

How Michif Was Lost

Story by Jeanne Pelletier and interview by Maria Campbell

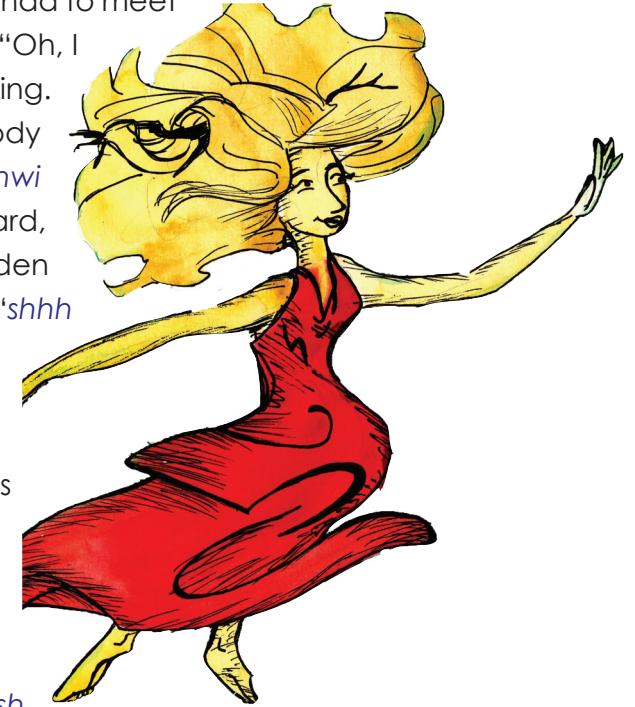
Jeanne Pelletier: Oh yeah, I have a story for you. I'll tell you a story of *Chi-Jean, Nanabush, Wiisakaychak* all together. You know, they're cousins. Did you know they were cousins? ...Yeah, they were cousins, and there was another lady. I always think she must have been Mother Nature...

The story runs around all three of them and this woman. This woman invited them to come. This *Chi-Jean*, he was a good dancer. Every time he moved, he never walked, he danced. He got these shoes a long time ago. And then in order to let him go, this little guy had to give him some shoes, dancing shoes. So from that day on, he danced, and he could never take those shoes off. And every time he'd walk, he'd go "tick tick shhh or shhh shhh tick, shhh shhh tick." He never walked, he danced. And *Wiisakaychak*, he always ran. "shhh shhh shhh shhh shhh" like that. *Nanabush*, he ran fast when he wanted to, just like a bird. And then he just dragged himself, "chhh chhh," like that, just dragged himself. So this lady, she invited them to come to have supper, to come and dance and sing and play music for her. And, you know, one could play the violin, one could dance, and the other one could sing.

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Wiisakaychak played the violin, *Chi-Jean* danced, and *Nanabush* sang. He was a real good singer, the best you could hear.

So I'll start with *Wiisakaychak*. He came running. They had to meet at the crossroad, and he got there first. And then he said, "Oh, I wonder where my little brothers are?" "Oh, they'll be coming. I'll whistle." He said "Shwi show..." Then he listened, nobody heard him. "Shwi shwho..." he said, and he listened. "Shwi shwho," he said, and he listened. All of a sudden he heard, "shhh shhh tick shhh shhh tick," you know. And all of a sudden he heard "shhh shoo...shhh shoo." And then he'd go "shhh shhh tick shwi show." He said that was *Chi-Jean*. Oh he looked up, he saw him come so he was waiting, and then they sat there. All of a sudden, they heard this. They didn't hear anything for awhile because this *Nanabush* he was coming, but he wasn't using his arms to fly. He was using his feet "Shhh shhh shhh." He didn't want to come to this woman's house because this woman always used to tell stories about them...He didn't want to go, but they were going to go because, boy, she could cook, and *Nanabush* liked eating, he just liked eating.



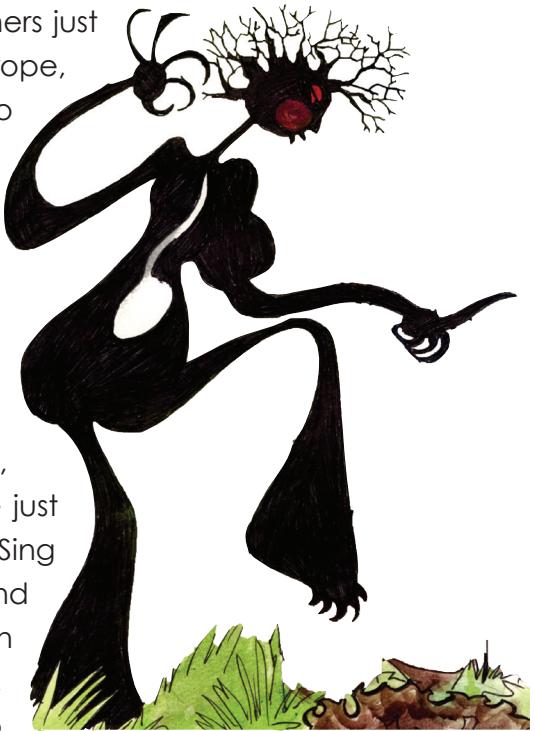
So these two got together, and they were waiting for him. They sat there alone. They were greeting one another, and they were waiting for him.

