

Michif Conversations – 2

Victoria: Yeah and when they started tearing down our houses, everybody moved. How can we keep our tongue?

Ed: But our people used to get along so good.

Tina: They sure did. Now, today this is what's wrong.

Gil: No. We don't want no politician. Just us Métis people.

Geo: Over where I come from, they don't speak Michif. Not till I come here. That's when sometime when I was at home, I use to speak to myself.

Tina: Gee we used to be poor. Seems like when you speak to another person, eh?

Vic: But we don't anyone to blame. It's us, yeah, its us, moving around so much. We didn't speak enough. Even in school, we didn't speak Michif.

Ed: Today too, even the priests and nuns. They don't help each other. When someone did something wrong, they were alone and when we didn't have anything we sure to help each other. Today we don't.

St. Pierre: Did you have nuns in your school days?

Ed: Oh yeah.

Vic: She means relatives.

Tina: Yeah, when you're in the wrong, you were alone. Also, you didn't have to pay anybody. It's a pitiful thing, eh?

Mrs. P.: It's so crazy. Yeah, they make us crazy.

Vic: Everything in English.

Tina: Yeah, that's right. Isn't it pitiful? Yes it's a pitiful life. People that died long ago. If they had a lot of children and when the parents died, the godfather, godmother, they would take all those kids and raise them like their own.

Mrs. St.: Yeah, they don't do that today and if they do, you have to give them money.

Ed: We sure are spoiled.

Tina: Today, life is not like that anymore. There is something doing us wrong. Doesn't it say somewhere in the bible about this? When they were done making the Bible, it said something like that? Something bad will be.

Mrs. P.: What about the kids? They don't know this. How can they know? There is no one to teach them.

St. P.: Nobody to teach them. They speak English.

Mrs. P.: Yeah, just English.

Tina: Yeah, it's poor today.

Ed: Yeah, if only there was someone to visit.

Tina: You're right, boy.

St. P.: That's right. Go in a wagon, hitch up, and go visiting by wagon. Now when they drive up in a car, they won't come in to visit.

Tina: Yeah, you go visit, they open the TV right? (all laugh) Or they will start combing their hair at five o'clock so they can go to Bingo and then you're left alone. Nobody to feed you bannock. Now when you come in to visit, nobody makes tea or attempts to feed you, but I guess you can hint. (all laugh). They just get their dabbers.

Tina: And that is what is so very ugly. Look, long ago all over, there was lots of laughter, telling jokes and now today, there is nothing. Right?

Mrs. P.: And they used to help each other. Now they do not get along too good.

Ed: That's right. Long ago when someone came upon some bad luck, everybody pitched in to help.

Tina: People would cook and bring food over to the place. Yeah, long ago when they dug a grave for nothing and now they would have to pay you. They use to go to the cemetery to dig a grave for free.

Tina: And now today, you have to pay for everything with a lot of money.

Tina: We use to dig root to get money or go looking for eggs. Geese eggs. Those poor geese. We were mean. We took everything.

Tina: Then again, we used to go hunting rabbit. We used to eat a lot of rabbits and make rabbit sauce soup. Rabbits were all over in them days. They weren't hard to get. They used to come and feed on grain. That's right, and get poisoned. Long ago there would be gophers. We used to

drown them out. They would look funny, all wet and muddy. We'd clean them and singe them. It was poor days.

St. P.: What I never thought would happen, did happen.

Tina: Yeah, just like a dream, right? They would cook them.

Tina: Sure was a hard life, eh? Yeah, holy smokes. They used to cook a lot. Yeah, and also rats, too. Muskrats. Oh, they tasted so good. These animals don't eat everything; they're clean.

Geo: My Dad was going down the highway and a gopher ran across. He killed it, then he said, "He'll know better next time." Oh yeah, it's dead. Oh my, we sure went through a lot of drowned gophers. Wha wha, they sure looked ugly (all laugh). Anybody looks ugly that's been drowned. (laugh and laugh and laugh).

