

Mervin Fleury Interview by Norman Fleury – English Paraphrase

Dad – Jean Louis Fleury

Mom – Marie Ledoux

My parents were born in St. Madeleine. My dad's dad was William Fleury. My dad's mother was Cecile Gendreau. I don't know if she was from Gambler or Wayway. I don't know if my dad's dad was born at St. Madeleine or the Red River where the Michifs came from. My great grandfather Louis had a homestead at St. Madeleine and so did my grandfather William. I don't know too much about my mother's side of the family. My mother's mother was Veronique LaPointe before she married my mooshoom Johnny Ledoux. I don't know where my Koohkoom's from.

In our family there were five girls and five boys. Before us, dad was previously married and had two boys. We lost some in our family already. We are still six living and seven with my brother Dolphice. I remember my parents having a team of horses and always keeping busy. They always worked and amused themselves playing cards and other forms of socializing. They told us stories, mom baked and cooked and late at night she would get rabbit and other things ready for the next day. We ate a lot of wild meat, like deer and rabbit. Mom didn't play too many games and cards but Dad liked playing cards. Mom amused herself doing other things. We never had television or radios. I used to go to the neighbours to listen to the radio at William John's and my cousin bad boy. We listened to Hop Along Cassidy and the Cisco Kid and laughed. In summer time, we'd go to the movies in Binscarth on foot which was seven miles away. For fifty cents we were able to go to the movie and buy a chocolate bar or potato chips and a drink. You might still have a few pennies left over. We might get a ride or run home.

My dad worked mostly for farmers around Binscarth, like Frank Goody or others. My dad worked in the field picking stones, roots, or fencing. In winter, Dad cut fence posts and I'd help haul them out of the bush on my back. We got five cents a post. In those days if you sold 100 posts, you got five dollars and 200 you got ten dollars. You bought a lot of food for \$10.00. Dad would also trap. It took us awhile so we took our lunch along. We also had to cut wood to heat the house up in winter time. Dad would sometimes borrow horses from Adolf Drielick or Joe Boucher when he didn't have horses. Dad also bartered and traded wood in exchange for using the horses. Adolf Drielick got flour from the mill and dad would trade wood for flour. We cut cord wood at St. Madeleine. We cut dry wood for our house and we'd cut green for cord wood. In those days we cut wood with the axe or saws. There weren't any chain saws. We cut oak posts. Oak is hard wood, it was hard to saw and cut or sharpened. My dad was good at sharpening saws and the axe. Dad had all the tools and special filer which he needed. My oldest brother Jim was born April 16, 1932. My brother B  b   was born in 1936. Mom lost kids in St. Madeleine.

The M  tis moved from St. Madeleine because the Government wanted a pasture and threw the M  tis out. There were supposed to be compensated and given homes elsewhere. The residents of St. Madeleine said their homes were burned, their dogs shot and literally forced out. Some people moved to Fouilliard Town and some to Selby Town. I seen my dad build his house. My dad went to work for farmers in Langenburg, SK after the farmers that he worked for around Binscarth, MB had retired. I also remember dad working for Colin Hall, a farmer around Binscarth, MB and his sister. My mother kept

herself busy caring for us and doing regular mother's work and chores. My mother picked berries and helped in the garden. My dad always had a big garden. When we got home from school we had to work in the garden for half to one hour before we played. My dad was handy at sewing and making us clothing. I remember him making me a shirt out of a flour bag. I was impressed, as he dyed the bag first. He sewed everything by hand, as we didn't have a sewing machine. He made socks and mitts for us. Nobody dared to take our clothes, I would fight (laughs). My dad was also a good cook. He made cakes and mom made pies. I liked my dad's cake. They didn't over do it for a birthday but for a wedding there was a lot of baking and cooking and decorating.

It was a big day where we lived when it was was New Years. At midnight a lot people went out of their homes and got ready for twelve o'clock to strike so who would shoot first to start the celebration. They would then go in the house, kneel down in front of dad, get the blessing, and everyone shook hands. We sat down and ate and then others would come to visit and eat and we would do the same. My dad was older in the community so a lot of people came to our place first. The furniture was moved and made room to dance at our house and other places and this went on all week until All King's Day. The dances were at our place, Louis Pelletier, Chi Tom Fleury in the valley at Zeux Bleu's place, this was two to three miles from Binscarth, MB. Some used horses or walked. There was hardly any drinking and if there was there was no trouble. They would dance and visit and laugh.

When there was a wedding my dad was asked to take the bride and groom to and from the church with sometimes two or three other teams. My dad decorated his horses with fancy dressage with scotch tops, bells, ribbons. It was nice. The wedding usually took place at the bride's parent's place. That's where they ate and celebrated and danced. I remember those days, I would sometimes tie my sleigh behind dad's big horse drawn sleigh and be part of the parade or I would run behind. I remember my cousin Giling and Paul Morrisette's wedding on Christmas day. I remember a lot of weddings. My dad had a big influence in my life. He taught me how to work and a lot of our ways. When I started to smoke he told me to never beg for smokes, always work and buy your own. I started working when I was fourteen. I had to quit school early. Dad would take the money and give me a few dollars for the weekend. He used my money to feed our family.

