

Victoria Genaille Interview by Norman Fleury – English Paraphrase

My name is Victoria Genaille. I was born and raised in St. Madeleine. I was born in 1936. I was four years old when we moved from there. My late dad was called La La. His name was Alfred Demontigny. My mother is Chi Rose Fisher and became Rose Demontigny. My grandfather was Li Vyeu Fisher. His name was Ambroise Fisher. My grandmother was Victoria Fleury. My grandmother's nickname was Ainfii. I called my grandpa Mooshoom. My dad's dad was Patrice Demontigny and my Grandma was Rose Anna St. Germain. My Grandmother Demontigny died in St. John, North Dakota and is buried there. Her baby was only two years old. My grandpa and grandma Demontigny came from St. John, North Dakota. My dad and his family came from St. John, North Dakota except my Uncle Eugene and Aunty Helen. They were born in Boissevain, but were registered in St. John, North Dakota. I have all the birth certificates. In the States, they lived on a reservation and they were called half-bloods. My mother was born in St. Madeleine. My mother didn't tell me too much about where her parents came from. Apparently my mother was supposed to have been born in a place called Mountain Lake. My Grandfather Fisher came from Le Bret, SK. I also heard of Mountain Rock. My Grandmother Fisher's mother was Cecile Flamand. She used to tell us she was related to Flamand's. She told us her cousin was Pete Flamand. I don't know if it was first or second cousin. Mom had eleven children, five died so there were six living. Now there is only my brother Laylaan (Leo) and I living. Dan, Therese, Mary May, John, Leo and I were born in St. Madeleine. My sister Angela was born in Russell hospital and my brothers Ernest and William (Bill) were born at Fouillard Town. And my mother lost two pre-mature.

Mother said we were supposed to get married in St. Lazare, MB, but it was too cold. That was at the end of January so the priest came to say mass so that's where we got married in St. Madeleine. Then got married, January 29th, 1928. We travelled in the sleigh drawn by horses. It was so cold I didn't wear a white dress and had no flowers. We had to wear a hat. Remember when I showed you the wedding picture of Desiree and Caroline's wedding. You can see they dressed. Their dresses hung below their knees. All the bridesmaids wore hats and the men wore suits. I remember Ambroise Morrisette and Cecile Ledoux's wedding of long ago. They got married on a Christmas Eve. Jean Louis drove them to the church with his team. They had lanterns hung on the sleigh. That is the first wedding I saw on Christmas Eve. Father Poulette used to make mass at 7:30 in the evening. People carried lanterns to see the road. The wedding party danced at Jimmy Ledoux's. This is the first wedding I remember going to. The wedding party sat together with the parents (older people). I remember the old people singing wedding songs in French while they ate. After everyone ate, then everything was cleared and Chi Bon Homme Venne, Willie Boucher, and Samuel Genaille played the music each their turn. They had a good time, no drinking, no fights, lots of fun. I don't know when and how I got home. I was tired, maybe they chased me home (laughs).

I married Dave Genaille. His dad is Frank Genaille and his mother is Marie Flamand. Dave was born at Shortdale, MB. His brothers are Francis, John, and Rene. His sisters are Mary and Liza and there was one more sister, but I don't remember. I had eight children. My first child was Frederick, then Isadore and my daughter Therese, then from there, Barbara and my youngest boy Rene and my two youngest daughters, Brenda and Valerie. My children were all born in the Sacred Heart hospital in Russell, MB. We got married in the St. Herbert Church on Gamblers on July 11, 1964. We ate at old Chi Tom Fleury's

