



Sins of the Righteous



Based on stories by
Gilbert Pelletier, Norman Fleury,
Joe Welsh, and Norma Welsh

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Based on stories by Gilbert Pelletier, Norman Fleury, Joe Welsh, and Norma Welsh
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

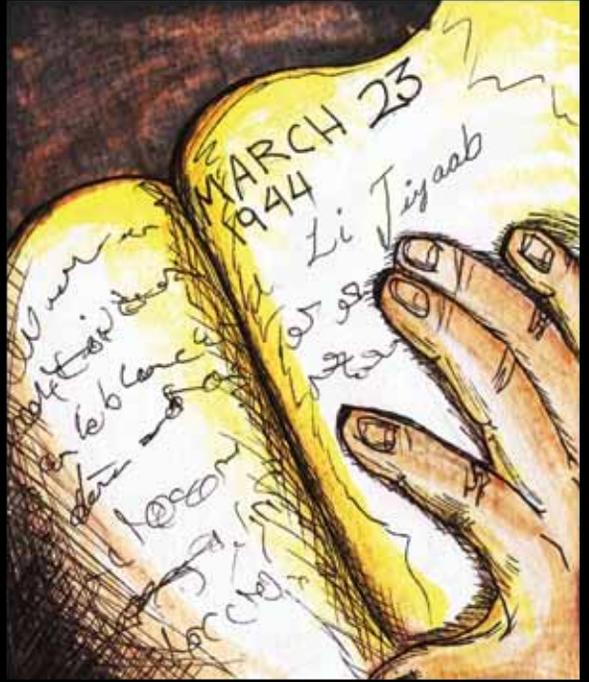
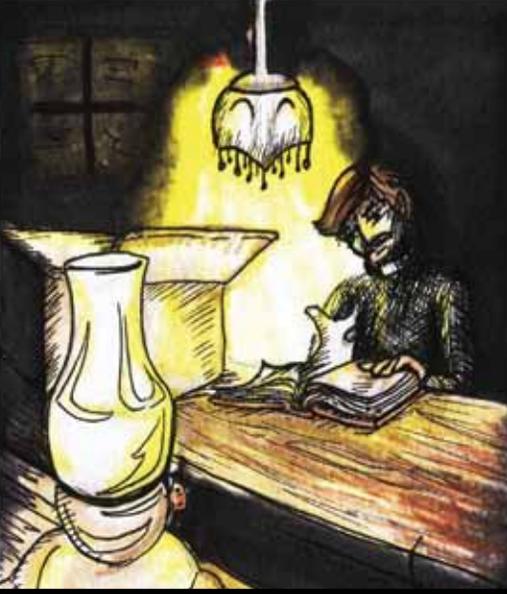
Sins of the Righteous

Attack of the Roogaroos!

