

This story is written in memory of a peaceable and loving woman. My grandmother Rose [nee] Létendre {TREMAYNE}. Everyone affectionately called her Grandma Rose. She lived to a ripe old age of nearly ninety-one years of age. She never showed any signs of senility. In fact, her memory was so crystal-clear that when she spoke of what she experienced in her life-time, it was so vivid that you would almost swear that it happened that day. Finally, your life story is written so that it can be shared by all who read it.

**Dedicated:** To my dear Mother who passed away on January 20 th. 1990 who inspired me to write this story of my Grandmother and to my children, Andrea, Curtis, Amanda and Alicia who have never seen their great-grandmother, but, have heard so many speak of her stories. The stories that she shared with her children and grandchildren were told so that we would be proud of our heritage.

# Chapter 1

## Sad Memories of Batoche my Birthplace

This is the story of Rose [nee] Létendre {TREMAYNE}. My grandmother was born in the autumn of 1882 just two and a half years before the Battle of Batoche. She was born to William Létendre grandson of Xavier Létendre dit Batoche. Although she was very young, she heard many stories about the battle. She was still a child when Louis Riel came back from Montana to help the Metis fight for their rights. Many of the early meetings with Gabriel Dumont, Louis Riel and others were in the back of Xavier Létendre's store. Grandmother said that she wandered into the back room while the meeting was on. Gabriel Dumont wanted to push her away to onese, but Louis Riel, on noticing her stopped Gabriel and said, "Laissez le! C'est a cause de et enfant, et de tous nos enfants que nous devons ressier dans cette bataille" Let the child come to me! It is because of this child, and all our children that we must fight. Grandmother added, "Many people believe that Louis Riel was crazy. I think, that he thought himself to be the saviour of the Metis people. He would often would say things that was from the scriptures."

Times were hard for the Metis people and because of the impending battle, women and children were hurried out of the town in the middle of the night so that they could be unnoticed. Grandmother recalled how they crawled along the fields to make their way along the river bank. Grandmother said, "My mother Mellanie ([nee] Fayant {Létendre}), placed her hand over my mouth to keep me silent as we crawled along the field. The soldiers must have been close by because you could hear their voices in the night air." Grandmother continued, "When we got

to the river bank, my mother told me we are going to play a game. I was excited along with the other children. The game that we were to play was to dig with our hands. Everyone started to dig with their hands. We dug in the evening and long into the night. During the day we would have to hide in the bush. At night we would return to the river bank and continue to dig. A day or so went by as we dug along the bank. At the time we did not know what we were doing. All I remember was that I was told, not to stop digging. We ended up with a big hole. It was big enough to crawl in and hide. We were told that we were going to hide. So we went in and hid. Women and children huddled together in the caves. The children were cold and frightened. Some of the old people got really sick. Others were brought to the caves so that they could be cared for. My mother and other women knew enough about Indian medicine and so they cared for them. Some of those who were brought to the caves were dead so they had to be made ready. Those families who's men that were brought in the caves cried for their love ones. We also shared in the crying. They were our relatives. Other people may have even died because of this terrible thing that we were going through. I really don't remember, it happened so long ago." Grandmother went on to say, "One had to be quiet, so that we would not be noticed. When we were in the caves I remembering asking my mom, 'Why can't we go home where it is warm?' My mother would say, 'You got a big mouth. Be quiet soon we can all go home.' I wasn't the only kid that would cry to their mom. There were quite a few families there. Most of us were related in some way."

Grandmother continued to relate her story saying, "The children, even though we were young, knew the danger that was amongst us and respected our elders because Father (Moulin) taught us well. Back then we were Catholic's. Not like today's youth who do not respect their parents. I think we must have stayed in those cold caves for a couple of weeks. We didn't know when to come out ... maybe we didn't come out so soon because we didn't know if it was safe or not. I can't remember." Grandmother needed to rest for a while so I made her some tea. After drinking tea she said, "I remember that when we came out of the caves we walked back to our house and found it burnt down. Many homes were wrecked. Why those soldiers wrecked our home I can't say. They wrecked not only our homes but they wrecked our dreams. Batoche was our homeland." A tear came to her eyes as she said those words. "There was nothing left for us at Batoche, so we moved further west to a small town, Pincher Creek, Alberta."

## Chapter 2

### Leaving our homeland

Another visit to my grandmother revealed the saga of her early life. I went over to visit because I felt terrible. I needed to speak to her about how I was being treated in school by the children. I was in my sixth grade, at McKitrick Elementary School in North Battleford. The children were calling me horrible names. I felt ashamed because of my native ancestry. I needed to vent out my frustrations. Grandma always made time to listen. After listening she told me, "My boy, don't quit school. Those white kids are jealous of you. Your family was here before this was a province. My grandfather dit Batoche was the father of the town of Batoche. The Metis people were here before the white man. We fought for our land. You should never be ashamed because you are a Half-Breed. Remember, I told you about Batoche. When them white kids tease you ignore them. I was teased too when I was a kid." After rebuilding my confidence and pride she would relate stories of her life.

