

Norm Fleury (NF) Interview – Mary St. Pierre.

Before I got married, my name was Vitaline Flammand. My late father's name was Alexandre Flammand, and my mother's name was Marie-Adele Allary.

I was born in Crooked Lake, and it's in a valley. I was born in a house and my grandmother was a midwife. My grandmother's name was Isabelle. Just wait, I forget know. I have the papers at home, but I really don't know right now. It was my dad's mother.

This was the way they used my grandmother. She used to go around delivering babies, but she was never paid. She did it for nothing and that's the way people used to live at one time. The Métis people helped one another.

When you had no money years ago, there was nothing that you could do. That's just the way it was. You just had to live with it.

My dad's folks came from Québec. They were from down east. You know like those kinds of Frenchmen that were born down east, but my dad was a Métis, he was a Michif. I don't know where that is but that's where they come from, down east. That's where all the Flammands came from.

My mother was born on the Kewosance [Keeseekose?] Reserve. Her name was Marie-Adele Allary. Her language was the way we speak now. Her language was the Michif language. My mother had thirteen kids. She had six girls and the rest were boys.

When I was a young girl we used to wash clothes, we used to make bannock, we had to haul wood, but we hauled wood by hand. We didn't use horses we had to haul the wood out of the bush by hand. My mother had a lot of kids, so we also had to baby sit. We had to take care of our brothers and sisters.

My brothers and sisters worked also they used to go digging Seneca [snake] root. We'd also dig little voles for bounty. They'd cut the ears off and then sell them. That's how we made some money.

They made a lot of money. We used to buy flour, we bought anything to do with food with our money, and we bought lard, and things that we needed for home, mainly for eating.

Everything was cheap in those days. So, we bought tea and we bought things that we needed.

Oh, I making a mistake again, I want to talk English. I forget.
We got married at Crescent Lake.

There was a lot of Métis living in Crescent Lake in those days.

My husband's name was St. Pierre.

No, he wasn't born at Crescent Lake. He was born in the States.

It was pitiful when we lived in the valley. We couldn't wait for spring to come so we could move back to Crescent Lake.

The men used to go hunting coyotes and we'd be digging Seneca root. With all this money we used to save, we'd buy lots of flour for the winter then we would move back again to the valley again for the winter. We couldn't wait until spring again so we could go out working and digging Seneca root.

My father only had one wagon and we were a big family so we had to follow behind the wagon while some of them rode on the wagon. We were travelling back and forth, and then eventually we moved permanently to Crescent Lake.

I had eight children. I had four boys and four girls. I lost my oldest daughter Laura.

My four boys are here. Edwin is my oldest boy, and Laurence and they're all [inaudible]. My sister Laura that died that was my oldest sister.

Oh my God, I have lots of grandchildren. I would, I could never finish counting how many I have. I have grandchildren, great grandchildren.

My daughter here has eleven kids. The late Laura had eight kids. Stella had six kids. Lafille [?] had five kids. I've got two, five generation grandchildren.

The Lord was the one that helped me most in my life, where I'm trying to think well and lead a good life.

I didn't have my grandparents very long, but my father was a good leader and I looked up to my father to give me the right directions in life. My father prayed hard, he prayed a lot. He was the one that gave me the right road.

That's what helped the Métis people. [It] was prayer. They really prayed hard. They were hard praying people.

When I was twelve year's old they tried to put me in the school. My, my Godfather lived on the reserve. My Godfather put me in the residential school. I wasn't there for two weeks and I was thrown out of the school. I went to school, to Crooked Lake. It's in the big valley. There's a big school standing there. This was a residential school. I only went to school for two weeks. That was all. And I didn't like the school anyway because we never left home. We were always with our parents. So I was lonesome, I guess. Then when I got home my father kept on thinking about me going to school. So there's a little town over here called Dubuque. So, he decided to send us to school. So then my youngest sister and I, we went to school but we were thrown out on the first day [that] we were in school. So we came home and told our dad 'we can't go to school there, the government won't let us go to school there'. So then, he came back

home and told my mother 'yeah that's right, the kids can't go to school there because we have to pay taxes'. So that was it, I never did go to school again.

Yes it was pitiful in those days, but you know, we all got along really well. There was no money, but the people got along well in those days.

We never played too many card games in my time, but we played a lot with mud. We'd make little horses. We made little animals. We made little houses with mud. We made little dogs with mud. We also made little towns. We also played another game called, we played it with knives. It was called the little knife game, and you'd put the knife in your hand and you had to throw it and try to hit some different parts of your body with it. I remember as a kid sitting around in a circle watching these people playing the little knife game.

I forget now how this game was played. It's been too long, but I know that you had to try [try to hit] the different parts of your body with the knife. You'd try to hit your ears or your nose, or whatever.

As a young girl, I remember us making swings. We used to like to make swings and swing, but you know as a young girl, I don't remember people playing ball.

