

Harvey Pelletier and Verna Demontigny Interview by Norman Fleury – English Paraphrase

Harvey: I am Harvey Pelletier.

Verna: I am Verna Demontigny and I was a Fleury.

Harvey: I was born in Russell, MB hospital. I was born with two teeth. Kawtii gave me the name Rabbit.

Verna: I was born at home in Fouillard Carner in the municipality of Ellice.

Harvey: My mother was Pauline Fleury and my dad was Louis Pelletier.

Verna: My dad was Jean Louis Fleury and my mother was Marie Josephine Ledoux.

Harvey: My dad was born in Lestock, SK. My mom, I think, I was born in St. Madeleine. She never said.

Verna: My dad was born in St. Madeleine. Mom was born at Fort Ellice, in the R.M. of Ellice. It was said that she was born in Camperville, MB. When I did the genealogy research it said mom was born at Fort Ellice.

Harvey: I don't remember when my parents got married, maybe my brother Louille remembers.

Verna: My mom and dad weren't married. They only lived together. My dad's first wife was Eleanor Flamand. My dad and Eleanor had two boys. I had two half-brothers. My brother Jim was born in 1932, then mom and dad started to live together. My parents lived in St. Madeleine and then to the Corner what was called Fort Ellice. There were five boys and five girls in my family, but mom lost six, three boys and three girls. Old Lady Betsy was one of the midwives. Three were born in the hospital, Bear (William), Yvonne (Gwen), and Boykey (Almen). All the rest of us were born in the hospital.

Harvey: My sister Janet and I were born in the hospital. The rest were born at home. There were six brothers and four sisters. There were twelve of us. Ten born at home and two at the hospital.

Verna: Years ago if someone was born in the hospital that was very surprising. Now it is the other way around.

Harvey: My mom's nurse was my Aunt Eleanor Fisher (Fleury) and Mrs. Eleanor Flamand. My mom and dad always worked, they were never home. Just in the winter time. They had to work for relief. My sister Mary (Fo Fouille) always babysat. We went to school, we fished, we played ball. My dad made playing toys for us like a teter totter and a merry go round. Dad would pick things from the nuisance grounds (garbage dumps) and make us things. Made us a sleigh and I would hook up my dog. My dad made sleighs and wagons. Even my cousin Pii-a-pii was around 21 years old and he would push sleighs around (laughs). He sometimes had a black eye. We played different games like the knife game. The object of the game was to have the knife stick in the ground after you aimed it from different parts of your body. You played this game outside. My dad played this game with us. This game wasn't for young kids. My Aunty Eleanor also told us a lot of legends. We sat around at night and listened. We went to church every day and at night we said the rosary. We went to church before school.

Verna: We played those games that Harvey mentioned. We even played and pretended someone died. We would make a hole and then stand around the grave and pretend to cry (laughs). We got caught and did we ever get heck (laughs). My dad loved playing horseshoes and he would make us a pit. My dad made us high jump. Dad was handy at making a lot of things. Dad made teeter totters, skiis, sleighs. He made us equipment and he played ball with us. Mom also played with us and imitated horse actions and other animals.

Harvey: Pii-a-pii was handy at making toys and other things. He made army characters, cowboys, and Indians. He made this with paper. He'd make sleighs and horses. He was good.

Verna: They made dolls.

Harvey: Pii-a-pii gave us a hard time when we played a game called Pish-nii. We got little battle scars.

Verna: We would also play major, a card game.

Harvey: We also played the spoon game.

Verna: If there were eight playing, you only used seven spoons. If you had the right card, you try to get the spoon. It was quite a challenge. Mom also made the papa, mama, and babies. He would pretend they were eating and doing other things. Dad would make us doll houses out of cardboard from the nuisance grounds. We had our play house, pick bird eggs, and boil or fry them in our house. We had a lot of games.

Harvey: Horseshoe was a very popular game. There were a lot of good players.

Verna: Dad made us sling shots. He told us not to kill birds or hurt things. We were only to shoot at targets.

Harvey: Albert Gregory and Binks (Smith) made good skiis with willows. They skied all over the hills and even went hunting. We made our own hockey sticks and played hockey. Alexander Tanner taught us how to play hockey. He played in residential school. We played card games like 500, rummy, la barouche and la Kawchii. Pete Ducharme liked to play for money for five or ten cents a game. My mom played too but very seldom did dad play. He might play la barouche if older people came to play.

Verna: Sometimes at lent, they would not to play cards. They made penance.

Harvey: We couldn't talk when we were at the table during lent when we ate. Lent was when we said the rosary every night and dad led the rosary. In our school we had dances every Friday night. Bill (Willie) Boucher was a good fiddler. Joe Venne's brother played, Demontigny played and Dave Genaille, Louis Fleury, and Dolphice Fleury. There were a lot of good fiddlers. There were mostly square dance, round dance, and the jig.

Verna: There were basket socials during what we call Métis days but were picnics in those days. The girls made baskets. My mother didn't make baskets. My mom made raisin pies or yeast bannock and sold them. She would take two bannocks or two pies. Us girls made baskets.