Vic: Oh my God. We also used to talk about eating (Le Panc) guts. Oh my God.

Geo: And you have to clean it lots. It's, it's just a little, or if any old way. (all laughing)

Tina: It tasted real good. If you don't clean it good, there will be cow shit on it. (all laugh). The broth will look funny.

Tina: Yeah. Today it's just not like that. What a crime.

Vic: What did they call that other thing in the cow we use to eat? Was it the bible? Oh yeah, le D... That used to be good. (All jibbering and laughing).

Tina: They used to be all over running. Now you don't see any when you're driving around, or pheasants. No more, now. They grow them in farms. (They are all talking) They talked about going shopping (all laughing and getting salad).

Ed: Yesterday we went to the store with this one. She said, "Look. My aunt is here, they are all over here." She walked away leaving me behind. She said, "They have moved, but I found them here." Le more. The Métis used to be afraid of them long ago, eh? And rugaroo (werewolves) too they use to talk about. They used to scare us. We used to wet our beds. I used to dream (all laugh) (jibber and jabbering and lots of laughter). Wet the bed ha ha ha. Wet the bed. Or legs of steel. Shash.

Tina: What a difference today is. A lot of people have gone. They will speak Michif again. That's why we are at this table. Well, yeah, keep trying. Keep trying. That's the only way. (all jibbering). I am asking you what can we do to get the young to speak Cree? I am telling they should start by

bringing them here. Head start from here or from kindergarten. Yes, it's got to be. Yes, it's got to be. It'll never be. No, it'll never be. You have to always help. That's what I wanted to ask you. How can we do this? Here, here is where they'll come and learn one third of a day. When you talk about nursery or kindergarten. That is where the little ones should be taught. And if the older people want to know, then, we'll have to play the cassette tape. If anyone wants to tell stories, they'll know from there.

Tina: And put one word in Cree, the other in English. Meaning the same thing that is the only way. Anyone that's teaching, we'll have to have words translating to English. Eh, eh. They bought a book like that. Who? The one that goes to school. She came and showed me this book. Well, it's easy. "Who's that?" Harold, hang on to that book.

Vic: Well, look at your girl, Rosie. She understands all. Everything. Sometimes she speaks it. I guess she must have grabbed on word by word when we used to speak. Yeah. The young one here. Well my kids speak Cree. This one and Gilbert. They can talk. All of them. They talk the same. They talk too much. Ha ha ha. They have a big mouth. (joke, laugh)

Tina: Me too. My grandchildren. What a shame. When we talk, they don't understand. Grandma, tell a hell of a story. (a lot of jibbering) Gerald was going to come. I wonder why he didn't come. I don't know, I didn't speak to him last night. Maybe he's babysitting, yeah.

Ed: Well we better start talking about what we're going to do about having a committee. We'll talk about this now.

St. P.: We are all lying to one another. (all joke, laugh)

Ed: The old people that are sixty-five and over. I think all the ones that are sixty-five and over should be in the committee. What do you think? Whatever. Yeah. The old people. I think the ones over sixty-five years old. Too young you. Yeah. Too young. Ha ha. The old lady spoke and said, my deceased mother died before I was born. Well, how were you born then? In an egg? I was hatched out.

You all have to try and attend all meetings. The ones that are in the committee and must be able to speak Michif, but most all old people speak it. That's it then. Sixty-five and over, you will be in the advising committee. What do you all think? Yeah, the ones in the advising committee are sixty-five and over. Zabel said yes. You then, Jimmy, what do you think? What? About the advising committee? The old people want to be able to attend all the time. Oh. There'll be a few at this meeting and another few at the next meeting.

Jim: Why sixty-five and over? We want someone to give advice to the younger people.

Gil: We want advice from the older people, that's the ones that will tell us. I don't think so. I guess we just had a couple come in. Alex you want to introduce yourself? What now?

My name is Alex Allary. Ha ha. Bertha Allary. We came in a wagon. I tell that guy he doesn't believe me. You are a liar. They have all forgotten their language. I didn't forget to speak but a...