place. After we ate, our cousin Phillip Genaille played the music outside. We danced outside. She should have seen the white shirts (laughs). There was a black ring around the collar. My bridesmaids were Louisa Gregory the first one and the second was Doreen Ledoux. The groomsmen were my brother Dan and Dave's nephew Wilfred Spence. My parents were living but Dave's parents weren't. His relatives that came were his nephew and his cousin Phillipe Genaille and William LeClair, his wife and sister-in-law. My godfather Damien Fisher and Uncle Chi Tom sang the table songs. These were sung in French. In my mother's family there were eight girls and one boy, Damien. The oldest, Adrienne, Mrs. St. Pierre Desjarlais was born March 21, 1902. My Aunt Maggie, Mrs. Smith was born May 27, 1904. My mother Rose, Mrs. Alfred Demontigny was born April 25, 1906. My Aunt Caroline, Mrs. John Vermette was born March 18, 1908. They were all born in St. Madeleine. There was one that died and I don't know how old she was when she died. My Aunt Eleanor, Mrs. Tom Fleury was born January 12, 1915. My Aunt Bernadette, I don't know when her birthday was, but she was born in 1917. My godfather Damien Fisher was the baby of the family, born January 17, 1920. I don't know two of my aunt's birthdays. My Aunt Bernadette married Gaarsoon Vermette. They had one daughter, Marie. My Aunt Eleanor was a seventh daughter born in sequence. As I was told, a seventh child born had a special gift, usually healing. But when they pass on the power is gone. My aunt was going to teach me but didn't really believe it but today I think I should have listened.

When the Métis lived in St. Madeleine they had farms, some had cattle and horses. They helped each other build houses, make hay, and just general help. It's like if I was getting married in those days and we built a house. People would come and help cut logs, haul logs, build, make plaster, until the house was finished. You don't see this happening today. My dad was always making houses. He was like a beaver. He cut logs and made wedges at the ends and fit the logs in so they wouldn't slip. There were hardly any nails used. If it was going to roll he would drill a hole and put a stick through it. Then it stayed straight. I helped my dad. I got old enough for him to teach me and I knew. You then cut out the windows and the door. If he'd add onto the house he would cut two logs, put them against the house and add on. He used little logs for the roof. He used cardboard, torn paper or whatever he could use. My dad also used to cut out sod and also used that on the house. When we came to find my uncle Patrice I remember them making a stove out of a barrel. He went and made the lid and also the stovepipe with some of the barrel. They had stones or bricks to set the stove on for a stand. Then it was safe from burning. The top of the stove was flat so you could also cook on the stove.

When we moved to Fouillard Town Corner we bought a kitchen cooking stove. There were four burning rings, two big ones and two little ones. The oven was small. You could only put three or four loaves of bread in the over at a time. It was a small stove, four legs, a box for ashes. Mom emptied the ashes once a week. My dad cut dry wood and if he had green, he would save it for winter. My dad helped everyone in the community and then he went working for farmers. He picked rocks, roots, and scrubbed bush to clear and make fields. My dad said the rocks were sometimes so big he had to dig around and under and tie a chain around them and pull with the horses.

Mom used to wash our hair and make braids for us, even the boys. I don't know if you heard but they said to never cut a child's hair until they are four years old. Apparently you would have eye problems if you cut your hair too young. I followed that with my boy Frederick. I cut his hair when he was seven

years old. I cut Isidore's hair sooner. George Fleury's mother, my Aunt Annie, when she saw that she was upset. She told me if he's 50 or 60, he'll lose his eyesight. Who knows if it's true or not.

In summer, my mother cooked and canned and we ate all kinds of things. We ate strawberries, raspberries, and whatever you found. She canned plums, peaches, and pears when she bought them. She would put all of this away for the winter. When they made gardens she would can peas, beans, and carrots for winter. I saw my dad roll the cabbage in the mud. He stored them like that for the winter. When you went to cook them, they were as fresh as if you took them out of the garden. Sometimes they would melt wax and roll the turnips and carrots in the melted wax to preserve and keep during winter. They had good methods years ago. Nobody does that now today. There were no fridges and freezers. When they killed deer, they strip cut the meat, made a fire in a dug out so they wouldn't lose the first. They made a meat rack and dried the meat. They also salted the meat and put it in bags. They picked chokecherries and saskatoons, dried them and made dried cakes. They cooked these in winter time.