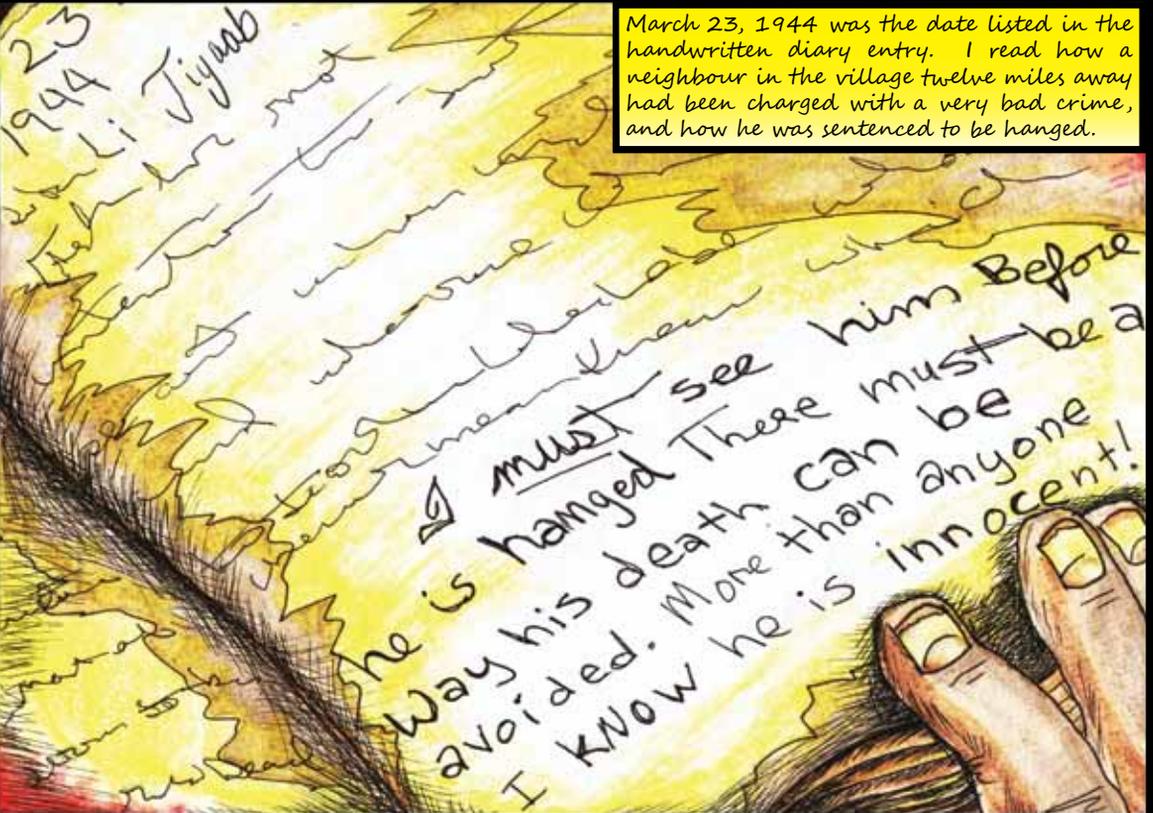


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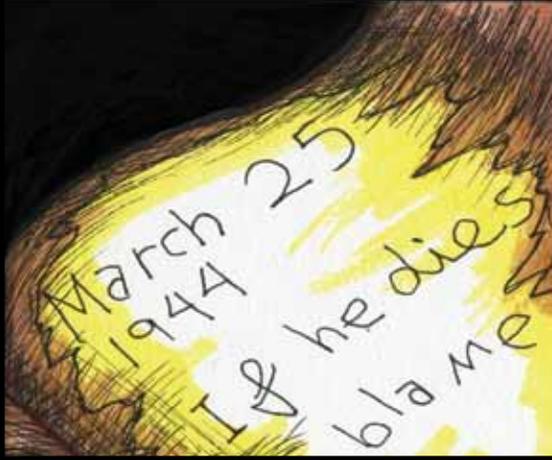




Li Jhyaab, the Devil. Reading this word in my father's diary struck fear in my heart and made me break out in a cold sweat.



March 23, 1944 was the date listed in the handwritten diary entry. I read how a neighbour in the village twelve miles away had been charged with a very bad crime, and how he was sentenced to be hanged.



March 25, 1944 is the next entry I read, which refers to the man that was to be hanged. "People are saying he is doing the work of the Devil and his minions. Where is their faith in God, the Church? If he dies, I blame the Church!"

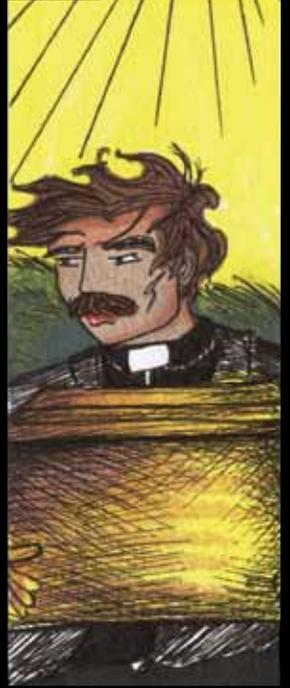
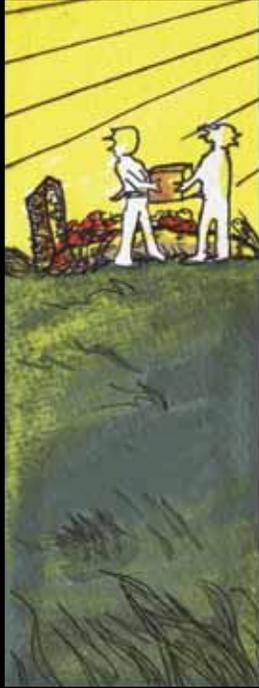
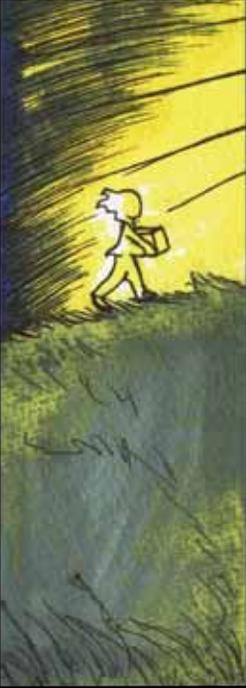