Harvey: The callers were my dad Louis Pelletier, li Jyaab (Tom Fleury) my brother Jouille (Paul).

Verna: New Years and Easter were important celebrations.

Harvey: During New Years the people celebrated for seven days. You ate and drank and had fun. They made a drink called la piquette. It was powerful. They made good piquette long ago.

Verna: They never got drunk. Before midnight most people took a quiet sociable drink, because they had to go visiting all of the homes. People had good times, not like today. People get out of hand.

Harvey: There was just a few that could look for trouble, otherwise there were wonderful times.

Verna: For New Years we got the house in order then Dad went to see the priest. They waited outside two or three minutes before midnight, then started to shoot in all four directions. At midnight, Dad gave us the benediction. We all knelt in front of Dad. At midnight, the Elders ate first, then the younger kids. We cleaned up, put the table on the side. My job was to feed the people until about three in the morning, then my sister took over and I would go visiting all night. Wherever you went there was dancing and eating. When that sister was done, another took over. My mother had done her share in cooking so it was our turn to help and take care of the table. What I like to eat was bologna (laughs). My dad would cut it in little pieces and feed it to our guests. That was my favourite and what I loved eating (laughs). My dad killed a lot of rabbits and mom would grind the best and meaty part of the rabbit and make meat pies. We made lii boulettes. We fed our guests chicken, partridge.

Harvey: My dad had cows and pigs so we fed that kind of meat. We also milked cows for ourselves. Napoleon Vermette milked cows and sold cream. He had a cream separator.

Verna: We had potatoes and turnips. They would mix these together.

Harvey: We also had carrots. We helped our dad with the garden, hauling wood and water. My dad helped but that was our job. My brother Jouille helped a lot. Before we grew up it was Dad and Jouille then it was our turn. Dad had two good axes and a swede saw. We split the big wood, not the small. We used to make lii ripp for starting the fires in the morning. You shaved wood so it was easy to burn.

Verna: There were still hot coals in the morning and when you put lii ripp, it started and burned quickly.

Harvey: My dad would make a big fire before going to bed and shut the dampers so it burned slowly. When he'd get up early there would still be hot coals. They burned dry and green wood.

Verna: They used the green wood at night.

Harvey: They used to burn white poplar. We didn't use birch, it was mostly dry wood like poplar.

Verna: There was also oak. They had only green wood in winter for night fires.

Harvey: My dad got up early and first so he made the fire.

Verna: My dad got up early, and while he made fire, he swept the floor every morning.

Harvey: We drank tea in the mornings and tea was our drink, not coffee. We ate whatever we had in the morning. We ate cracklings, porridge, eggs.

Verna: We ate porridge and sometimes bacon and eggs, but not all the time.

Harvey: My mom always made cracklings. She made her own lard. Joe Boucher always gave us pork fat and pork rinds. When we had visitors, they got to eat right away. That was the old ways (fashion). The older people ate first. Mom told us to go and play then it was our turn to eat. My mom cooked a lot so everybody got to eat. My mother liked to visit. My dad stayed home mostly, my dad wasn't a person to say very much.

Verna: I remember when they would come to visit at our place. Your mom talked and your dad listened. In those days, people visited each other a lot and got along.

Harvey: When you were short of something people borrowed from each other. They would lend each other things like lard, potatoes, or salt.

Verna: When the men went out hunting, they shared their kill, they didn't keep everything for themselves.

Harvey: In those days, you hunted to eat, not for sport. When you went visiting you got fed, but now nobody will feed you.

Verna: It is different today. It is not like long ago. When people come to visit us, we give them coffee and tea and we'll ask them if they ate.

Harvey: I only remember my dad's dad. He was on of the old Elders. There weren't too many.

Verna: I remember us keeping Elders at Dad's and Mom's. I remember old Alex Tanner living with us. Old Félix lived with us. They would tell us stories, not all the time.

Harvey: I never heard anyone talking about Louis Riel that I can remember.

Verna: They did talk about Riel at home but not much.

Harvey: My mom and dad didn't read. They didn't go to school.

Verna: I remember my dad talking about and telling us his memories of hearing about the time the Métis went to get Louis Riel to come and help them fight. My dad talked about the relatives that Louis Riel had in St. Madeleine. Riel's wife Marguerite had a brother Patrice in St. Madeleine. John Fleury from St. Madeleine was Riel's secretary.

Harvey: My dad came to live around Binscarth. My dad's brothers and sisters didn't live around here. They came to visit us. They lived around Regina and Crane River.

Verna: I remember old Harry coming to visit.

Harvey: When Harry was in the army he lived in the Fouillard Corner, then he moved to Minnedosa. He lived in Minnedosa and then Brandon. He had another family. My mother always made li boom. We drank that all the time.