I didn't dance very much, some square dances, but I loved listening to fiddle music. The music was fiddle and guitar and mostly square dances and waltzes. One of my favourite fiddle players was Willy Boucher. He played at the school dances and I would sit by the book shelves and watch him all night. There were other good players but I liked his playing the best. My dad was good at dancing the jig but I don't remember seeing mom dance. Dad knew quite a few steps. My dad also sang French songs at the table when there were celebrations. Before the party was on, the older people (Elders) had a few drinks, told stories, and sang in French.

In winter time, I seen dad lying down in his bedroom and singing the old French songs. I used to know two of them. I forget now, it has been too long. (Tried to sing a verse but he forgot). My late brother B  b   knew some of dad's songs. It's a forgotten art and I don't know why, years ago the people seemed to know all the old songs. I don't remember when I last heard someone sing. People play records now and other things. Even the fiddle is something that is rarely played.

We spoke Cree, what we call Michif. That is all we spoke at home. I didn't know any English until I started school. Dad spoke English, but not Mom. He didn't use it at home unless someone visited who spoke English. My dad learned English when he worked out. My mother and dad never went to school. My mom started to learn English when she moved to Brandon in 1979. She learned from her grandchildren. They loved their grandma and had good times teaching their grandma. She didn't use it that much. When she'd go to the hospital, someone went with her like my sisters or my dad and spoke for her. The parents don't speak to their children in Michif so they don't know how. When you have coffee in town with someone they speak only English so I don't know if they are embarrassed to speak in white society. I don't know and they also forget. When my late wife and I lived in Roblin, MB we always spoke in Michif to each other and the grandchildren and her children. We also had to speak English because everything around them is English. Years ago we lived in Michif speaking communities. Now we live in BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and all over where only English is the first language. That is another reason we lost our language. The Michif speakers used to see each other more often, but there is hardly any time that we visit. This doesn't help our language. In order to save our Michif, we have to meet like all the time and practice and talk about our culture in our language. We can start slow and it will grow, we know but the kids don't know so we have to teach them. The kids have to know, we learn from each other. Even we forget. We don't meet often enough so we lose the touch. Our speakers should lead. We should also learn to write it.

My dad told us a lot of stories, they should have been recorded. When dad had company and I was in bed, I heard him talking but I forget more than I remember. They would sometimes tell stories by the light of the stove and lower the lamp so they wouldn't disturb the children, but I still listened to them talking. My dad talked about his parents' life much but mostly what went on years before.

My dad didn't say much about Louis Riel. He talked about the buffalo and how the old Michifs lived. He spoke of the Métis of St. Lazare and his relatives there like your (Norman's) dad and others. I didn't know those people. The Métis don't know the relatives like years ago because the Michif lived together in close communities. The Métis years ago were very close. There were storytellers and they'd joke and were humorous. My dad was rough with me a few times that I remember so I learned. I used to spill my uncle's potato bags over and I got caught and I did get it. I am not sorry that dad was rough at times because he taught me things and I learned. Years ago the Métis had a better way of life. Today you pay for your rent, hydro, and years ago the people made their own and furnished their own needs. The Métis were more self-sufficient. There seems to be more sickness today than years ago. My dad knew the natural herbs and roots on the prairie. I remember we had yellow jaundice so dad went to McClennan's who had sheep and made medicine with sheep dung and other things. Boiled that and gave us a drink. It got rid of our jaundice. Spruce gum was a medicine, la belle angilique. Where we lived many knew medicine. The little Ernestine Morissette knew a lot of medicine. She always had a medicine bag. I remember one or three women would go around helping when someone gave birth. They took turns staying with the patient. My aunt Eleanor was a good nurse. My uncle Chi Tom's wife. Old lady Betsy and Napoleon Vermette's wife also helped. That is in the early 1950s. Mrs. Jimmy Ledoux and my Aunty Bizouille also helped. There was a lot of help when a baby was born. It was difficult years ago there weren't any vehicles so the home remedies were used. The hospital was too far away.

I don't have my own children but I raised step children. My kids' children, my grandkids live in Edmonton. They phone me once and awhile. One of my grandchildren lives here in Brandon. I visit my sisters Verna and Nora and my brother Jim. He sleeps sometimes when I go over but he comes for coffee a lot down town at the gallery and he stops to see me. I have two sisters in Moosomin, SK. Yvonne, the youngest and Cecile. Mrs. Gordon Burroughs, she's the third oldest. Nora is the oldest now. We lost our oldest sister Agnes. She died of cancer. I lost two brothers. One was 26 years old and the 28 year old. My brother B  b   died in 1999. He died of a heart attack. He was born in 1938. My brother will be 77 years old tomorrow on April 17. Dolphice is my oldest brother.

There was a picnic in St. Madeleine last year and we had a little family get together. I ran the bingo in St. Madeleine last year for the organization.

The last Michif conference was okay but too much English and not enough Michif spoken. The person that was MC only spoke English. I didn't like the way the organization of the conference went. It was the same and nothing accomplished. It was the first time I rode in an airplane. There was too much of the same. We should form a Michif group. People asked about you at the conference. Too much English and no Michif.

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