

Flamand, Liza Rita (1931-2016)

Rita was born in Camperville, Manitoba, the daughter of Peter (Chi'pit) Flamand (b. 1886) and Ste. Anne de Lima Fagnan (b. 1905). Peter was born at St. John's, North Dakota (near Turtle Mountain), the son of Joseph Flamand (b. 1860) and Agathe Fleury (b. 1862). Peter was an excellent linguist and spoke Michif, French, English, Nakawēmowin (Saulteaux), and Ukrainian. Her mother was born in Camperville; and her maternal grandparents were Joseph Fagnan (b. 1883) and Catherine Chartrand (b. 1882). Catherine was from Montagne de Lima (File Hills). Her paternal grandparents were Joseph Flamand and Marie Thorn, both from Baie St. Paul, Manitoba. After the 1870 Resistance, many Métis families had left Manitoba. Around 1887, the Flamands went to the US where they had relatives, and this is how her father came to be born in North Dakota.

Rita Flamand was an excellent linguist, and speaks Michif, Plains Cree, Nakawēmowin, and English. At one time, she taught Michif and Nakawēmowin at Camperville, and also taught Michif at the Métis Resource Centre in Winnipeg. She was an informant for Dr. Peter Bakker¹ when he did his seminal study of the Michif language. She contributed chapters to *La Lawng: Michif Peekishkwewin: The Heritage Language of the Canadian Métis*, Vol. 1.² Her Michif lessons, *Michif Conversational Lessons for Beginners*, appeared on the Métis Resource Centre website.

As a nurse, Rita Flamand moved around Manitoba and across the country, from James Bay to Vancouver. She is a past president of the Métis Women's Association and developed the Métis Academy, a forerunner of the Louis Riel Institute. She was also a Magistrate in Camperville. Rita had eight children. Her son Keiron is a noted Métis author, illustrator, and artist. In her later years, she attended Red River College and took the Aboriginal Language Specialist program, which was a program designed to train fluent Algonquian speakers (Cree, Nakawēmowin, Oji-Cree, and Michif) in translating and interpreting in a variety of settings. As a result of this background, Rita developed a double-vowel system for writing the Michif language.

In 1975, Rita was featured in the book, *Speaking Together: Canada's Native Women*. Rita has been a role model, teacher, community volunteer, and cultural preservationist for many years. In 2001, Rita provided the Michif translation for *Li Minoush*, written by Bonnie Murray. This book is part of Pemmican Publications *Michif Children's Series*. Subsequently Rita provided Michif translation for the rest of the books in this series.³ Rita also provided a Michif translation for Leah Dorion's children's book, *Relatives with Roots*⁴ and for Christi Belcourt's *Medicines to Help Us: Traditional Métis Plant Use: Study Prints and Resource Guide*.⁵ Rita has participated as member of the National Michif Speakers Association Steering Committee.

For a number of years, Rita Flamand participated in a Michif-language immersion program, perhaps the only one in Canada. This unique program has been implemented in Camperville. Language activist Heather Souter and two community elders, Grace Zoldy and Rita Flamand, modeled the program on the Masters-Apprentice Program concept, an innovative and successful language program originating in indigenous communities in California. It is a

¹ Peter Bakker, *A Language of Our Own: The Genesis of Michif, the Mixed Cree-French Language of the Canadian Métis*, Oxford University Press, 1997.

² L. Barkwell, ed. *La Lawng: Michif Peekishkwewin: The Heritage Language of the Canadian Métis* Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications, 2004, 35-46.

³ *Thomas and the Métis Sash / Li Saennchur Fleshii di Michif, Thomas and the Métis Cart / Tumaas ekwa li Michif Sharey; and Thomas and The Métis Flag / Li Paviyon di Michif.*

⁴ Leah Marie Dorion, *Relatives with Roots* Saskatoon: Gabriel Dumont Institute, 2011.

⁵ Christi Belcourt, *Medicines to Help Us: Traditional Métis Plant Use: Study Prints and Resource Guide* Saskatoon: Gabriel Dumont Institute, 2007.

complete immersion program where the speakers, usually elders, commit to teaching the language on a one-on-one basis in the home, and in the community. It is a community-centred approach that allows speakers to effectively pass on their language to learners without classrooms, books, or language experts. Trish Logan, an employee of the National Aboriginal Health Organization—Métis Circle apprenticed in this program. . In 2009, she provided an essay for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation.⁶



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Compiled by Lawrence Barkwell
Coordinator of Métis Heritage and History Research
Louis Riel Institute

⁶ Rita Flamand, “Truth About Residential Schools and Reconciling this History: A Michif View,” In Greg Younging, Jon Dewar and Mike DeGagné, eds. *Response, Responsibility, and Renewal Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Journey*. Ottawa: The Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2009, 73-81.