Nanabush, now he was coming. He looked up, oh, he saw this big hill. He said, "Oh, if I climb this hill and go down, I'll be at the crossroad. I'll beat them." He didn't know they were already there. So he went up climbing this hill. He got halfway. He got played out. So he said, "Oh, I'll sit here and I'll sing, and I bet you I'll make the stones dance." He thought he was climbing a hill. All this time he was climbing a mountain. He was coming from the west, so it must have been the Rocky Mountains that

he was climbing. And he came, and he sat there and starting singing.

"Oh, what song will I sing? Oh, I'll sing the song my White brothers just taught me when I got off that big boat." I guess he was to Europe, I don't know. He got off a big boat, so he was gonna sing. "Yo do lady hoo," he sang. "Oh, that's not good enough." Just little pebbles fell. "Yo do lady hoo," he sang. He sang a little bit more: "Odalady, odalady, odalady."

He looked behind. He heard a big noise. Hey, he looked behind and there was this big rock coming. Boy, *Wiisakaychak* looked again, and all these rocks were falling. So he took off as fast he could go, and he used his arms this time like wings. He went flying. And in the meantime, these other ones were whistling, and you could hear them, and when he got to the bottom he just moved like that, and this big rock just moved past him. He said, "Sing again." *Wiisakaychak* was just sitting there. He's just puffing and shaking because that big rock almost hit him, and all of a sudden he heard the other two whistling for him. And all of a sudden, "shwi shwoo, shiw shwoo," he said. He was answering them, so they heard him. They had a hard time hearing him. "Oh," they said, "I wonder what happened to *Nanabush*." All of a sudden he sees this big stick, eh? He grabbed this big stick. "I'm too tired to walk. Maybe I'll get a ride from one of them."



And then he was walking. He didn't have to go very far, just around the turn. That's where they were. So he went around the turn, and then there was his two cousins waiting for him, *Wiisakaychak* and *Chi-Jean*. *Nanabush* got there. He was dragging himself. Finally, he got there, and he was hugging his cousins. He was happy to see them, and they asked him, "What are you carrying that big stick for?" He was walking, dragging this big stick, eh? "Oh..." he said, "Oh, I hurt my back. A big stone fell on me. That's why I'm sore." And then he turned around, and he looked at *Wiisakaychak*. And when he saw this bag he said "I'm walking, ah boy." And then he looked at him. "Ahh," he said. He was pointing at this bag where *Wiisakaychak* had his fiddle, eh? He looked at him. He said, "Okay, jump in." So he jumped in because they felt sorry for him because he hurt his back.

So they were carrying him when they were walking. All of a sudden, "chhh chhh chhh chhhh chhh chhh." You heard *Wiisakaychak* and the other one "chhh chhh tick chhh chhh tick." He was going, and this one that was in the bag, "errrr errrrr," he was going.

So they got to this old lady's house, and then she said "Oh, come in, my cousins." She called them her cousins too. So they all got to her house. "Did you bring your fiddle?" "Oh yeah," *Wiisakaychak* told her, "Oh yeah, I got the new jigging steps," he said, "I'll dance." And then *Nanabush* crawled out of the bag. "Whatcha gonna do?" he said. "I'm gonna sing." Okay. So she said, "You better rest for awhile then come and eat. I've been cooking."

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She said, "Oh *mes cousins, mes cousins, oh mes cousins, mes cousins, mes cousins*." They were all hugging each other, and she told them she had *boulette* soup, *lili patate*, *lili beignes*, *li gallet*, and fried chokecherries. Oh, they were gonna have a big meal. So they went and they sat down for awhile. They drank some tea, and they came and they were filling up their dishes.

