



Chi-Jean and the Red Willows



Based on a story by
Gilbert Pelletier and Norman Fleury

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Based on a story by Gilbert Pelletier and Norman Fleury
Illustrated by Carrie Saganace

This series is a departure from other books about Aboriginal or traditional stories. It includes five stories. As readers go through the series, they will notice that the narrative and artwork gets progressively darker. The series starts with trickster stories, then moves to a Whiitigo and Paakuk story, then jumps to a story about selling one's soul and personal redemption, and finally to a Roogaroo story.

This project came to life from the stories of our Elders, and as such, original transcripts of the stories, prose renditions by Janice DePeel, and biographies of the storytellers and project team are available on the Virtual Museum of Métis History and Culture: www.metismuseum.ca/browse/index.php?id=13100

Stories of Our People/Lii zistwayr di la naasyoon di Michif Series:

How Michif was Lost

Chi-Jean and the Red Willows

Whistle for Protection

Sins of the Righteous

Attack of the Roogaroos!



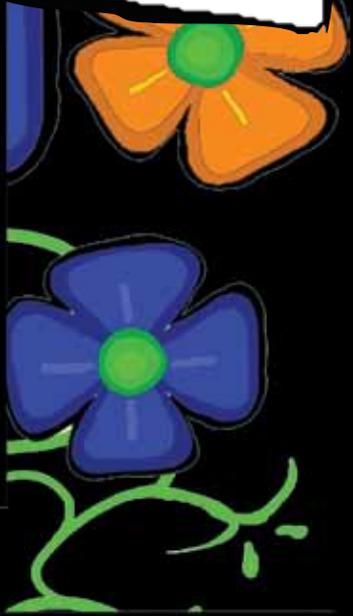
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The family gathered at Canoe Lake for its annual reunion for berry-picking, fishing, and storytelling—a tradition that happened yearly since Ralph was born.

They all turned their attention to **Mooshum**.^{*} He sat on a stool in front of the fireplace, which they imagined was an outdoor fire. Ralph couldn't get enough of **Mooshum's** stories, told in a thick Michif accent. For him, the time around the fire was the best part of the yearly family gatherings.



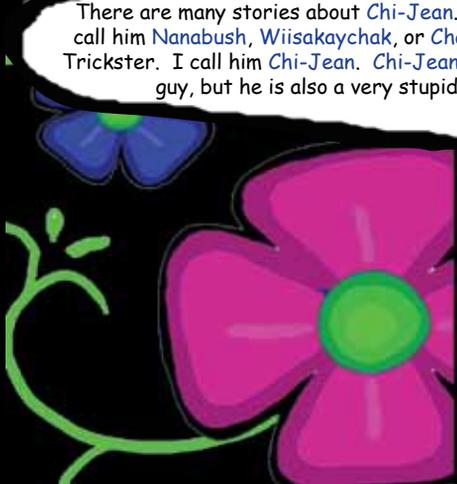
It was the first story he'd ever told Ralph when they had first come to Canoe Lake together.



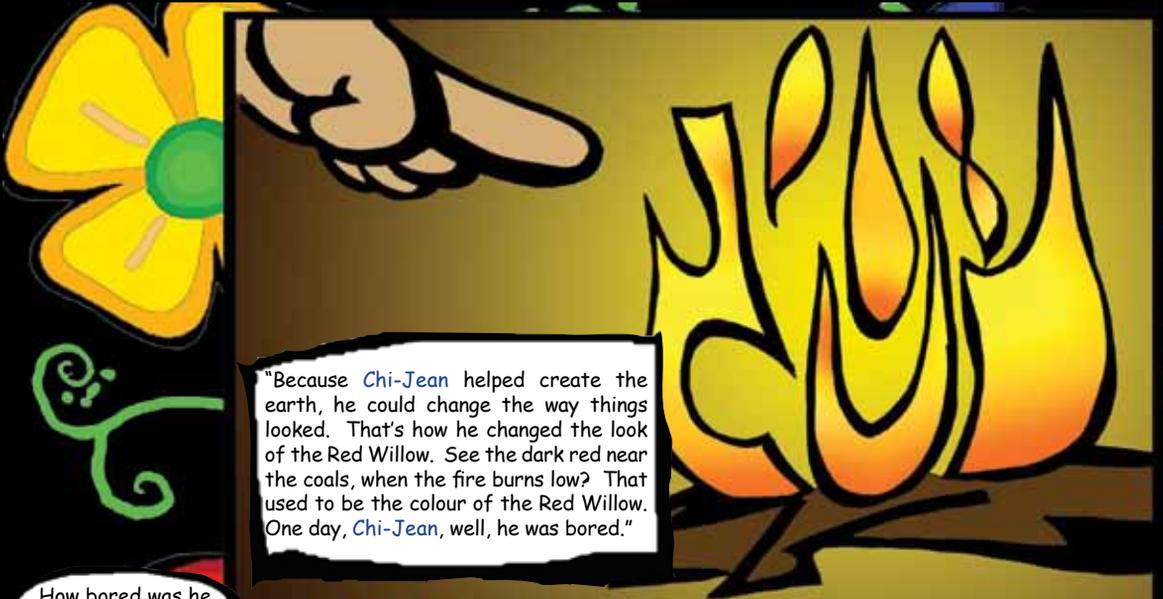
Since this is your last story Ralph, you choose.