The Old People used to make feasts and gatherings and get-togethers, not the young people, and they 'd drank and sang and really have a good time. They used to sing old songs, and you know I don't even know one of those songs. My father used to sing those songs. They used to sing those songs in French, and they were good singers. There was my dad and his brothers who sang these songs.

I think there were five brothers, my dad's brothers.

Some of those old dances that they used to, the old Métis used to dance was the Reel Eight, the Reel Four. Yeah, then there was the Rabbit Dance. Yeah, you see we don't even dance that dance anymore. There was "Drops of Brandy" which they called the "Hook Dance", and there was also the Sword Dance. My sister and I used to dance that, ah Kerchief Dance or the Sword Dance.

Do you remember? That was your Godmother.

Oh yes, we used to jump up and down quite a bit when I was young.

We lived around Yorkton here most of my life, but then we moved to Moose Jaw and I worked there for seven years. I was a seamstress. I used to do a lot of sewing. While I working there sewing, my husband was sick already. He was already getting fairly, pretty sick.

My father was a landowner, but we never had, we never owned any land. My husband owned some land in the States, where he was from, but we sold my husband's land, but we still owned the royalties or the oil rights.

I go visiting in the States yet every year. I go to Dunseith, Belcourt.

There was two of my sister-in-laws here Saturday. They came to visit me.

When I started working out, doing sewing, I already raised my family.

Oh, I used to do a lot of hunting and trapping myself when I was a young woman. I hunted rabbits, partridges. There was a lot of wild life in those days.

I remember when I was a young girl, my dad used to go out thrashing. So my mother said to me 'we have nothing to eat, we've just got bannock'. 'We've got no meat'. You've gone hunting with your dad before. Don't you think you could go and hunt some ducks, you and your brother John?' And you know we had a double barrel shotgun and they're pretty heavy. So, mom says 'your brother Jean will go with you hunting'. So both of us, we carried that gun. It was fairly heavy. We both had to carry that gun. I remember going with my father and we used to watch him and how he used to sneak up to the ducks by [the] lake and he'd lay down and look at them until they got together in one flock. And then he'd get up and shot them. So there I was lying there with my brother, and I said 'be quiet, we'll wait for the ducks to come here'. So all of a sudden, I was scared to shoot, but I closed my eyes and I pulled the trigger. So then we were lying there, then we finally got up, we jumped up and I says 'look it, look, it we killed eighteen ducks'. They weren't all big ducks. There was smaller ducks, but they were very heavy to carry, so what we did was we'd leave a few behind and we'd go ahead take a few and we kept moving them 'til we got home. Oh, did we ever have a lot of duck meat.

Oh, we'd use the feathers for making feather tick mattress (es) and also we'd make pillows out of those feathers also.

Most of us Métis families were Catholics. I was baptized at Crooked Lake, in the valley. My Godfather was Francis Delorme, and my Godmother was Marie-Rose Lavallée.

Crescent Lake was a big community in those days. That's where I raised all my children.

The Mass, the Midnight Mass, was held in Yorkton because the priest had to travel to Crescent Lake. So then, we had to go to church in Yorkton for Midnight Mass.

I remember when I was a young girl, when New Year's came along we were really proud of New Year's. We celebrated New Year's. They'd set the table all the time with food. They'd put a bottle of wine at one table, one at the other. They had little glasses here and there. We never slept when midnight came along that's when everybody came in the house, they came in singing and then they sat down to eat. We had meatballs, there were prunes, and there were all kinds of things ready at the table for everybody to eat.

The meatballs were usually made out of deer meat, beef, rabbit, especially jack rabbit. Boy is that ever good!

When somebody came in you ate from midnight on, all through New Year's. There was always food on the table, and then at Midnight, you could hear these bells ringing, because the Métis always dressed their horses nice with bells. And in Crooked Lake, along the lake where the Métis lived, the Métis people used to drive nice horses with cutters, and they always had bells on their horses, and my, did the bells sound nice. They used to use sleighs and toboggans also, for driving their horses with.

They say that it was hard in those times; it was pitiful, but I would still rather see those days again.

The Métis always had good horses, not like today. There's only vehicles now.

There were a lot of Métis people in Crooked Lake. The Métis lived on one side and there were reserves on the other side. There were about six reserves. We all got a long really well. We had dances just about every night, and people got along very well.

I remember years ago, we were able to live and camp anywhere we wanted. They weren't any farmers in those days, but when the farmers came into the place, then they start (ed) to moving us. They wouldn't let us stay wherever we wanted. We start(ed) being kicked around.

I remember Saltcoats many years ago. There were hardly any farmers, it was wide open. It was like a prairie, and there we could go digging Seneca root anywhere we wanted to.

We used to make a lot of money, actually when we were digging Seneca [snake] root. We'd buy a lot of flour, we'd make bannock, and today it seems like everybody buys bread. I don't know if many people even make bannock. I remember my father buying about eight bags of flour, and they were hundred pound bags, and you could see them. He'd pile them up high, but he had to because we were a big family. He had to save.

