

Chi-Jean and the Red Willows

Stories by Gilbert Pelletier and Norman Fleury, and interview by Sherry Farrell Racette

Norman Fleury (NF): Like I always say, with all the different nations, the Cree or the Ojibway, we have more in common than we have differences...Because when you start listening to their folklore or their stories, there's so much that we have in comparison, and yet we are separate nations, you know?

...

Gilbert Pelletier (GP): Norman's got a good one.

Sherry Farrell Racette (SFR): Okay, you'll have to tell it.

GP: Yeah, I'll let him tell it.

NF: Oh that was, the *Nanabush* one?

GP: *Nanabush* yeah, or *Chi-Jean*, or whichever one you want to call.

NF:...The legends eh? *Nanabush* and *Chi-Jean* but, like when you're talking about those legends eh? Like *Nanabush*, *Chi-Jean*, and *Wiisakaychak*, that's the same character.

GP: That's the same character.

SFR: So *Chi-Jean* would be like the Michif...

NF: Yeah, Michif character, *Nanabush*, Ojibway, *Wiisakaychak*, Cree...See that's all different...

GP: But he was a trickster, and he was a smart guy, and a stupid guy, and you know.

NF: He could do anything actually.

GP: He could do anything. There's nothing he couldn't do.

NF: But he'd always do tricks.

SFR: Could he change?

NF: Yeah, he could change.

GP: He can change, and he can talk to animals, anything; he could talk to anything.

NF: Any language too.

GP: Any language he could talk. He spoke to birds, you know, animals. He'll speak to anything.

NF: He was sort of like a mediator between God and man. He'd help create the world, to make the world. Like he got involved in certain things, but there are certain reasons why certain things look like they look and why, you know, those kinds...

SFR: Those are the stories?

GP: Yeah, those are the stories. One of them, you know. How the red willow came to be.

NF: Oh yeah, like *Chi-Jean*, like *Chi-Jean* will call him. (Story told in Michif)...

Well how did you get your bum actually is the story, that's how it ends. See this guy, this character, *Chi-Jean*,...could do anything, and he went and danced with the prairie chickens, you see. And that's where he told them you know.

SFR: Maybe their little legs or something.

NF: Yeah, "you close your eyes" you know.

GP: To dance with your eyes closed.

NF: Then he killed them...He ate so much, and he was full. So he had too much meat. So he thought well I have to sleep now. So he had the fire, and he put these little pieces of meat like in the



fire, like this all around to keep them from getting too cold. When the fire died down, he said to his rear end "You wake me up."

GP: He was able to talk to anything.

NF: Anything.

GP: He talked to his own rear end.

NF: He said "You wake me up when somebody comes to steal the meat." So of course that thing didn't wake him up. So anyway when he got up he was hungry so he went and told this leg, "There was no meat there," and he went around and there was no meat. So he got really, really angry, you know. He told his rear end, "You didn't listen to me, I told you to wake me up. So, I'm gonna teach you a lesson." So he took this rock that was red hot, and he sat on it, and of course he burnt it eh? So when he was walking, like he left there, he was hungry. He had to keep moving. So when he was walking, the scabs fell off and spread around. That's how we got the red willows today. They look like scabs you see. See that's one story about how we got the red willow...With the red willow, that story can go on forever. These legends are winter stories. They have evolved somehow, and gone around, and they intertwine in the different cultures that we have.