Oh! The Red Willows. That's my favourite!

^{*} To learn Michif, visit www.metismuseum.ca/michif_tools.php







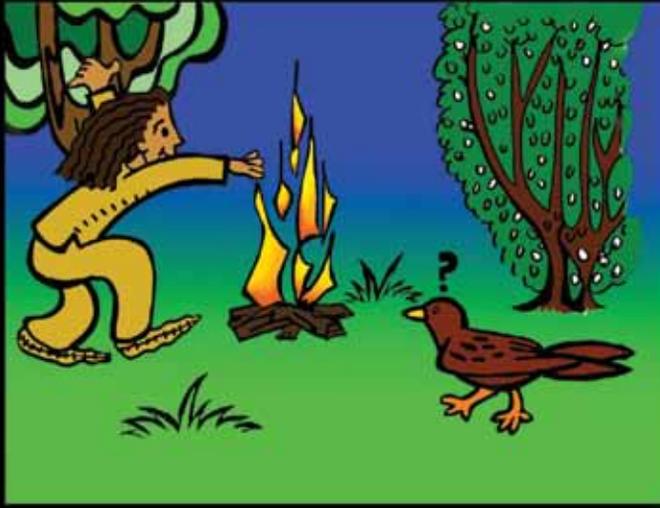
"Because Chi-Jean helped create the earth, he could change the way things looked. That's how he changed the look of the Red Willow. See the dark red near the coals, when the fire burns low? That used to be the colour of the Red Willow. One day, Chi-Jean, well, he was bored."

How bored was he Mooshum?



I'm glad you asked.





"Chi-Jean was so bored that he decided to go and dance with lii fayzaan di prayrii or what you call prairie chickens."



"As Chi-Jean danced, the prairie chickens watched him, and they began dancing too. Since they have such short legs they moved very quickly."

"Chi-Jean worked extra hard to dance as quickly as the chickens, and before too long he stopped dancing."





"He collapsed onto the ground and the chickens danced around him, drummed their feet, and rustled their feathers in victory."

"Chi-Jean was mad at the prairie chickens because he lost. He was also hungry though."



"So he stood up and offered them a challenge."



"I challenge you again, but this time, while you dance you must close your eyes."

"Lii fayzaan di prayrii were so happy that they beat Chi-Jean at dancing that they didn't even think. They just closed their eyes and continued drumming their feet. Chi-Jean couldn't believe how stupid they were as one-by-one, he grabbed each bird, killing them."



Mooshum continued dancing, twisting his hands together pretending to wring the necks of the prairie chickens.





Mooshum grabbed a stick and threw it on the fire. His face was illuminated in the fire's flames, and Ralph could almost imagine that it wasn't his Mooshum who stood telling this story.

He could feel the power of Chi-Jean and the hair on his arms stood at attention.



"Now with the fire burning, Chi-Jean cooked the prairie chickens..."



"...and feasted until his belly was so full he couldn't possibly eat another bite."



Mooshum inched his belly forward so much so that a button burst from his shirt and flew into the darkness. They all laughed as Mooshum rubbed his belly, just like Chi-Jean must have done on that day so long ago.