Grandmother started her story saying, "Growing up in Pincher Creek was really hard. Everyone knew we were Half-Breeds. At school the kids would call us terrible names. They would say things like, 'You dirty filthy Indian! Why don't you go back to your reserve. We don't want dirty Indians here.' Or they would say, 'Rebels. Why in hell didn't you all die. Your whole family should have been strung up for treason.' I gave in to those kids, I quit school." She did not lie around idle. To the contrary, she started to work for the Hudson Bay Company at a very early age. Grandmother told me that the company worked the women hard because they were the "scorched wood" or the dark skin people. Grandmother also said, "We were the daughters of the earth, and in the minds of the clerks we could handle any task."

Not only did she face racism in the school system but also in the work force. After a few years working at packing furs into bundles for the Hudson Bay Company, her family moved to Medicine Hat, Alberta. She worked at a local cafe where she met a young mix-blood, named Peter Tremayne. He was the son of Richard Tremayne and Maria Tait. Richard Tremayne was a factor at the Hudson Bay Post. Peter Tremayne's father returned to England leaving his country wife behind. Grandmother said, "That's what

the fur traders use to do. They would live with the Indian women and go back to their home where they had come from. That's exactly what happened to your great-grandmother. Then you would hear stories of how the ship went down while returning to England. I don't believe that. I think after his time was over, he returned to England and forgot about his Indian family." Maria Tait married someone else years after the departure of her first husband.

Grandmother married Peter Tremayne on November 23, 1905 at St. Patrick's Rectory in Medicine Hat, Alberta. Grandmother said, "When we got married we were married as Mr. and Mrs. Peter Ross. Donald Ross your grandfather's cousin by marriage told him that his name was Peter Tremoyne. All these years we were known as Tremoyne's. It wasn't until we searched for your grandfather's baptismal papers that we found out his real name was Peter Tremayne."

Grandmother began to laugh, than she said, "All these years I thought I was married legally to your grandfather, only to find out that there was a mistake in our marriage licence. Oh while, too many years have gone by to correct things. I guess I'll go to my grave a sinner." I reached over and gave a big hug and kissed her tenderly, and said, "No grandma, what has happen many years ago no one had control over. In the eyes of God he knows your innocence." We gave each other a big hug. Grandmother told me, "You know my boy, the way you can explain things, you should become a teacher. Even at my old age you have taught me so much."

Those words that my grandmother told me that day echoed in my head. I never thought of becoming a teacher before, it was those words of comfort that my grandmother spoke that day that later compelled me to become a teacher.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Moving Back to Saskatchewan**

"Shortly after we were married, we loaded our wagon and took our cows and horses and came back to Saskatchewan. It was in the spring. I was twenty-three years old when we decided to move back to Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan was a province and your grandpa said, `Things should be better now. The fighting is

over and people are getting land. We should go and try to get some land.' We arrived in the town of Birch Lake, and my husband went to North Battleford to register for some land. They told him there was no land available. But he could lease some land to raise his cattle. We leased some land and we built a house on a small farm. Your Dad was born on that little farm. By the time your father was born we lived on the farm for ten years. We had about 150 head of pure bred herefords. The lord blessed us with a large family." I asked grandma, "How many children did you have?" In reply she said, "Let's see, there was your Uncle Robert, than Edith, Harry, Nora, Lena, your dad, Mable, Josephine, Bill, Madeline, and the baby of the family your aunty Emma. Eleven kids in all."

Many years later, while visiting the Gabriel Dumont Institute, my father George Tremayne recalled a story of visiting the Létendre home at Batoche. In our office there is a print of his grandfather's house, Xavier Létendre. After looking at the picture he said, "This is my grandparents place. When I was a little boy I remember visiting them. There was a chicken coop in the yard. When I was about 3 or 4 years old, I went into the chicken coop and wanted to help by gathering some eggs. My Kokom was happy that I brought in the eggs and she told me I was a good boy. That was all that I needed to hear. I went outside and went back into the chicken coop and I looked for some more eggs. I searched all over and I found some eggs that my Kokom put out to hatch. She had marked them with an X and put them back in the nest. I took all those eggs and brought them in. She said, 'Rose! Look at your little boy, he is bringing in my eggs that I want to hatch for chicks.' My mom told me to put them back, because Granny wanted those eggs to make chicks. Together, we put them back and about an hour or so, I must have forgotten. I went back and brought those eggs in again. This time my old granny took a switch to me."

We would of still had that farm, but your grandfather gave up the lease. He sold the cattle and the rest of the livestock that we had and moved into North Battleford. With his money he bought a small delivery truck and a couple of lots. He built a house in North Battleford were the highway crosses. "Where about's was your house Grandma?" I asked. "There is a Gulf Service Station and a Motel where our old house use to be. We lived in that first house until your father was about eleven years old. My old man thought the kids were old enough to help with farm chores, so he sold that house and moved us to a farm. This farm was different than the first farm we had. We bought it and we had a title for it. That farm was by Lizard Lake just

a little North of Red Pheasant Reserve near the small village of Baljenny. The year was 1928 or 1929. We stayed on that farm until your father had a serious accident which caused him to go in the hospital. I tried to help your father but no herbs would help him. He stayed in the hospital for a few months in North Battleford. They couldn't help him anymore so they moved your father to a sanatorium in Prince Albert.