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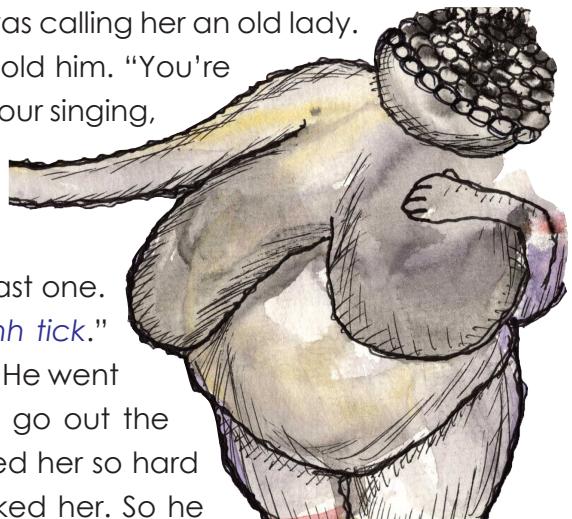
There were other people that were invited, too, but I don't remember their names. But her neighbours, and these three, they filled up their plates. And *Wiisakaychak*, he said, "My, my meal is too hot. My plate is too hot. I'll let it cool off, and I'll play music." So he went and checked his fiddle out and it was good. He started playing, and *Chi-Jean*, he said, "Oh, my soup is too hot. I'll just wait and I'll go dance a little bit," because the tea was good. So this was good. So he was dancing and old *Chi-Jean* was dancing. *Wiisakaychak* was playing the violin and he played really good, and *Nanabush*, he had that sore back, so he came and he was sitting at the table and he took a bit of *Wiisakaychak*'s dish. "Oh," he said, "It's too salty," and then he put it back and then he took *Chi-Jean*'s. "Oh, too much pepper," he said. So he took the plates and he dumped everything in his dish except the fried chokecherries. He didn't touch them at all. He didn't even have any in his dish. He left everything but that. So he ate it, and boy he's sitting there, he's just full into his stomach. "Ha," he said, "Well, now I'll go and sing now."

So he went up there and he was singing, and *Chi-Jean* was dancing. He was singing and, and there was *Wiisakaychak* playing, you know. They were going so hard and so fast for so long. All of a sudden, "chkkk." *Wiisakaychak* was playing so hard that he broke the neck off of his fiddle, and he looked at his bow and all the hair was gone. So he said, "Well," and *Chi-Jean* when the music stopped, he stopped dancing and he looked at his feet. Boy, you could just see the smoke come out, that's how hard he was dancing.

So they said, "Well, we better eat now. We're hungry now," because they danced hard and they played hard. And *Wiisakaychak* said "I'll fix my fiddle after, if *mon cousin* has flour. I'll fix my fiddle." He put it back in the bag and he went to eat. *Nanabush*, he was singing. All of a sudden he got sick of that song. "Oh and I want to sing you a song I learned from my White brothers," he said. "Way over there they came by boat," he said, "in a big, big, big lake. They showed me how to sing this. Yo do lady hoo yo do lady hoo," he was singing. He was a good yodeller. He was just yodelling terrific, and then these two, they looked at their dish, and they asked this lady: "Is there any more to eat?" "What happened?" *Wiisakaychak* said. And then they looked at *Nanabush*. They said, "You ate it. You ate our food." And he said, "No, I didn't eat your food. You were playing so hard at your violin that you didn't know what you were doing. You were eating at the same time you were playing, and you too, you were jiggling so hard you were eating at the same time. I didn't take anything," he said. And this old lady knew he did it, but she didn't say anything.

So he was singing. All of a sudden, "Well, I'm getting pretty tired of singing, but I'll sing one more song," he said. "I'll sing the same song again. Odalady odalady odalady hoo." He was going louder and louder, eh? Boy, this old lady got mad. She thought he was calling her an old lady. She grabbed him by the neck. "You're a bad cousin," she told him. "You're not supposed to say that. I did everything nice for you. I like your singing, but not this song," she said. "You take it back where you got it from."

That was okay. So it was time for them to leave. So they were saying goodbye, and this *Nanabush* he was the last one. So *Chi-Jean* went out the door. "Chhh chhh tick chhh chhh tick." "Oh, bye cousin," he said. "Nanabush, shhh shhh shhh shhh." He went out the door. "Bye cousin." *Nanabush* was the last one to go out the door. He was hugging his cousin (Mother Nature). He hugged her so hard that he tied his arms around her, eh? And he kind of choked her. So he



let her go, and he turned around and looked at her. "That's for saying to those guys that I ate all their food. That's for you telling on me for eating all their food. I didn't even touch the fried chokecherries," he said. "How could I eat all the food? You told a lie." Now he choked her so hard she couldn't talk. All she did was speak to them in Michif. Now she couldn't talk. So he said, "You'll never talk your language again, but someday you'll remember it."

So he took off. He used his arms. He could fly. He flew right out of there. You know, to this day that woman never spoke Michif. She talks English. It's barely coming back to her, and we were told that's how some of us lost our language...That's the way I see *Wiisakaychak* and *Nanabush* and *Chi-Jean*, Little John.