"Chi-Jean was now ready for some sleep, but he didn't want the meat to get too cold, so he stoked the fire just enough to ensure that the flame wouldn't be too high. He put the chickens over top so that they would stay nice and warm while he had a nap."



How do you wake up in the morning? With the sun? Do you use an alarm clock? Does somebody wake you up?

Chi-Jean arranged for a wake up call for himself, only, he can't go find someone to wake him up so he talks to himself, a particular part of himself.

Hey you! You wake me up!



You wake me up when somebody comes to steal my chicken. I'll scare them away, and then I'll have something to eat when I wake up.



Mooshum explained that Chi-Jean was talking to his rear, as he slapped his own bum.



"So Chi-Jean fell asleep."





"When he woke up, the fire was just a few embers intermixed with blackened chicken bones. Chi-Jean picked up a bone and there was no meat on it. He picked up another bone, and there was no meat on it either."



I told you to wake me up if anyone came to steal my meat! You didn't listen to me and now I am going to teach you a lesson!



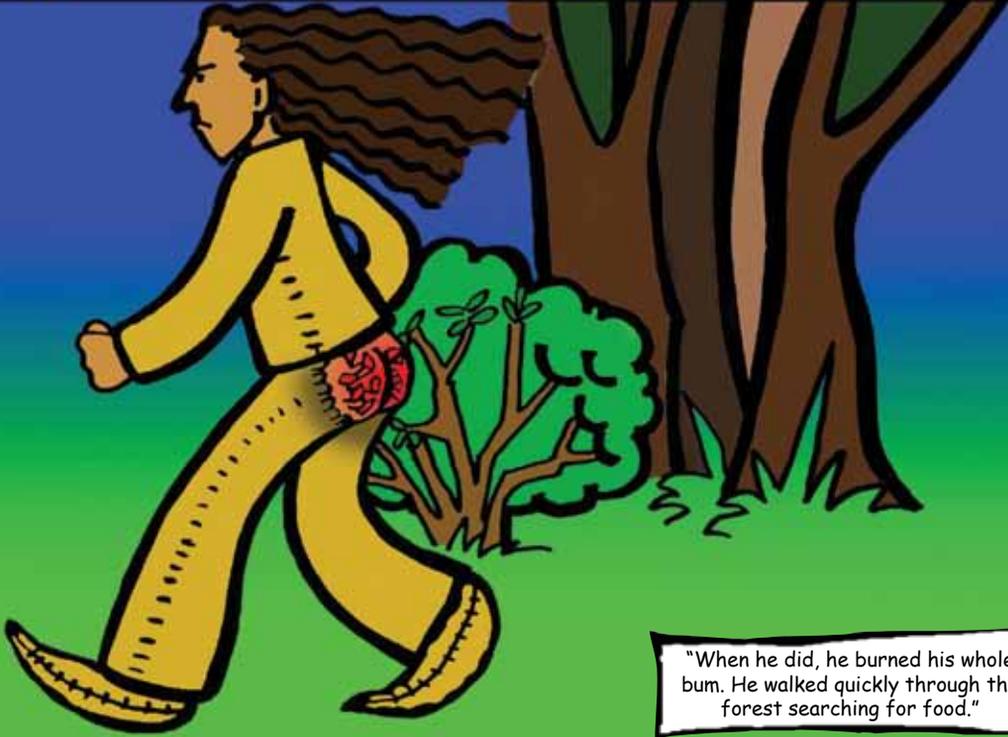
Mooshum moved like Chi-Jean must have that fateful day. His steps were quick and angry, his face twisted and mad. Finally, Mooshum got near the fire and pretended to sit on it.



He then gave out a whoop of pain! He threw both hands over his bum, and ran in chaotic confusion while continuing with the story.



"Chi-Jean taught his rear end a lesson for not listening to him. He found a rock that was red, red hot from standing so close to the fire, and he sat on it."



"When he did, he burned his whole bum. He walked quickly through the forest searching for food."



"Chi-Jean walked by the Red Willows, and he moved so quickly that the scabs fell off of his bum. The scabs bounced off his feet as he moved, and they jumped up onto the Red Willows."

"And so now today, when you look at the Red Willows they look like scabs."



This was how Chi-Jean changed the way they looked and made them as beautiful as they are today.





