

Gilbert McCallum

Summary

I was born January 9th. I was baptized in 1920. I lost one year because I wasn't baptized until 1920. I was born in Pinehouse and the priest only came to Pinehouse once a year to baptize the children. The day that you were baptized is the day they record. My Mom's name was Madeline Gerard. She was a Gerard. My grandfather's name was Pierre Gerard. I have a picture of him. A long time ago the Métis spoke French. That was all they spoke. For instance, my grandfather and Old Felix, Felix Morin, he called my grandfather, uncle, they were or not related. My father's name was Joe McCallum. They called him Joseph. He was from around Pinehouse area. My mother was from Ile a la Crosse. I grew up in the bush by Pinehouse. There was no school or church. There was nothing there. We didn't know much of anything, because we lived in the bush. I spoke to my wife about that. I told her that having bannock once a week, I was very happy, because we were not fed bannock all the time, because times were hard. They saved the flour for soup base when boiling duck's meat. Even spoons, we were lucky to have one or two to a family. See, this is what we used to eat soup (clam shells). We used to pick them up. Each family had at least one of these. There were many of us and there's a few of us yet. There's three men still alive. There's me, Willie and Chuck, Charlie and women, Sakimes (Auzelia). She's my sister; she lives in Beauval. There's still four of us alive in the family. We all lived together, sometimes up to five families in a bunch. We would not stay too long in one area. When they kill meat and tan the hides and then we'd move on. This is how it was all summer. They made all sorts of things, but I didn't do much of anything, cause I was just a child. We didn't speak or read English. I was in the convent for two, three years in Ile a la Crosse. I learned some then. That was in 1933 is when I stayed at the Ile a la Crosse convent with the grey nuns. There never was a time that I can remember that we were treated badly. The only difficult thing was once you were in the convent you were there all winter. You could not go past the gate. We ate well, dressed well and slept well. We prayed at least three times a day. We mostly spoke French. I saw a lot of poor children enter the convent. Those were tough times. No income like the family allowance. The priest bought all sorts of things like moose meat, rabbits and ducks to feed the children. Yes, they bought it. They also had a large garden and some cattle. In Pinehouse, the men would trap and sell their furs to the Bay or? (sic). There were only two stores. In the winter, they'd trap and in the summer, they'd fish. There was plenty of fish. Straight jumbos, the women would dry the fish. There, four families would gather together to work. If one family killed something e.g. (a moose) the rest of the other families would benefit. Nobody got short changed. In the fall, the men would hunt ducks, because the ducks are fat and travel in groups. There was only two people that I know of that had a garden. One was Hansen, Dutchie Hansen. He also had a lot of cattle and horses. The other one was Dick

Johnstone. He also had a garden. My brother Willie said we never had a garden (nomadic lifestyle). I remember here in Ile a la Crosse, the older people had big gardens, cattle and horses. They never lacked anything in the yards. You could see cord wood piled up. Yes, nine children and I lost a boy. He wasn't sick for very long. I don't know the name of the sickness (illness). It had something to do with the spine. I didn't know much about the outside world living in the bush. I was naïve. When I was put in the convent, I was scared of the nuns. We came to visit from Pinehouse and we never returned. We're still here. Yes, here in Ile a la Crosse. We had just come to visit. We used to live in Fort Black. My grandparents lived there. We used to use a canoe to cross. We never had motors. There were motors called Evenrude 1.2 horse power. They were a heavy motor. You could not even flip them and it would shake the whole boat when running. There were a lot of horses. Almost everybody had horses. People in Sandy Point were well off. They had horses and cattle. He had three horses. They also had gardens. The people lived well a long time ago. Today, I don't know why things have changed so much. I often think about this. We played all sorts of games. We made a ball out of cloth. When someone ran to the bases you threw the ball to hit that person and when you hit him, that means he's out. I don't know where we learned the game, probably from the elders at Big Island. It has a Cree name. Yes, Big Island. A lot of people would go there to camp and sing and dance the pow wow. We really didn't have any knowledge about them, but the elders would come to Ile a la Crosse by dog team from Pinehouse to attend Christmas mass. Ile a la Crosse was the only place that had a church. People would come from surrounding areas to attend church here and Beauval. They knew about the holidays, because they had a Cree calendar. That's how they knew. They would play violin. They didn't have guitars back then. All I remember is the violin. I'll tell you a story. When I was young, I was very curious. Some musicians had arrived from Green Lake. Monie Morin and another person, Maguire, was there too. There's going to be a dance, but they needed a caller. Yes, a squaredancer, Tom Nantomakan, said he found somebody to call. Who? Abraham Ratt. He only called once because he didn't know how to call. I was just a boy, but I remember this was at Mouse Lake. They had a lot of fun. They had home brew. They would boil it all night and sometimes they would make about 45 gallons. It was whiskey they made. The alcohol would separate from the water and it would drain to separate drums and that was what they drank. They wouldn't drink all the time. Not like they do today. They did not continue to drink to cure a hangover. They had to leave to make their livelihood. They would either go to work, trap, or fish, or hunt. My Grandmother used to talk about him. He would put a full glass of water on his head while playing the violin and jigging. My grandfather's name was Pierre Gerard. Indian medicine was all we had. For instance, my grandmother was a midwife and assisted all the women. For instance, there was this old man called Sakawis and another one called? kamik from Sandy Point, probably your greatgrandfather, Louie Larriviere. Jossette said, "I don't know the Cree name of le boom." You mean those that grow nice smelling stuff? Jossette: Mint tea, when you make tea, you put some of that

