

Mary Fleury Interview by Norman Fleury – English Paraphrase

My name is Mary Fleury. I was married twice. My first husband was Smith and now I am Fleury. My first husband wasn't Smith but he used that name. My mother was Pauline Fleury. My father was Louis Pelletier. I think my dad was born around Lebret, SK and my mother I don't know, maybe at St. Madeleine. My mother didn't tell anything about her family. I didn't know her mother, but I knew her dad's name, Frank Fleury and I remember him.

I only knew my dad's father's name was Edward Pelletier.

All I know is that Grandpa Pelletier came from somewhere in Saskatchewan. My dad worked for farmers. He also trapped beaver and muskrats in the springtime. My dad hunted a lot. When school was out many times we went along when Dad worked for farmers to help and we stayed in tents or granaries. There were 12 in our family but lost a little brother at six months so we were 11. My mother was busy feeding and caring for us. The oldest ones, my brother Paul and my sister Rose were born in St. Madeleine and I was born in Selby Town Valley but I don't know where the rest were born for sure. I know two were born in the hospital, the younger ones.

I don't know where Rabbit, George, and Kenny were born. I remember I was sent to get a lady by the name of La Schwet, Garsoon Vermette's wife when Mom was going to have a baby. They then sent me off somewhere with my sisters and brothers and babysat while mom was having her baby. In those days a woman stayed a week in the hospital when she had a baby, as I know because I had all my kids in the hospital. The women like mom who had their babies at home also stayed in bed for quite a few days. The midwife stayed at home for at least two to three days. Then we, the oldest ones, had to take over doing the chores and work. We did laundry, cleaned house, and took care of the kids.

I was around nine years old when I started baking bannock, and as I got older I started to bake bread.

I had eight children and they are scattered all over. Some of my kids live in Saskatchewan and some in Alberta. I have a little Barney in my family. He looks like his grandpa, I think he's in Brandon with his uncle Rabbit. I raised all my children in the Fouilliard Corner. My kids were all in school in town when I moved to Binscarth.

When we were small we spoke Michif. My dad spoke Michif and French. He didn't speak English. My mother spoke Michif and no English. She didn't speak much French. We didn't always have a lot of meat. We had wild meat so my mom had to make food stretch and go a long ways so she made la rababoo and other things. My mother made a lot of bannock. Even with my family I made five bannocks a day. I was getting tired of making so much bannock. We picked a lot of berries, whatever we found. Not too many chokecherries, but things like raspberries, strawberries, and Saskatoons. My mom canned, made jam, and she'd pour the Saskatoons over a blanket and dry them in the sun for the winter. She would soak them in water, then make pies or add them in other baking. Mom baked a lot of bread. I don't remember the gardens. Dad was away working a lot so had no time for gardening much.

I remember having big celebrations when it was New Years. We prepared and cooked for one week before New Years. You fed people for one week from January the first until the seventh of January, All Kings Day. At midnight of the eve of New Years the celebration started. We all knelt in front of our dad and he gave us a blessing. Then we got dressed and we went visiting all the homes. We danced a lot. The first we went to was at Jean Louis Fleury's and Marie on News Years day. You could only eat a little at the time because there were too many places to go. You ate for a whole week everywhere you went. At midnight you heard people moving about and voices as they visited around. The table was set at all times. You were always busy washing dishes and setting the table. Mostly lii boulette made from ground rabbit and deer meat was a main course. Whatever you had is what you served. There were potatoes, turnips, pies, and cakes. The cake was chocolate or especially made with molasses. My dad loved molasses cake so when Friday came along, mom would say you have to make your dad a cake. As a recipe she says it is whatever you think about. For the molasses cake you put two half cups of molasses. One half you mix with flour, eggs, etc. The other half you put hot water and baking soda then pour all together. I think I forgot to make the cake, it has been so long. This is a Michif New Years Cake. For New Years, a big three tiered cake was made with molasses and was the centre piece of the table. You had to sing for the cake. There was a dime put in the cake and whoever got that piece of cake, they were in charge of making the next dance.

Willie Boucher lived in Selby Town and we walked a long ways to go dancing at his place. But the place that we danced a lot was at Jean Louis Fleury's.