The flour was actually cheap in those days. It was about a dollar twenty-five, a dollar and a half for a hundred-pound bag of flour. Coffee was only twenty cents a pound and my dad only drank coffee, he never drank anything else, but my mother she had to drink her tea. They used to also drink a tea called Muskeg Tea, and it was not only used for a drink, it was also used for medicinal purpose(s). We found this tea in the valley, and we were very, very happy when we found this tea because we all liked it.

I'll tell you about one of the weddings, one of the last weddings that I saw. I've seen two or three of those kinds of weddings, but this was a wedding, actually it was an anniversary. It was a twenty-fifth anniversary. It was my Uncle Pchit-Jean Pelletier's twenty-fifth anniversary. You should have seen the tents. They were tents all over the yard, people that come to this big occasion. So as we're waiting for the bride and groom to come, all of a sudden we saw horses coming. My were they ever beautifully dressed, they had plumes on their head and they had ribbons and they were beautifully decorated, and as they got closer to the house, the people got their guns and start shooting up in the air to give them a welcome. It was so beautiful, and some people

played their accordion(s) and everything was going on, there was everybody was so excited. We stayed there for three days and three nights. We had such a good time. We partied a lot.

And another tradition that the Métis had was they'd go and steal or pretend they stole the shoe of the bride. They'd take her shoe off, and they'd auction the shoe off. And you know in those days money was very scarce, but you know they made quite a few dollars when they sold that shoe. When they auctioned the shoe off, they gave the money to the bride. Then they had a lot of songs, table songs, wedding songs. There was always somebody singing the wedding songs, and the priest was also there. The priest was amongst our people a lot in those days. The priest used to go visiting the Métis people in the community.

I remember the priest used to go around visiting the communities. I've lived in Yorkton for twenty years now, and I don't think I've had a visit from the priest. Now the women will even come around and bringing the communion, but what can you do, you can't refuse.

I remember my Uncle Pchit Jean Pelletier, he went to the First World War, but I don't think I've had anybody else that I know that went to war from my family.

I was born and raised with the Michif language. I did not know any other language existed. I remember years ago, it's not everybody that wanted to speak the Michif language. A lot of them got to be prouder or they were proud so they wouldn't speak their language. So that's one reason I see that's how we lost our language, but also the education system, when we start to go to school that kind of ruined a lot of things also. That kind, that's where it seems we started to lose our language also. Years ago I remember when somebody asked me what did I speak, I said I spoke Cree. Cree was our language and our nationality was Michif. There aren't too many people that come and visit me that speak Michif any more. It's really hard. That's why I find it difficult to retract and remember, and there's some of my kids even that don't, are not up to date with what I know in the language.

I remember my grandfather, he was really good at telling stories and also telling legends. My uncle, Myle's grandfather, he was also good at telling stories and legends. There used to be a lot of Old People that used to tell those stories. I knew a lot of those stories and legends to, but it seems like nobody seems to be interested. So we seem to forget, we don't tell them anymore because there's not the interest. The radio and television seemed to have ruined a lot of that. In those days, there was no TV, there was no radio, so when you told those legends and stories, there was nothing that ruined it. People were interested in what you were telling them.

Years ago most people spoke Michif, and on the reserves, they spoke English. The Old People spoke Cree and Saulteaux. I understand most of those languages.

The Métis people are wise. They're very intelligent, they're smart, and that's why I am also interested because I would like to help also. I'd like to help the Métis people to get what they're trying for and what they are trying to get. And I think we will make an

accomplishment. I think we are going to get where we want to go. The older people might have a harder time to learn the Michif language, but the young kids, they're the ones that are going to learn. They can learn much quicker. The reason a lot of the older people, people our age, are losing their language is because they seem to be too proud to speak their language, and I think that is one of the downfalls, is pride.

Lucy LaFontaine (Mary's daughter). While I help my mother out a bit. Some of the children they have a hard time speaking the language. You take like some of my kids, some understand and some don't. Like I remember when we were living in Crescent Lake and we start(ed) moving away, and they were knocking down our houses, the priest found work for the men, and then that's when we start(ed) to disperse, and we lived in other communities. For example, once we moved away and we lived in different communities, our children started going to white schools or schools where they only spoke English, and it wasn't like when we were young kids and when we went to school. We were still among one another, and weren't able to lose our language like our children. That's where our language, I think, was starting to disappear and that's where we start(ed) to lose our language.

Mary When I went to school, I didn't lose my language. I had my language, but today the kids are losing their language, but it's not their fault. When I was a young girl, I had a hard time to speak English. While you take at my age, I'm even having a hard time concentrating on Michif in this interview because I'm always used to speaking English. I speak only English to my grandchildren now because they can't understand me when I speak Michif.

I'm very happy and proud having these kinds of meetings, like we have here because this is one of the only ways that we can regain our language, and we most help one another. I also honestly feel that we should be having conferences or holding conferences for our youth. And they should be interacting with the Elders, so they can learn how we used to live, and how it was years ago, so the kids would have an opportunity and the chance to learn who they are.