

Paul Chartrand Interview by Spenser Thibault, November 20, 2021

[Paul tells story in Michif]

There's a story that was told by a grandmother (not going to mention her for a moment) to the children, she's telling about my uncle. The "Bailiff" was his nickname. He's a wiry little guy, bow-legged, big moustache, with chewing tobacco running down the side. He's a real character, but anyway, wiry little guy. The grandmother was telling a story about when he came home one time, all covered in blood, and what had happened apparently that day had been involved in a fight with the Bretons, people from Brittany in France. They were imported by the Church. The Church did that across—maybe others too—across the west. They'd try to inoculate the Michif people with the right values, to go to church on Sundays and be good Catholics. St. Paul des Michif, for example, in Alberta, that may be more well-known. But anyway, lii Bretons were there, so this story is about early tension between the people.

Bailiff came home, all bloody. Why was he all full of blood? Because he'd been fighting with a Breton, and they'd been fighting with picket fence posts, with fence posts. And one of the children listening to the story says, "Grandma, whose fault was that, that they were fighting?" And her answer was just classic. She says **[Speaks Michif]**. Which means—and that's the expression I can not translate—**[Speaks Michif]**, that was his fault. That's what I mean, you can't translate it. It's French words but, mon beau-Bailiff, literally translates to "my good Bailiff, his fault." It has its own unique meaning, some people know what that means, but it's very hard for me to explain exactly what it means, and that finishing line is just a kicker! Like when you know the character, and when you hear the expression like that, it gives it its flavour. You really have a good laugh, and you really enjoy it.

But at the same time ... although the character is regarded as feisty, and all of that, it still shows he's one of us and it shows a great fondness for the man in the story. So, it's a really good story in a way. And if you're in those stories, you're a precious member of the community.