The Michifs as I remember, played a lot of Barouche card games. When I was a little girl we made a lot of play houses in the bush. The boys had their games. We didn't have bought dolls so whatever we would find we would make them our babies. We had all our pretend furniture that we used in the house.

We only spoke Michif in those days. Some played horseshoe and ball. I didn't go too far from home so those are the games I remember.

We made different pledges for lent. Every year the main one was not to talk at the table when you ate. Before we went to bed, Dad would lead and say the rosary. We learned our prayers in French. Irene Boucher and Father Poulette taught us our Catechism. The sisters from St. Lazare I think it was also taught us.

We also went to school for awhile at the church. That's where I started school. Then they built a school I think the teachers stayed at Joe Boucher's. We had a tough time in school as we didn't speak much English. I feel so sorry that I didn't teach my children to speak Michif. I speak to my neighbour in Michif but the only one as no one else speaks Michif in this community. I feel so bad that we are losing our language of Michif. The older ones of my children, like Debbie, understand a lot. Some of my family might want to learn Michif. Sandra that lives in Regina also understands a lot. My late husband and I spoke Michif and then I don't know where we got English as we started to switch to English. When I meet my brothers and sisters I try to speak with those that speak Michif. Not all speak Michif anymore.

I think a lot of Métis were embarrassed to speak their language so lost their language. The language wasn't spoken in towns or general public because of shame. There are still a few people that can speak Michif if they want to.

There are no more people in the corner. When I see La Mikinn, or Louis and Ralph in Russell we speak Michif. Most people on Gambler Reserve don't speak Michif, only Andriish Ralph Ledoux. Albert Tanner might still know how to speak. Vitaline might also speak.

I didn't work out. I raised my children. My husband trapped, hunted and worked for farmers. My husband also worked for the Métis Sheep Ranch. I worked there for a week. I made coffee and fed the workers for a week. I don't quite know what they did there. Now I travel and visit my kids. My oldest, Carl, is 47 and had two mild strokes. He lives in Medicine Hat and started to work again. I have 23 grandchildren and three great. My older children are now grandparents. If I had a vehicle and could drive, I wouldn't live in the corner but I would go to St. Madeleine. There is only the cemetery there now and they still bury their families there. We go to visit the cemetery. They ask me where people are buried, but I don't know all. If people think they know who is buried for certain, a marker cross is put there right away. It hasn't been too many years since this has happened. Now there is one big cross in the cemetery for everyone and when someone passes on, we put a cross with the name.

I have been involved with the Métis organization for a long time. I mostly make bannock and other things. I take bannock to sell at bingo. I can't stand in one place very long because of my legs. I used to work bingos and help wherever I could. I like living here now but at the beginning I was lonesome. I have a daughter living here, she was going to move to Regina, but I think she changed her mind which I am glad. My brother Frank might move here from Winnipeg, MB. I will have someone to speak in Michif to.

Coming back to lent, my grandfather Pelletier would sit on the bed with us and tell us stories, legends. Louisa's mother Eleanor Flamand was also good at telling legends. We were told not to go outside when it was very dark during lent because you would see a roogaroo. We thought who is this roogaroo? But we were scared and I still don't know who that is (laughs). You couldn't dance during lent, we were told that our legs would cripple up or stiffen. There were no celebrations during lent. The legends were Nanapoosh or Wiisakaychaak or Chi Jean. These were told all night and for days. There were messages from these stories. You could compare these legends to watching TV programs, fairy tales, or reading story books. I used to know but now I forget. We listened very carefully and no one talked. Sometimes the older people took part.

Years ago when someone passed away, we had wakes for three days and the body was kept at home. During this time, people sat, played cards, ate, and said the rosary all the time. No dead persons were embalmed in those days. People mourned for six months or for one year. They didn't go to dances during this time or dressed in black clothes.

I remember there was a wedding at the time we lost our little brother. We went to the wedding at the school to eat but we couldn't dance. I was asked by this person I didn't like, Kakayenn Morris Vermette to dance. I told him I couldn't. Mom must have heard so she came and told me I guess you could but I

don't know why she gave me permission. So I was able to dance. Even if I didn't like him I still danced and laughed.

You remember a lot but I forget a lot. When I am reminded I still remember. Like Sonny Boy, I think he remembers about things when he was three years old.

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