

Lillian Lafontaine and Josephine Flamand Interview by Norman Fleury – English Paraphrase

Lillian: My name is Lillian Lafontaine. I was born in Maryville, SK. I was born and raised there. I ran away when I was fourteen.

Josephine: My name is Josephine Flamand.

Lillian: I went to Calgary to work. I had to be brave. I ran away in a hurry (laughs).

Josephine: I was born in Boggy Creek, MB. My mother was Emma Gagnon and my dad was Louis Lafontaine. We were six in the family. We were two boys and four girls. There are only two of us living now. My sister lives in Winnipeg, MB. I married Frank Flamand. He was also born in Maryville but raised in Crescent Lake. We lived in Crescent Lake once we were married.

Lillian: Frank came to move in Crescent Lake with his parents from Maryville.

Josephine: His mother was Marie Adèle Delorme. His dad was Alexandre Flamand.

Lillian: That is my dad's mother's sister and she was a Delorme. Robert Pelletier was my dad and they called him Baptiste. My mother was Marguerite Laframboise. My mother was from Germany. My dad was from Canada. My mother was an orphan and adopted. My grandmother told us that a letter from Winnipeg came to the Crooked Lake Mission at the church and the priest read it on a Sunday during mass. The letter read that who ever wanted children to go to Winnipeg. There were a lot of kids brought there. That's what my koohkoom told us. My grandparents hitched the team to the wagon and went to Winnipeg to get children. They brought home two little girls and a little boy. The children got the name Laframboise but my grandparents never knew where the kids came from. My mom was Elizabeth. She was called Zabeth. My Uncle John and my aunt died when she was eight years old. There were ten of us in the family. There were two boys and eight girls. My two brothers are gone. There are only us girls living. My dad worked for farmers and also worked at the mission. That was a convent school. That was more a Native school, I went there but not for long. Louis Pelletier lived where we went to school. When Louis moved out it was converted into a school. This is where the Métis went to school. There weren't that many Métis. Many had moved away.

Josephine: My relatives live all over the place. My dad worked for farmers, stooking, threshing, hauling wood, picking stones and all kinds of other work. I don't remember mom working out too much, but mom dug seneca root and sold it. I think we got around 50 cents a pound. We left Boggy Creek around 1946 and came to live around Yorkton, SK. We came to Crescent Lake. Our whole family moved there. I don't know why they moved out here. He probably came to work for farmers. I had five children, four boys and one girl. They are living all over.

Lillian: We would play ball on Sunday. We played all kinds of card games. The names were three of a kind, rummy, high and low, and barouche. We pretend to play poker with pennies. They worked for farmers, stooking, threshing. There was a lot of seneca root digging in Manitoba, more than Crescent Lake. My mooshoom old Fred Pelletier was a farmer. My dad and his brothers had animals there too like pigs, chickens, cattle, and horses. In the fall they would butcher and share the meat to help each other.

Josephine: There was like a co-op in the community of Crescent Lake, they raised pigs, chickens, and made big gardens and everyone would share in the fall. We had eggs.

Lillian: They had to work to make a living. Some people were lazy but still they wanted their share. To share, they went by the size of the family. I remember working in the barns caring and feeding the little chickens and pigs for three weeks. My husband was away working so I had to help and put in my hours.

Josephine: People started to steal chickens and eventually it closed down. I don't know who started or owned this.

Lillian: Mr. Guthrie started this.

Josephine: This was around '63.

Lillian: No not '63, my mom died in '63.

Josephine: Delmy started school then.

Lillian: It was a priest that was the cause of what happened in Crescent Lake. The priest promised to help the Métis, then he chased them away. He burned all the houses that we once lived in so nobody would move back. He ruined a lot of people.

Josephine: The priest was supposed to pay the people to move out. Only one person got some money. Nobody else got anything.

Lillian: That was municipal land. Roy Brazeau still lives there cause he rented that place.

Josephine: There were a lot of people living there at one time, it was like a little town. You could see the lights all over the place.

Lillian: I remember some people that lived there like DaDum Langan, Frank Flamand, Ernest Flamand, Coorii, Louis Pelletier, then you come across the highway. We lived there. It was like a village then when you left there again there. Shorty around the curve, Chakwana, Alice, Agoo, Robert. We had a lot of fun, lights all over.

Josephine: We had a little store close by.

Lillian: Martino's store. He sold flour, baking powder, just about anything you needed. He sold gas and oil. When we lived at Crooked Lake my grandparents shopped at Grayson, SK twelve miles south. Then there was a store opened in Crooked Lake. The store keeper was Mr. Leost. The people shopped in Yorkton before the little store was opened.