I threw the diary down as if I had been burned.



My father was a good Catholic all of his life. I couldn't imagine him writing words such as this, much less thinking them.

My father was dead, which is why I was reading his diaries in the first place.



I wanted to find out more about his life. Now I wondered if I even wanted to know anything further.

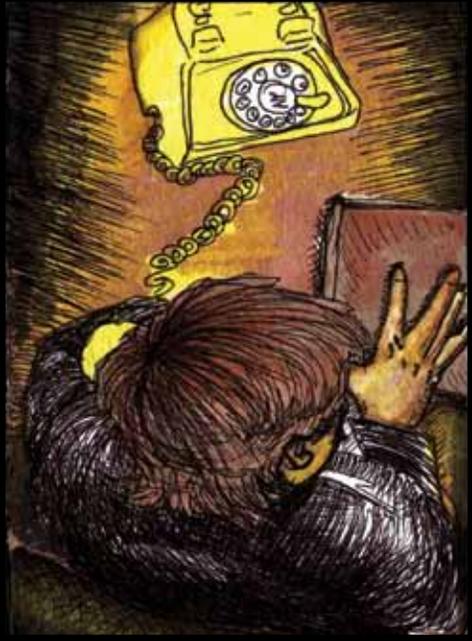


A week later, I knew I was going to continue digging into the past. But who would be able to tell me what I needed to know?