Tape 6 – GDI

Okay, we'll start eh, he. This interview that I am doing, it is called Gabriel Dumont Institute. They would like to know. No, not them. It's the Métis Society of Saskatchewan. They will use this video. Their young will hear the old, will hear all sorts of people, will hear this. They would like to know where they come from. Where they were born. What the names of their ancestors were. How did you know your tongue. The Michif. Okay, we'll start now.

My name is Norman Fleury. I come from St. Lazare. I was born there, but now I live in Virden.

You then, what's your name?

My name is Agnes Pelletier. When I was going to school my name was Agnes Patrea.

Okay. My name is Norman Fleury. I am here to help out doing interviews. Eh ha.

What's your name?

Agnes Pelletier. I married George Pelletier.

Where were you born?

Lebret.

Were you born in town or at the farm?

In Lebret. In a coulee. They called it Jack Rabbit Street. Ha ha.

Who helped with your birth? I think it was Mrs. Zedore Blondeau.

She used to be a midwife?

Yes. At that time, just women.

Is it cause there was not doctors?

No, there was no doctors.

And when were you born?

December 2nd, 1917.

Which towns did you live at?

From there we moved to Regina.

What was your first job?

When I was eleven years old, I started working for a bachelor. All kinds of work there like laundry, ironing.

You worked at the house for him?

Yeah. Yeah. When I was fifteen years old, I started working for families for thirty-five cents a day. Yeah. Five dollars a month.

You ate there? Yeah.

You lived there?

Yeah. That's where I lived. Yeah.

How long did you work there?

For one year and after that I went to work at the mission where the priests and nuns stay, that's where.

What kind of work did you do there?

Just about everything, like doing laundry.

Did you do cooking?

Some. I did a little of that.

What was your Mom and Dad's names?

Eh? My Mom's name was Celina Pregina and Dad, Russell Brown.

Where were they born?

I think my Mom in Lebret too. My Dad is from Regina.

And your grandparents by your Mom?

I don't know on my Dad's side. I only seen them two times. I don't know their names for only meeting them twice.

What about your Mom?

My Mom's mom is Minnie Major and her Dad is Fred Major. Yeah. Him. He was from France.

What about your Grandma?

Oh, in a coulee around Lebret is where they lived.

How did they make their living?

Oh gee whiz.

Did they dig roots?

Well, yeah they did and fish. They had a net.

Did they get a lot of fish?

Eh. Yeah. They used to sell them. They would get given food.

You mean trade?

Yeah. They would trade and they did sewing for different people.

Where did they go to church?

In Lebret.

Were they all Catholics?

Oh yeah, just Catholic out there.

Did they cherish their religion? Oh yeah. They went to church every Sunday.

Did you go to midnight mass too? Oh yeah, yes.

What about New Year's Day? What did you do?

Oh, we had fun, visiting, going around, eating, drink a little and on to another place we go. All in the New Year. They did that for seven days. I don't know where they got the food from, but they did it.

Did they do any singing?

Yes, they'd sing. They danced. The old people really valued that day. Yes. Today, nothing. Just Christmas Day now. There's no more New Year's Day for the Métis anyways.

What did they eat that time for New Year's?

Most of the time was fried bread, meatballs and tarts.

What kind of tarts?

Raisin, apple and dry apricot.

Did they boil them?

Oh yes. They cook them before hand and then put them in tarts. Yeah and also chokecherries.

What did they make, wasn't it what they use to call torue?

No. To make torue, they used hard grease and pork rind, remember? Although they had lots of raisins.

Was there any currents in those days?

No, they dried saskatoon berries.

And that's what they used?

Yeah. Yeah.

The chokecherries you're talking about, did they just eat that as is?

No. They cooked them in a frying pan with lard and flour once it was thick.

That's how they'd eat it?

Yeah. Yeah.

What you used to like eating, would you eat it now?

Oh yeah. I still cook chokecherries and fried bread.