Verna: My dad picked a lot of medicine. There were different medicines like for example, the chokecherry bark when boiled was good for diarrhea. I remember going with Dad picking medicine. I watched him put tobacco when he took the medicines. He put the tobacco toward the east direction. He also dug strawberries. The leaves were also good for diarrhea. Dad made a lot of li boom.

Harvey: I only remember mom making li boom.

Verna: Our Aunty Eleanor Fleury, li Jyaab's wife (Tom Fleury), was a seventh child with healing powers. They said she was a strong healer. I remember the older ladies talking about Aunty Eleanor being a seventh child. I personally don't know her healing powers.

Harvey: L'Hommish Boucher was also a healer. You gave him tobacco and he would help.

Verna: He helped my brother Jim when he had a toothache. He told him to go walk around outside and when you come in the house have a little sweet and your toothache will be gone. This is right, it was gone. You would go to him with tobacco and asked him.

Harvey: You gave a little tobacco as a gesture. That man was a healer. I went to grade three in Fouillard Corner.

Verna: That school was called Fouillard Special School. It's where I started and then I went to school in Russell. That is where I finished my school. Some kids went to school in Binscarth.

Harvey: My brother and Cecilia went to Cranberry Portage.

Verna: When they got to grade nine they were sent to Cranberry Portage to further their education. And when I took grade nine I went to Russell. The school burned in the Corner. So, some kids went to Binscarth and some went to Russell. I went to Russell alone. When the school burned we went to school in the teacherage until June and in September we went to Binscarth and Russell. In our school at the Corner we went from grade one to grade eight.

Harvey: I thought it was kindergarten?

Verna: No, it was grade one. The Dick and Jane story you talk about was grade one.

Harvey: Oh, that was grade one.

Verna: Some of the teachers I remember were Miss Reibuck, Mrs. Boucher, and Miss Chuba. I remember winning a doll in grade four because my marks were the highest.

Harvey: I remember having a Mr. and Mrs. Doerksen teach us. They had a little boy and he went to school with us.

Verna: This teacher we had I only knew her as Mary Jane and you looked at her sometimes, she would be sitting up sleeping (laughs).

Harvey: John Tanner's brother Wayne would fall asleep in school. The teacher used to throw chalk or whatever at him so he'd stay awake (laughs).

Verna: When I started school, I didn't know English so my sisters Taan Taan, Bayush and Aggie would write on our wall or the logs to teach me. Sometimes they had a hard time to teach me the right way (laughs).

Harvey: My parents used to use any kind of paper for our wallpaper. When it was quiet at night you could hear the mice eating (laughs). They used flour and water for paste and the mice made nests. The mice didn't poison. They liked the flour, and all of a sudden you could see little papers falling down (laughs). We never had any cats.

Verna: We had cats and they lived outside.

Harvey: We spoke Cree at home and a lot of French.

Verna: They used to say it is not the real Cree, so it was Michif. When I moved to Brandon years ago, that was the first time I heard the term Métis. At home in Binscarth we were Michif or sometimes you would hear Half-breed. I went looking for work and on the application form it said Métis and I didn't know what that was. It was 1968 when I moved to Brandon and first saw Métis. I heard Métis used by the French. My parents would say we are Michif and we speak Cree.

Harvey: Mine said we spoke mostly French.

Verna: My dad spoke Cree, English, a little German, Saulteaux, and French. My mom spoke Cree and a little English (laughs). My mom spoke a little French but understood.

Harvey: My mother spoke good French, Cree, Michif, and understood and spoke a little English. My dad spoke French, Saulteaux, English, and Michif.

Verna: Us, we speak only two languages but like yourself, you speak quite a few. (Referring to Norman).

Harvey: I think we should have our own Michif school. Just like going to school every day like the ordinary schools but in Michif. No one will learn otherwise if we don't have a school. It can't just be taught in the computer and today technology ways of teaching like my brothers and sisters won't know how to learn because they are illiterate.

Verna: If it is put in the computers you also have to hear it. Even for myself, I can't recognize Rita Flamand's writing on the computer. I have to look real close. I don't recognize it so we should also hear it. I write also but if you haven't seen the words written before, it can be hard to try and read. The language is just being written. Not everyone has a computer so there has to be other ways. It should also be taped like the little machine you are recording us with. Rabbit and I have been teaching, but if

you don't use the language every day and practice you can forget. We have to preserve our language. It has to be heard and spoken every day.

Harvey: I go to conferences but that doesn't count. There is a lot of French spoken, to me that is not Michif.

Verna: I go to big conferences about Michif but it doesn't count because Michif isn't spoken. They speak only English. A few words here and there in Michif, that doesn't count. It is not enough. In the conference Michif should be spoken at all times. There should be smaller gatherings and utilize the speakers. Too split up. They start in Michif and end up in English. Some spoke Michif in BC conference. Some spoke differently. I didn't understand a lot of them.

Harvey: I couldn't go to BC and feel bad but my doctor wouldn't let me fly because of my heart condition. I can't fly anymore. We speak but we forget and if we don't use it all the time. I have a hard time talking. I have no teeth (laughs).