With your father so far away from home, and us not able to visit him. We decided to sell our farm and move closer to Prince Albert. We bought a little farm near the fox farm. We stayed in that area for three and a half years. Your grandpa sold that farm to Bill Vermette your Aunty Nora's husband. After selling the farm we moved to Big River. We bought two quarters of land. We cleared the land and built a house. The rest of the family stayed in the Big River area. Four years we worked hard to cut trees, pull stumps and plant crops. The soil wasn't very good. The longer we stayed the poorer we got so we tried to sell that farm. We couldn't sell it so we left the farm and moved back to North Battleford. Your grandpa built us a lovely little house and we stayed there until your grandpa retired. He died in 1956. I stayed in that little house until your Aunty Edith asked me to live with her after her husband died."

## **Chapter 4**

### **Stories of your Grandfather's Home Town**

"Did I ever tell you stories of your grandfather's birthplace?" Grandma asked. "No I can't remember if you have. Probably, when we were younger you may have told us something." was my

reply. "Your grandfather was born in the Qu'Appelle valley back in 1877. When he was younger his mother would tell him some of the old tales of how the Metis people would go on an annual buffalo hunt. Buffaloes were plentiful back then. There came a time, however, that the buffalo was hunted and sold for food at the fort in Qu'Appelle. Your old Granny Tait said, 'In 1869 the buffalo were really thick like flies, the people hunted and such an abundance that they were able to feed the people at the fort and also their Cree relatives. They had so much left over that they made pemmican and the store kept a big stock of the dried meat, the next year when there was no buffalo around for miles, and the annual buffalo hunt failed the people were forced to buy the dried pounded meat from the store at Fort Qu'Appelle.' The Hudson Bay post was bad in those days, the Metis gave the extra meat for the store to keep and when the people needed food to feed their families the people were forced to buy it back with furs. To make things worst that year there was hardly any fish in the lakes."

Another story that your Grandfather told me was about a Metis Medicine man who lived at Fort Qu'Appelle. His name was Desjarlais. He was a big man, and people would say he was a devil. When one of his grandchildren died, old Desjarlais challenged the Almighty to come down and fight like a man instead of killing innocent children. This Desjarlais, knew about good medicine and about bad medicine. Two times he put himself under a spell and everyone thought he was dead. Each time just as his boys were preparing him for the grave he came to. He scared the living daylights out of his boys. He spoke to them and told them of his visit to the spirit-land. The third time old Desjarlais put a spell on himself, his boys quickly draped him with a winding sheet and put him into a coffin. His grave was already dug and so they put him into the grave covering him with dirt. They poured water over the grave to keep his spirit from rising." "Oh Granny! That isn't a true story." I said. "It sure is a true story. All you need to do is talk to people about the Fort Qu'Appelle devil. They will tell you the story." said Granny.

Granny ended the story of the Metis Medicine man by saying, "During the service, while Father was speaking of old Desjarlais, the mother leaned over to one of her boys and said, "Better check to see if that is your dad in the coffin, the way Father is speaking about him I'm not so sure! If he is talking about him." Granny had so many interesting and funny stories of the early life of the Metis people. Often it was hard to know

if she was serious or not. It is these little stories that I miss. As while as her pleasant attitude toward life.

## Chapter 5

### Granny's Last Remaining Years

"We lived together for many years until your family moved to North Battleford in 1968. You kids have been wonderful to me. Helping me get around, shopping for me." I replied, "Oh Grandma, we don't mind. We enjoy having you living her with us. We love to listen to the stories of your life. It must have been interesting to live back than. To see how much has changed in your lifetime." Grandma said, "The world has changed so much from the time I was a child. We use to get around with horse and buggy. Than we had cars. Even man is talking about going to the moon. Everything has changed and people changed to. They have forgotten about the old ways. They have life far to easy. They don't even care about the old people like they use to. The store clerks try to take advantage of me because I'm old."

Grandmother continued to live for five more years until she died in the Spring of 1973. Grandma Rose lived a long and fulfilling life of ninety years and eight months. She was a very loving and dear person. Those early years of her life were hard yet she obediently followed her husband. After tracing the many moves with such a large family never did she grumble or complain. She was pleasant to be with, full of laughter and wonderful stories. Even though she had very little education she was wise in a spiritual sense. She loved nature and her Creator and always had something to say that would cheer you up. She will always be remembered for her cheerful ways, a pillar among humanity. Grandmother is gone now, the only memories that we have are her smiling face. Her beautiful white shinning hair, the wrinkles on her face tell the story of her early life. Words of wisdom from our elders are so important to the Metis people. It is from these words that one can infer the deeper meaning of life. The wisdom of age is passed on from generation

to generation. Grandmother, you may be gone, but, you will NEVER be forgotten.