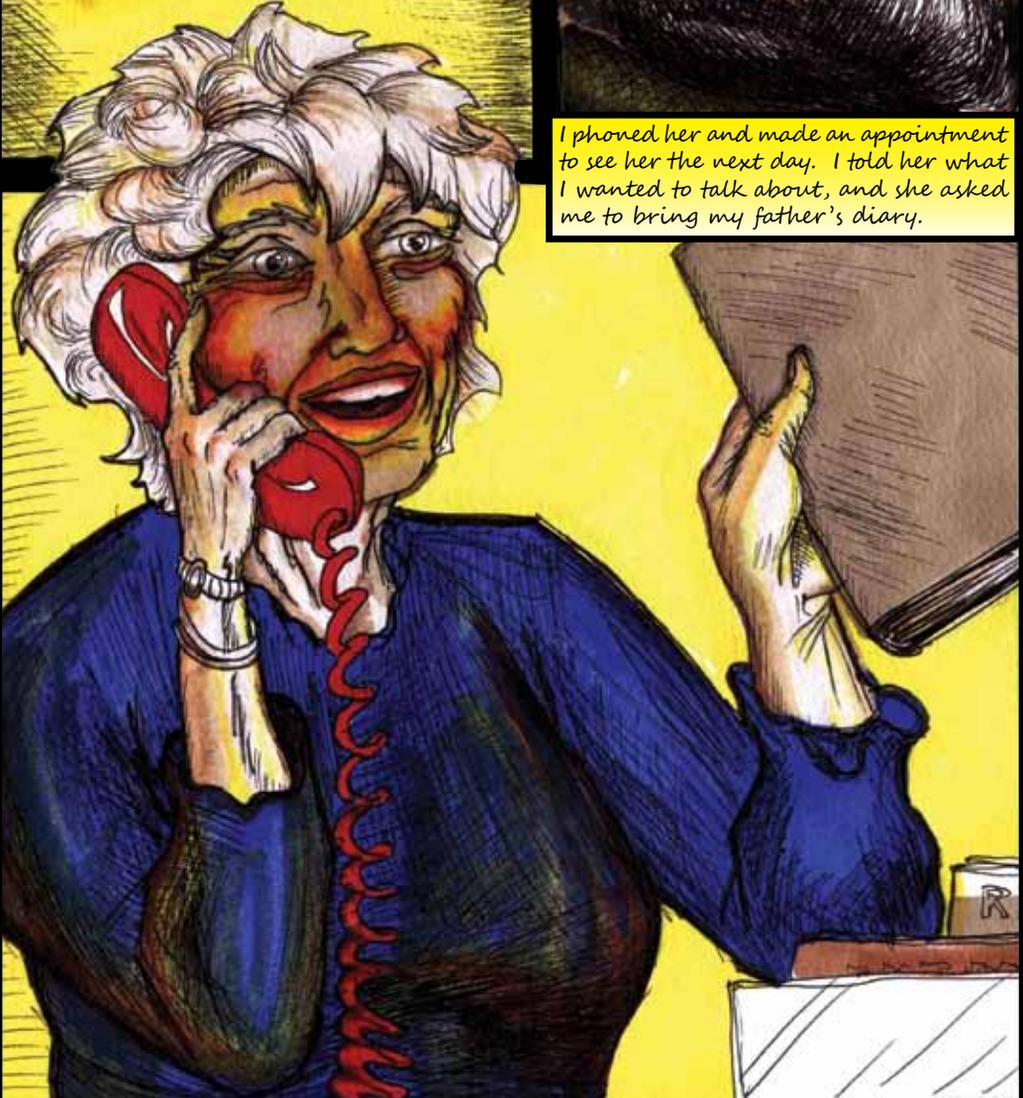




There was only one name that came to mind—Sylvia Lépine. She'd worked as a librarian for years, and was now the head of the local historical society.



I phoned her and made an appointment to see her the next day. I told her what I wanted to talk about, and she asked me to bring my father's diary.





March 26, 1944. My father went to see the man in jail. One line of my father's ramblings caught my eye: "It is so hard to talk to him and know that my blood courses through his veins too."

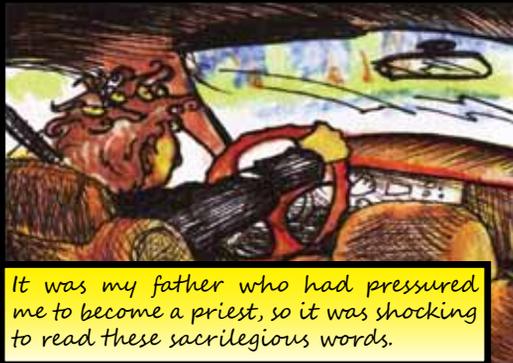


I hoped Sylvia would be able to tell me more, since my father had stopped writing in English and started writing in Michif, which I couldn't read well enough to translate.



I noticed he wrote a lot about li Jiyaab, and how there was no greater evil than this before the Catholic Church. And now, possibly because of the Church, a man would die who had done nothing wrong.

My head was spinning with all sorts of questions, and much confusion.



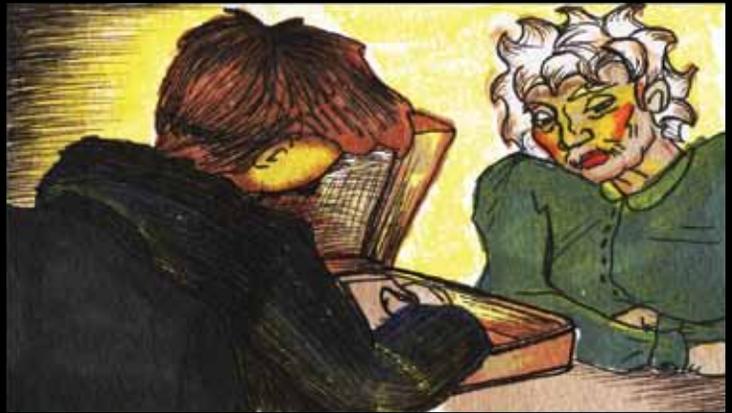
It was my father who had pressured me to become a priest, so it was shocking to read these sacrilegious words.

