



# **GABRIEL DUMONT INSTITUTE**

of Native Studies and Applied Research

Interview of Elder Gerald St. Pierre

Conducted by Amy Briley

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**1. Gerald, can you tell me where your home community is?**

Crescent Lake, Saskatchewan. That's where I was born. It's 12 miles south of Yorkton. That's where I grew up. That's where I went to school. I went to school there till grade 8 and moved into town. But when I started school, I didn't know a word of English. All I spoke was Michif, and I got spanked every morning until I learned how to speak English. Man, it didn't take me long to learn how to speak English. But it was something new to us because all our parents talked was Michif at home and that's all we talked to our brothers and sisters. That's all we talked. We didn't talk English. That's what I learned and that's what I went to school with.

**2. So, when you went into Yorkton, it was an all-English school and about how many Métis?**

It was an all-English school. I think there were three of us Métis there that I knew at that time. It was a very racist school, and it was a Catholic school, and was run by nuns, but we still had to go to school. So we had to fight our way every day to go to school. So, I went there until grade 9, then I quit school and I went to work. Then I took my GED after Gabriel Dumont offered it. I took my grades 10, 11, and 12 in Yorkton at Eastern Assiniboine. [Amy: "well no wonder you love our institute."] Yeah, you bet yeah.

**3. So, most of your life you lived in Crescent Lake and then Yorkton, but always in that area?**

No, I moved around. I worked in Regina for a long time. I worked in Moose Jaw where I was president of the Moose Jaw Local. I was a housing manager there for quite a while. I also worked at the hospital for quite a while and I worked as a nurse's aid, too. Then I moved to Regina. Then I moved up north and got married. I even lived in La Loche for a while. That's where the wife came from. I have two kids, and they are both Dene speakers, and their grandpa was a Cree Métis, so they had three languages. My son spoke all three languages at one time, English, Dene, and Cree because I taught him a little bit of Cree. His grandpa did too, and then he knew Michif too. Yeah, then my other son Justin, he's learning his Michif language, too. He's 50 now, and he's into the Michif culture and language.

**4. So what are your parents' names?**

My parents were Alexandre St. Pierre. He came from the States and married my mom, Vitaline, who was from Crooked Lakes and she was Métis, but she was born in reserve. However, she claimed to be Métis all her life. She had a chance to go Treaty but she didn't. She loved the Métis people and even in her dying days she was a true Métis because that's all they spoke. She was born in Crooked Lake, and her last name was Flamont. My grandparents were Flamonts

**5. Your grandparents, where are they from? What are their names?**

His name was Alex Flamont. He was from Crooked Lake. Most of those people come from Crooked Lake. My grandparents did too. My grandmother came from the reserve. My dad's parents came from the States, so that's why I got a lot of ties into the States and a lot of relatives down there.

**6. How did you spend your life as an adult in regard to work and family or anything else you want to share?**

Well, I was always involved in Métis politics until a few years back. Then I started working for GDI as a board of governor. I began to stay away from Eastern Assiniboine and its politics, and I got into GDI for the education and cultural stuff, which I like very much because that's who I am. I am Métis all the way through. I like my culture. I like my language, and I like to spread it around, especially with the younger kids such as my grandchildren, my great-grandchildren. I talk to them in Michif all the time. We started up a few programs with our Métis language and cultural stuff like fiddle playing and guitars. GDI sponsored us and gave us some guitars and some fiddles. We set up some programs, hired an instructor, and we did well. A lot of them learned how to talk their language, and how to count and stuff like that. We did that for a few years and then things went kind of bad. But I didn't stop. I still carry on with my children and grandchildren. And we were talking about doing something similar this summer. My brother Ed and I got together, and we would like to set up something in the summer for about a week or so because we like camping. That's our life. We camp every year for a couple of weeks or so. We do all this Michif stuff: like play horseshoes, have dances, have cookouts, and talk our language. We sit around. We like to get the young children involved to learn their culture, to learn their language a little better, to know where they come from, and to not forget. It's sad thing that they forget. You know 90% of them don't know. You tell them what we went through, and they don't believe you. It's hard to believe because of the way I was brought up. It's hard for me to forget where I came from because that's what I lived, and that's what I did all my life. It never goes away. That's what I would like to instill in younger people—to at least have a recognition of who we are and what we stand for and to be proud of who we are. You are Métis and you got to be proud of who you are. You can't pretend to be somebody else when you're not. I would like to carry that on a little bit more, to get the children more involved in their language and their culture. To me, that's the main thing. It's important to know who you are.

**7. So what's the best thing of being Métis?**

You got be proud of who you are. You got to be proud to be Métis. That was the way that I was brought up. Our parents told us who we were and to be proud of ourselves. It doesn't matter who you are. A lot of times, I got into fights in school when I first moved into Yorkton. They used to call me "Indian." I used to tell them, "I'm not an Indian. I'm a half-breed." At that time, it was a half-breed and now it's a Métis. I used to get in a lot of scraps. You can't change that. It could be on paper, but it's who you are inside that's what counts. And if they can understand that then it will mean a lot

**8. What is the most challenging thing about being Métis?**

Being Métis? The language, I guess. The language would be the most difficult thing because nowadays parents don't know the language themselves. Not like years ago when people spoke their language, but nowadays they don't speak it at home anymore. So you know they are losing that. As a Métis, once you lose your language, your culture, who are you? You got to at least, I think, have some knowledge of the language, and how important it is in today's life. We are living now, yeah know? Sure, it doesn't mean too much to other people, but to us Métis, it means a lot. That's our life. That's our history. That's who we are. If we don't have our language and we don't have our culture, then why would they call us Métis? I think that's very important. We should carry on and try to teach our young ones how too speak their language, and it should be brought into the schools, and it should be brought in at home.

**9. What do you want other people to know about the Métis people?**

I think the outside world has to recognize who we are, first of all. We are a people who are proud of who we are, and we'll fight for our rights. They can't throw us away like that. We will fight for our rights and our languages, and our culture because we are what we are. We are Métis, and if the other people don't recognize that then it's their own fault. They're just being difficult, but I think they definitely have to recognize we are Métis people.

**10. Knowing what you know now, what would you tell yourself as a Métis youth?**

Well, first of all, I would tell myself not to be discouraged by the negativity of the white society, and to carry a strong torch for our Métis language and our culture. I forgot my language for a while too. I had to go back and to learn. Well, not to learn. I knew the basics, but when I was working for the government for so long, I forgot. There was nobody to talk to. You kind of forget. I had to go back too, to learn it, and that was a bad mistake on my part because you should never through away what you have because it will come back to bite you. If I were younger, I would carry a stronger knowledge of my heritage, my culture, and my language.