The Métis didn't celebrate or cook as much for Christmas. They would go to church. New Years was a big celebration. Since I remember New Years, we went to my grandpas and we were there at midnight with Grandpa and Grandma. We all knelt in front of Grandpa and he blessed us all for New Years. When this was over, the table was set and the Elders ate first. Then some people like Joe Venne, Damien Fisher, Old Man John Fleury sang songs in French. My grandfather, Félix Fleury and Chi Paul Fleury also sang. These New Years table songs were all in French. You cooked whatever you had. If you had chickens, turkeys, deer roasts or beef, that's what you had. Sometimes pork and we made lii boulette with ground up rabbit meat. I ate more than one boulette (laughs). When we left Grandpa's we then went on to visit other Elders. We went to Norbert Boucher's. He lived beside Grandpa. We went to Chi Marie's, la Mikinn's mother. We also went to Aunty Maggie's. We went to every home and ate a little in each home. When we were done, then dad hatched his team and then we went to the other places like Old William Ledoux, Jimmy Ledoux, Boyii Smith, Louis Pelletier. My dad and mom were home as they had visitors. My uncle, J.B. Demontigny, we knelt in front of him also. We did the same with Uncle Patrice. The young people made the rounds and visited. You knelt down in front of all the old people. The women replaced the husband if he was gone. I told my kids I sure wish I could see these things once or twice like it used to be. Sometimes kids laugh at the old ways. They were not taught these ways. If they don't know a lot of this, it is our fault. We can't rely on the old people because they are gone. We have one old person, your mother (Norman's mother), but they also can't teach anymore.

The Métis left St. Madeleine because old John Selby and Ben Fouillard made arrangements to sell to the government. Some people had land and couldn't afford to pay their taxes for five or ten dollars. They surveyed the lands for pasture and we were all thrown out of our homes. Everyone went all over, like dad and us, we came to Fouillard Town. We came next to Gambler Reserve. Some people went to Batoche, Camperville, Duck Bay, some went to Alberta and South. Wherever they thought they would make a living is where they went. Those who moved to Fouillard Town was us, old Jimmy Ledoux, Old Johnny Fleury, Kookoom Lodia, Zyeu Bleu, William Ledoux for a while. Pete Ducharme for not very long and Boyii, they went north. Desire Vermette for awhile, one of the last one's to move out. He moved to Crane River. At Selby Town there were my grandparents, my aunt Maggie, their daughter, Chi Marie La Mikinns mom, Old Norbert Boucher. They all went to Selby Town. We were placed there by John Selby

and Ben Fouillard and that's how it got its name. Joe Boucher moved on the other side of the creek. They were given land. I don't know when they left St. Madeleine. Maybe in 1940 or 1941. There were Rosalie, George, Almer, and I think Robert. They stayed at Eric Wotton's and went to school at Gambler School. They were lucky, they went to school. Where they lived in spring time you couldn't get across because the creek and the river flooded. So the kids were placed somewhere to go to school. When Joe and his wife went shopping they had to go to Spy Hill, SK to shop because they couldn't get across. It was a tough time in the spring.

When I first started talking, this was my first language, Cree like we are speaking now, Michif and a bit of French. I only knew these two languages. My grandparents spoke like us. My dad spoke some Saulteaux, English, French, and all Michif. My mother spoke French and Michif. My mother didn't understand English. My mother didn't go to school. I started school when I was just about twelve years old by the Gambler Reserve, Fouillard Town. I started school at the church. When the teacher asked me what is your name I said, "Yes," (laughs) "that was my name." I wasn't told in English my name, when I was born, and what month. I didn't even know in Michif. I think if we are to save our Michif language, we have to teach it to everyone. We can lose our language. We can use cards, knives, forks for teaching tools. You can lift them up and they will have to answer in Michif and name them. You can use pencils, paper, and write. Teach how to count. You can even use a needle and ask them what it is in Michif. If they don't know then the teacher says what it is. What do you do with a needle? You can say you use it to patch your pants and coat. You can cut out pants, dresses, and shirts, and show and sew them. As I was taught, I taught my kids how to do the same. I would go by a slough or where there was water, make a fire, heat the water and wash the clothes. We used to hang our clothes on branches to dry. I learned these things and taught them. I taught Michif here in Binscarth but only had three students. I would rather teach Michif alone. If you have a partner there is danger that you will not get along or there could be jealousy. There could be a difference of opinion sometimes and could be arguments.

I like going to Métis meetings. When they say Michif language conference then we should speak Michif, not English. That is not our mother's language, English. When we speak Michif they should have translators so others can understand. I went to Vancouver Michif Language Conference in the spring and when I spoke Michif, a lady said I hope someone could speak English. Mervin and Verna didn't talk, just George Fleury and I. The conference was long. They started early from nine to twelve and one to five. That's too long for Elders. There was only one MC that spoke Cree and he answered you.

Maarsii.