If Sylvia Lépine couldn't help me, I would be at a loss as to whether or not I would ever be able to respect my father's memory again.





Sylvia met me at the local historical society, and put my father's diary on her desk.



She spoke with a twinkle in her eye...

...until I mentioned the date in my father's journal. Then her eyes darkened with pain.

When I was done telling her my brief story, Sylvia's eyes glistened with tears.



"My half brother's name was Daniel. Your father and Daniel were cousins, and were the best of friends. They were like brothers. They liked to drink, they liked to gamble..."

Her head was tilted on an angle as she relived events that happened over sixty years ago. Several long, silent minutes passed before she spoke.



"Their families were lii boon Katalic.* They weren't afraid of anything, lii Roogaroos, lii Whiitigos, lii Paakuks, because they had faith."

"They reasoned that they could pay for their sins at the confessional, and live the life they wanted to lead without worrying about Hell."



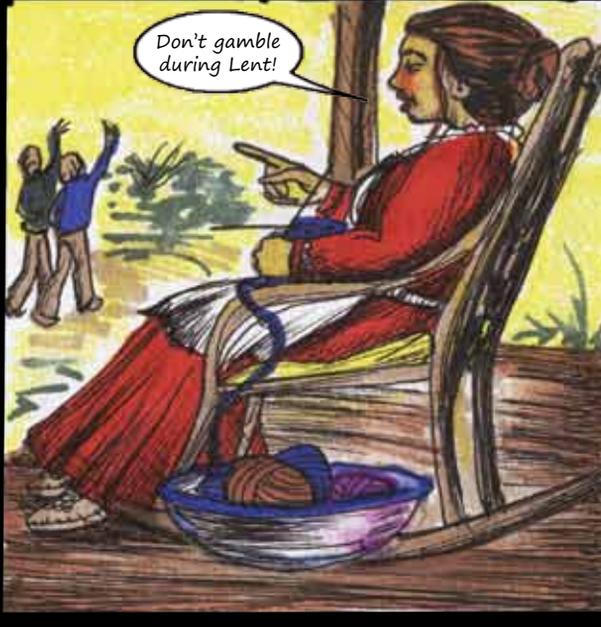
"...and they weren't afraid of anything."

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

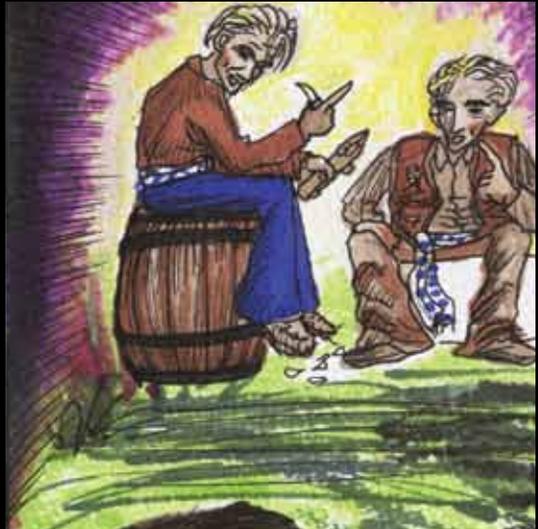


"They'd buy their way into Heaven. To do that, they'd gamble."

"They had been warned so many times..."



"The Old People told them in Michif, 'Kii wiitamakashoowuk ayka chi li gambliichik daan li Karaym.'"





"The boys ignored the warnings. It was Lent, and they went out drinking and gambling."



"For three nights in a row they went out drinking and gambling."



"On the third night, they were walking home, and they heard a horse coming up behind them."



"They stopped walking and so did the horse."



"They'd been drinking and they were young and stupid."



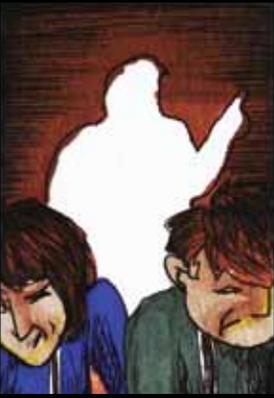
"So they grabbed the horse and got on it."



