

Alphonse Fleury, Riel Fleury, and Alvin Vermette Interview by Norman Fleury – English Paraphrase

Alphonse: I was born in the Leclerc Corner in St. Lazare.

Alvin: I was born in Russell hospital.

Riel: I was born in Selby Town and then we moved to Fouilliard Town. We were seven in the family. We were three boys and four girls. My dad was Raphael Chi Tom Fleury. My mother was Eleanor Fisher.

Alvin: My mother was Caroline Fisher. My dad was John, Desiree Vermette. We were twelve in the family. We are only two living. I remember two girls and three brothers. I was married twice. My first was a Parenteau from Duck Bay and we had four children. Three boys and one girl. My second wife was a Pelletier from Duck Bay. We were all raised in the Corner called Selby and Fouilliard Town.

Alphonse: When our Métis people were thrown out of St. Madeleine, they were given land by a person called Selby and that is why they named that place Selby Town.

Riel: We were thrown out because they were going to make a community pasture. It was around 1939 mom said I was born not far from the cemetery in St. Madeleine. We were allowed to go and visit the community, but couldn't live there.

Alvin: The Métis worked for farmers and they would haul and sell wood to the town of Binscarth.

Riel: My dad fenced for farmers. My dad worked as far as Millwood and I still fence there. My dad didn't raise cattle.

Alvin: My dad and other Métis always had horses but I don't remember us having cattle. We would go as a family to help dad and we lived in tents or we had a little caboose. We also lived in granaries.

Riel/Alvin: We mostly played barouche, cribbage, and little rummy. In winter we played card games. In summer we played ball and had homemade equipment. We used rags and whatever to make a ball. We had to go to bed early.

Alphonse: There was no hydro in our community. The hydro was in the church and the school and at a later date, Pete Ducharme and Louis Pelletier had hydro. We didn't have hydro.

Riel: We worked on the railroad. I worked in Alberta for around 10 years. I worked in Manitoba, had different jobs on the railroad. We stayed in gangs and also later in motels. When I worked in the beginning on the railroad it wasn't easy like today. Everything was done manually like putting railroad ties by hand with a sledge. I worked as a cook helper and a machine operator helper on the gangs.

Alvin: I worked in Brandon first then I went to Winnipeg to work in construction. I then went north but I always worked in construction.

Alphonse: I worked in Alberta and BC. I worked on both CNR and CPR I started at one dollar an hour.

Riel: Me too and after 3 months I got a raise for \$1.56 an hour. This was around 1964. This was on the section.

Alvin: We had old dances. The instruments were the fiddle and guitar. We had no hydro at that time. The only lights were coal oil lamps. They had basket socials in the school.

Riel: The fundraising was for the school and the...

Alvin: They brought wood to heat the school and the church.

Riel: Families were also required to take turns hauling wood for heating the buildings. They did this as a volunteer.

Alphonse: They built the church and the school. They went to school in a house for awhile then to Binscarth.

Riel: The church was built in 1946 and I went to school there awhile. The school was burned and never rebuilt.

Alvin: We went to school with the Reserve kids.

Alphonse: There were only Tanners on the Reserve. They were Fred, Louis, and Alex Tanner. Their language was Cree (Michif), just like us.

Alvin: Some of the Tanners like Fred spoke English when I would visit him in Winnipeg. In our community the Michif people spoke mostly Michif and some spoke French like Dad, Peter Ducharme, and Tommy Fleury. My dad moved to Winnipegosis from St. Madeleine then moved back here. People moved to Camperville and Winnipegosis and other places. They went looking for work.

Riel: The women went seneca root digging.

Alvin: I still have my mom's seneca root shovel.

Riel/Alvin: On New Years people shot their guns to bring in the New Year. Some people drank and would go around visiting and eating. We still followed the old tradition and we would kneel down in front of dad and he'd give us the blessing. We ate first at midnight, then visitors arrived and we fed them then we would go visiting, all over the community. We ate lii boulette, pies, cakes, deer meat. We celebrated for a week until All King's Day. All the young kids only speak English. They go to school in English.

Alphonse: We lost our language on account of going to school and it is all English.

Riel: When we lived in Selby Town we almost spoke French all the time. My grandmother, Mrs. Fisher spoke French.

Alvin: We also spoke only French at home until we moved to Fouilliard Town. I then started to speak Michif.

Riel: I remember my grandfather Frank Fleury but very little because he passed away in 1946. My dad's father. I don't remember my dad's mother. I remember my mother's parents.

Alvin: I don't remember my dad's parents. I remember my mother's parents.

Riel: I remember at weddings my dad would sing French songs and Louis Pelletier.

Alvin: My mom and dad also sang in French.

Alphonse: My dad, Louis Pelletier, Doug Ledoux, (Jouille) Paul Pelletier, Louis Demontigny called the square dances. I think Joe Venne also called. I think Maaschamin also called.

Riel: The instruments were fiddle and guitar. Willie Boucher was one of the main fiddle players.

Alvin: There were a lot of fiddle players in those days.

Alphonse: They were never short of players.

Riel: Dave Genaille, Doug Ledoux, and Demontigny played, Chi Bon Homme.

Alvin: There were a lot of good hunters. They hunted wolves, squirrels, deer, rabbit, beaver.