in it. Yes, it grows along the lakes. They are about this high. (Demonstrates height). No, that would be the muskrat root. That's different; that's called kapinipotek ahtihkamik. Your great grandfather used to call it "throw in a little." We cut it up and then we grind it up (muskrat root)? fine. It is used for everything. Even when you've been driving and you're tired, you take it with coffee or tea. My grandmother told stories about this person who did a lot of crazy things. Yes. Wesahkecak. One day, he became very attracted to his daughter. He played sick to the point of death. He told his wife, "If I die, you will trade my daughter to the first man that comes around. You will lay me to rest up high and leave plenty of food offerings." So she did this. The mom, daughter and son moved from that area. Wesakehcak rose and began to eat to build enough strength. He left to go and look for his family. Since he was the first man to come, the mom, she prepared her daughter. Wesahkecak slept with his daughter. The following morning, the son saw the man's backside. He said to his mother, "That's my father." "Hush," said the mother, "Don't speak ill of your dead father." "But," the boy said, "That is my father. He has a birth mark on his butt." The mother became very upset. She chased Wesahkecak out with an axe. Wesahkecak fled. He did a lot of crazy things. My grandmother told the story. He (Wesahkecak) was able to fly too, you know. Jossette: Bunny Pederson is a very good violin player. Gilbert's great-grandfather was also his great-grandfather. Not too many people did any commercial fishing. I just remember Dutchie Hansen and couple of white guys. In 1930, I remember they all threw away their fish. Everything depreciated during the depression. They were paid one dollar for a box of fish. I just paid the freight. No extra money. Dutchie Hansen used his own team of horses to haul the fish. About thirty teams arrived. There were two stores, Hudson's Bay and Revillon. They used horses to bring freight. Revillon was a French company. Hudson's Bay bought out Revillon. They didn't have money per se. The Bay had its own money (this is heresay). But, when Revillon arrived here, they would pay real money for furs. When you sold your fur at Hudson's Bay, all they gave you was a note and that's what you used to purchase things. Aw scrip, that was before I was born, when they were given scrip. My grandmother used to talk about that. Long ago people didn't have to pay taxes. You could build a house anywhere as long as the owner lived in it. There was no such thing as a lease or permit in those days. People who took scrip didn't know what it was, but some of the old people were smart. That is why there's treaties today. There are a lot of people who are treaty, because they didn't take scrip. If our grandfather hadn't taken scrip, we'd be treaty too. Some knew how to sign their name on the piece of paper. Some signed using an X and they required two witnesses. That's how they sold their land. There were a lot of people living across the lake at Sandy Point, Sucker Point towards the Beaver River opening. But when school started, they had to bring their children here. (Ile a la Crosse) The convent was very convenient for some who needed to go make a living. They would leave their children in the convent and go on their traplines. Question: Did you go to war? Yes, but I never went to the front line. I stayed in Canada for four years. That was in 1941 was when we left. There was a few of us that left. Leo Belanger and I

are left of that regiment. Those of us that left then were, Alphonse Kenny, Ambrose Lenand. The group that had left in 1940 and were already there were, Alex Malbouef, Jimmy Natomagan and Stanley Durocher and Alex Laliberte. I didn't go to battle. The war was going strong in 1941. We were supposed to work relief in Buffalo Narrows for 50 cents a day, so instead, I joined the army. They paid us a dollar a day. We ate and dressed well. Yes, all of them. We're Native in our regiment. The men who played in the band were all white men. There were a few from Ile a la Crosse. I recognized Ambrose Kenny and Stanley Durocher in those pictures. I was also in the picture right by Jimmy Natomagan. Was in northern Ontario in 1942. We were stationed in Cape Breton Island and we got shipped from there. We were separated from there. Leon Belanger was on the tank corp. He went overseas. Alex Malbouef also went overseas. He was a sniper. Prosper was from Beauval. He walked to Meadow Lake to join up. I understand French quite well. French was spoken quite a lot around here. I speak a little French. Only my grandfather spoke French. My dad does not speak Michif or French. He just speaks Cree. He's from around Stanley Mission area. There was a lot of religious celebration. They would come by dog team, horse team. In the summer, they would come by canoe. In 1946 there was a big celebration. There were many people from all over. The archbishop came to Ile a la Crosse. Wesahkecak, he's worse than the devil. The diver duck has a limp because Wesahkecak kicked him in the butt. Wesahkecak was a brother to all animals. One time he came upon a place where the ducks were gathering. He hid in the bush to think up a plan, as he was very hungry. He built a teepee. He came out of the bush with a bag over his shoulder. The ducks asked him "What's in the bag, my brother?" "These are songs in the bag," said Wesahkecak. "There's going to be a dance," he says. "It's called the blind dance." The ducks asked, "Where's the dance going to be held?" "In my teepee," said Wesahkecak, "But you must dance blind." Come this evening, the ducks arrived and Wesahkecak called the dance. As the dance progressed and the ducks danced by Wesahkecak, he'd grab them and wring their necks. The diver duck was curious, so he opened its eyes and saw Wesahkecak wringing their necks. Diver duck called out, "Our brother is going to kill us!" Wesahkecak was so angry, he kicked the diver duck in the butt. That's why to this day, the diver duck waddles. My grandfather used to tell us these tales.