"The horse then took them home."



"Their Mooshum was very concerned about the boy's behaviour."



"He spoke to them on the third day before they went out for the evening."



"During the course of the conversation the story of the horse was revealed."



"Mooshum was furious!"

He immediately called for the priest to come."

"He insisted that the boys be blessed with loo'd binii, Holy Water, so li Jhyaab would leave them alone."



"Mooshum told the boys that the horse was the Devil..."



"...and if they got on the horse, li Jhyaab would take them all the way home."



"Straight to Hell they'd go!"

Sylvia drew a shaky break and remained silent for a long time again.



"That night, your father and Daniel went out, and they didn't come back until the next day."

"They made their own way home, one without the other."



"Daniel was arrested and accused of spooking the bewitched horse that was following him home."



"The horse went wild..."

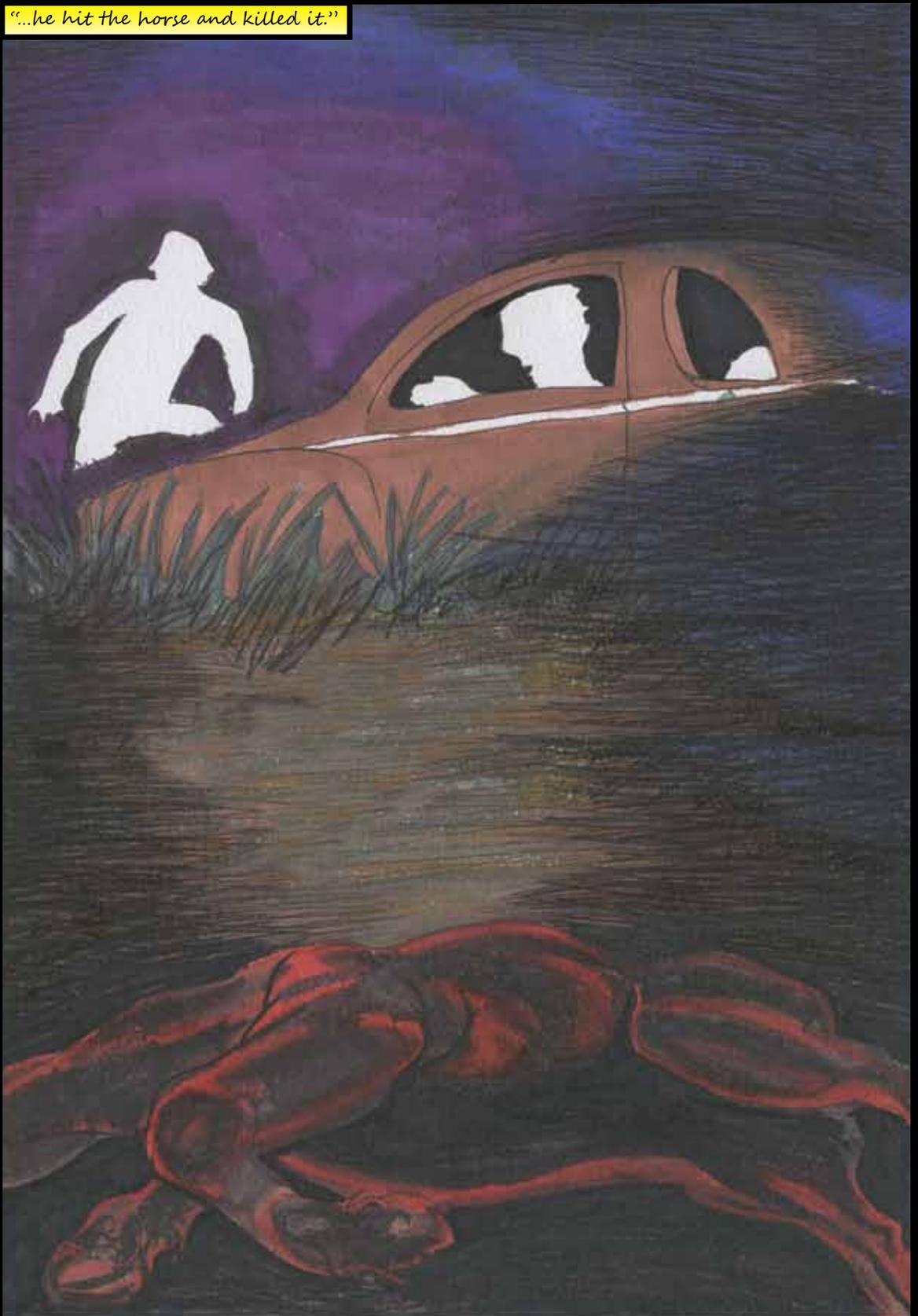


"...running and bucking all over the road."



"Avis Henry came along in his motor car and wouldn't you know it..."

“...he hit the horse and killed it.”



"But that's not all."



"Avis had been driving his sick toddler son to the doctor. The boy died along the way and Daniel was blamed."



Norman, you're a servant of God. Who am I to sully the image you have of li Boon Jheu and your father? It might be best if we stop and leave well enough alone, son.

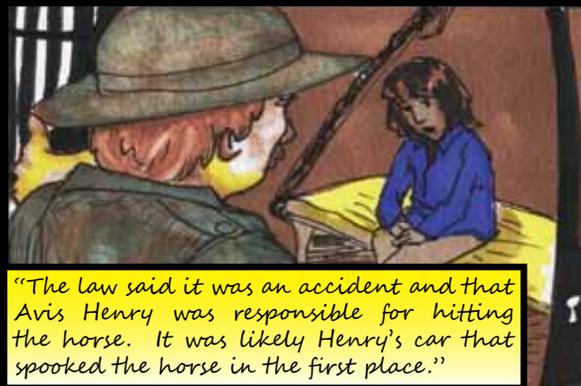
Mrs. Lépine, right now I don't know what I feel toward my father. I need to know the rest of the story.

Sylvia nodded her head once and then continued speaking, once more transported to the past as if it had just happened.

