's a really, really good—and then he said it started **[speaks Michif]**—the motor started to snore! The way he'd say it, it was just ... incredible, eh? You see really good writers, I guess, they know how to do that, but he could do it, instantly—just like that. Who would have thought of describing the noise that a water pump makes as “snoring?” Anyway, that's Cha-Bay, I can't say enough about his storytelling skills.