Josephine: We had a team of horses. Frank cut and sawed wood and piled it. Sometimes when we were playing cards people would steal our wood (laughs). We had a good time at New Years. We cooked a lot. People would come to eat and then go to other houses.

Lillian: In the evening we would go to Mooshoom Alexandre, he loved playing the fiddle.

Josephine: We danced round dances, square dances, the jig.

Lillian: A lot of good jiggers, darn it that's one thing I didn't learn. The square dance I tell you that was my favourite. My dad used to give us the blessing. A while before the New Years food was saved so you had lots for the celebration. They made lii boulette with bannock.

Josephine: They made cake and pies. They made soup, ate lots of rabbits.

Lillian: We ate all kinds of things. Talk about eating prairie dogs in the spring. They were fat and very good eating. My mom singed them then put them in the oven with lard and flour. Sometimes she would boil them if there were too many of us. We would put our garden produce in the cellar. Mom canned wild and tame fruit like chokecherries and saskatoons. They never canned vegetables. Mom made jam with saskatoons and also chokecherries.

Josephine: Around Crescent Lake we had chokecherries and saskatoons. We used to go to Manitoba around Boggy Creek and Togo to pick other berries like pin cherries, mooseberries and cranberries. We picked hazelnuts and kept them for winter. We would dry them.

Lillian: We would make our own head cheese.

Josephine: We had a lot of bush rabbits. My mother was a midwife in Boggy Creek.

Lillian: Cecile Henry and Philomene were the midwives in Crescent Lake. I will tell you a story about my mom's sister-in-law, wow the way she walked and waddled she was pregnant. I was small so when Aunty left I asked mom, why does Aunty have such a big belly. She said ah she ate too many potatoes (both laugh). I will never forget that, and I believed her. My younger brother George said to me let's go to the garden and eat potatoes to see if we get a big belly. We ate little potatoes and my brother would move his belly around but it still didn't grow. When a baby was born they would say the child came on the back of a rabbit like horseback. That is all we knew. We found out things for ourselves.

Josephine: There was a seventh child like seven girls in a row that had powers. We had one in Crescent Lake who was a healer. If you had earaches or toothaches she was good and healed you. We had one Mrs. Dadum Langan, Cecile Langan. She also came from Boggy Creek. My grandmother was a healer. We would go with her gathering medicine and she would tell us what this is and what it's good for and how to use it. Pin cherry branches she told us not to start peeling from the bottom, start from the top. It is a process, a protocol to prepare. She used to take Laura Dadum's daughter and I to learn. We helped her and she taught us. People would invite each other to go and eat at their homes.

Lillian: Once in a while birthdays were celebrated.

Josephine: When a cake was made you put a dime or a nickle in the batter. Whoever got the money in the birthday cake would have to make a dance. That person would do the same and the dances kept happening.

Lillian: Some women made their own clothing and others didn't. Some made their children's clothing. They made their own blankets.

Josephine: They would make their own coveralls with canvas and I don't know what they used for batting.

Lillian: My mother used sugar bags. The storekeeper in Grayson kept the bags and sold them for maybe ten bags for five cents. My mom dyed the bags and made us blouses and shirts for the boys. My mom made quilts, blankets, and made her own batting. My mom also made mats.

Josephine: I tried to make a hooked rug and tightened it too much and it looked like a hat (laughs). We used to make socks, mitts, and sweaters out of wool. One of my sister's that has passed on raised a lot of sheep and they would shear them in the spring. They shipped their wool to Winnipeg and got them cleaned. So they had their own wool. Cecile used to make sweaters and socks.

Lillian: I try to talk to people in Michif. Sometimes they look at me stupidified and sometimes they laugh. I try and tell them let's be careful and not lose our language. They have Michif classes here. You have to be a good speaker and good teacher. Not many go to classes. I haven't gone yet. I'd like to see Michif classes in schools but I doubt it. You have to have the right and good people in it. Everyone where I came from spoke only Michif and when I started school I couldn't speak English (laughs). I spoke a little French. I learned English in the school from our teacher and he talked to us. I got married in 1952 and moved to Crescent Lake. Some people already spoke English. Slim Joe's girls all spoke English.

Josephine: We called our language Cree but we are Michif. I had a hard time when I started school. The teacher was French, I understood some, but the teacher was mean. We had to learn French or English in School. I didn't go to school very long because we had a long way to go to school. In the spring in 1946 we moved here. I must have been around 15 or 16 years old.

Lillian: When something happens I always say that was the good old days. We all were good to each other and we helped each other.

Josephine: When we were digging seneca root and living in tents we all were happy, living the same and helped each other.