Alphonse: The fur pelts weren't that good a pelt. Minks were around \$27.00 for a big male.

Riel: Vic Murray would buy the muskrat pelts and pay around \$2.50 each.

Alvin: They were around \$2 to \$2.50 around there. Jacque Gway from St. Lazare would come to Binscarth and the Corner to buy fur pelts. We also went to Russell, MB to sell to Frank Clement. Everyone trapped and hunted.

Riel: They eventually used snares for wolves and beaver...

Alvin: And rabbits. We played a lot of Barouche in winter. We had no time we had to drink (all laugh). During lent you made penance and didn't drink.

Alphonse: You couldn't talk at the table when you ate.

Riel: We couldn't go anywhere after summer, we had to say the rosary when it was lent. My dad led the rosary.

Alvin: My mom led the rosary.

Riel/Alvin: When we made our first communion and confirmation sometimes the head clergy came like the bishop. They probably came from Winnipeg.

Riel/Alvin/Alphonse: The nuns and father Poulette taught us Catholicism. The priest lived in the church. The nuns taught at Joe Boucher's and they also held mass there. They had a big house. They knelt in the house and outside I guess (laughs) and maybe in the barn.

Alvin: You hardly missed mass in those days.

Alvin/Alphonse/Riel: They kept the statue of the Virgin Mary in each family's home for a week at a time and the rosary was said every night. I think this was in May, the month of Mary.

Alphonse: I did write it down there were about 300 people living with children and older people. The sheep ranch started around 1980.

Alvin/Riel: It was started by the Métis having meetings. Some of us ate sheep. We made woolen socks (laughs). The wolves might of eaten the lambs.

Alphonse: We had around 2400 sheep with the lambs.

Riel: We had only a quarter section, not much pasture so we had to make chop and feed them. Not everyone had gardens in the Corner. There wasn't much good land for gardens. The Reserve had better land and Borphiish would let us make gardens in the valley. Jean Louis had good gardens.

Alphonse: Some Métis lived on the Reserve and didn't know it. It was discovered later on that this was Reserve land.

Riel: We lived in the Ellice municipality and I think Alvin you lived in the Russell municipality. Selby Town lived in the municipality of Ellice. Louis Tanner gave land so people could live there.

Alvin/Riel: The young people don't speak Michif anymore, only the older people.

Alphonse: They speak Saulteaux and want to be First Nations (they laugh).

Riel: The kids went to Binscarth school and then Annie George went to Cranberry Portage School. My sister went to school there.

Alvin: People from Camperville and Duck Bay went to school there. It was a high school from Grade 9. I went to high school when I stood on the school (they laugh). I remember teachers Mr. Wolfe and Mr. Watsick.

Riel: I didn't go to school very much. I helped dad working out. We worked for farmers fixing fences. We hauled bales and sometimes picked seneca roots. My dad was also in the army.

Alvin: My dad was in the first world war and went overseas. I have my dad's war medals. My dad was given land in St. Madeleine. I still have his deed. I showed this to George Fleury's son John but he never got back to me. My land, lived on that property. My dad couldn't write his name. He never went to school.

Riel: My dad was also given land. My dad didn't even know where his land was.

Alvin: My dad was the fireman in the school in St. Madeleine. My dad was born in 1893. I have his birth certificate. My mom was born in 1908. My mom went to school.

Riel: My mom and dad were born in 1908. They were the same age. My mom went to school. The school was Belleview.

Alvin: They weren't able to speak for themselves in those days. They couldn't defend themselves. It is different today. We could defend ourselves even if you don't go to school. You hire a lawyer and fight for your rights.

Alvin/Riel/Alphonse: Nobody will ever go to live in St. Madeleine again. The old people would like to have gone back home. My mother Caroline, Aunty Chi Rose and Adrienne lived not far from St. Madeleine. They had telephones and no hydro.

Alphonse: There are no more people living in the Corner anymore. On the Reserve there are Ledoux and Tanners. They turned and traded and became First Nations (laughs). We don't know the young ones, just older ones like Kwayda (laughs). The Ledoux got in the Reserve through marriage and the mothers were Tanners. They are given a treaty number. Louisa and Albert Gregory got their treaty.

Riel/Albin: We worked a lot for farmers years ago and we lived in granaries. There were a lot of nicknames, Sonny Boy, Brick, Kwayda, Galette Gwajaanse, Iii Jyaab, Aen Fii.

Alphonse: Grandpa Fisher came from Fort Qu'Appelle and around Lebret.

Riel: We have to teach the young kids how to speak Michif. It is harder to learn when you're older.

Alvin: Kids learn through action kid's games.

Riel: I gave my dictionary to my nephews and nieces to learn. We call our language Michif now and we were Michif nation but we also called our language Cree.

Riel/Alvin/Alphonse: We used to say shavaage but no one got angry but today people are more sensitive. The Tanners called themselves shavaage. The First Nations married Métis or lived common-law and they name some Jimmy Tanner and Della Vermette. Boyshiish and Alvina, Louis Ducharme and Jean Tanner, Garsoon Vermette and Paul Fleury. The Reserve used to be all Tanners. There is everything there now even Garsoon Vermette's kids (laughs). There are houses built all over the place now as they have reclaimed lands.

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