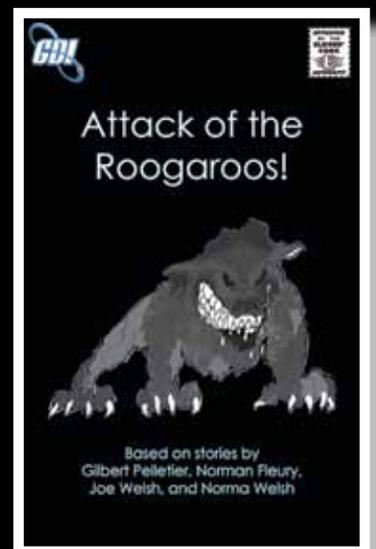
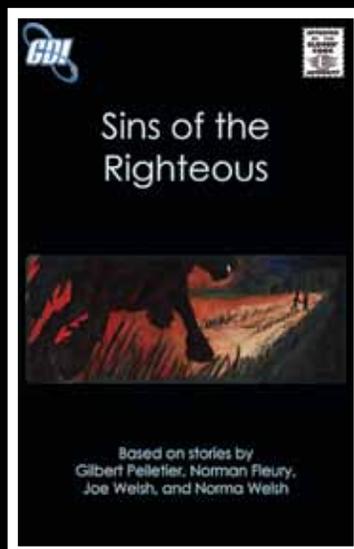
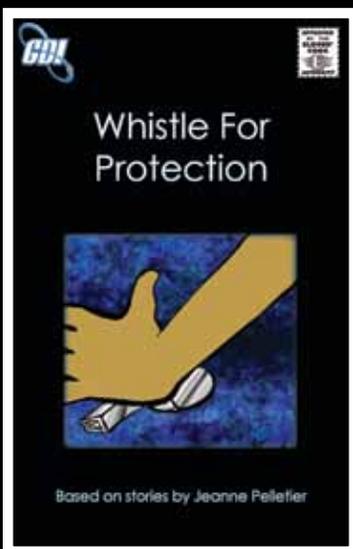
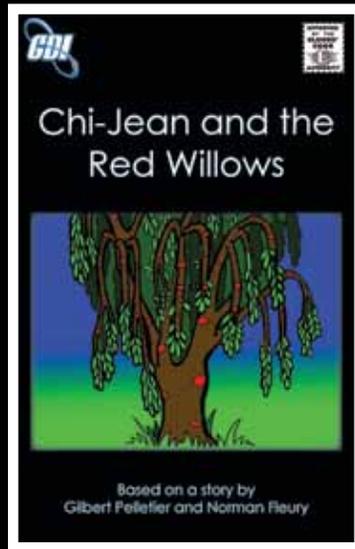
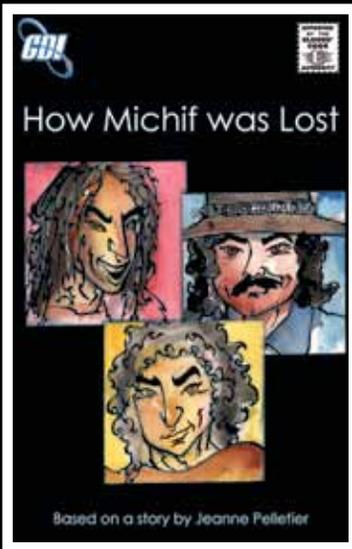
That Chi-Jean, he was a smart one but oh! He was stupid too, eh Ralph?

Yes, Mooshum. Thank you for the story Mooshum!



Ah, don't thank me! Thank Chi-Jean! Maarsii Chakapesh!

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Métis stories seamlessly blend characters and motifs from Cree, Ojibway, and French-Canadian traditions into an exciting, unique synthesis. Métis stories are an invaluable treasure because they tell familiar stories in interesting ways while preserving elements of storytelling which have become rare to the Métis' ancestral cultures. The *Stories of Our People/Lii zistwayr di la naasyoon di Michif* series includes stories about the three Métis tricksters (Wiisakaychak, Nanabush, and Chi-Jean), werewolves (Roogaroos), cannibal spirits (Whiitigos), flying skeletons (Paakuks), and of course, the Devil (li Jiyaab). The stories are steeped in Michif language and culture.



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