"The local authorities put Daniel in jail for his own protection."



"However, Henry and his cronies had gotten together and wanted to lynch Daniel. They were going to string him up from the nearest tree."



"The law said it was an accident and that Avis Henry was responsible for hitting the horse. It was likely Henry's car that spooked the horse in the first place."



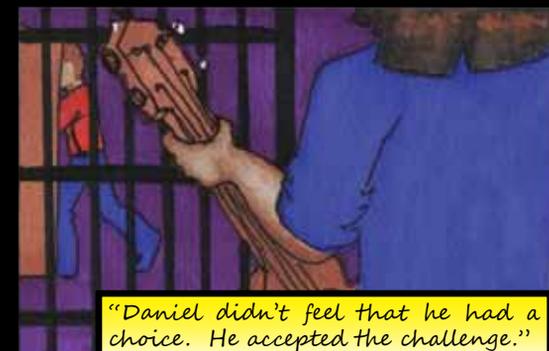
"People started to talk. They called him the Devil's hired help because of his good run of luck gambling during Lent. It was awful."



"Finally they decided to trick him. Knowing that he didn't know how to fiddle, they decided to give him a fiddle and told him they'd be back in four days."



"If he could play a tune on the fiddle they would let him go. If he couldn't, then they were going to take the law into their own hands."



"Daniel didn't feel that he had a choice. He accepted the challenge."



"Daniel never played a tuned note on the fiddle in his life, but for the next three days he did nothing but play."

"The fourth day he woke up and he didn't touch the fiddle at all. He fingers hurt."



"He had blisters and calluses on top of blisters and calluses."



"Although he'd tried his best, he'd failed. He resigned himself to the fact that when Henry and his lynching mob returned to the jail, he would die."

"The men came."



"They made a big deal about taking Daniel out into the public square so that everyone could see him."



"By now it was obvious they were more interested in publicly humiliating Daniel than killing him, but they brought a brand new rope tied with a hangman's noose anyway."



"Daniel was given the fiddle and bow and told to play. Daniel carefully placed the fiddle under his chin. Then he ran the bow over the strings once."

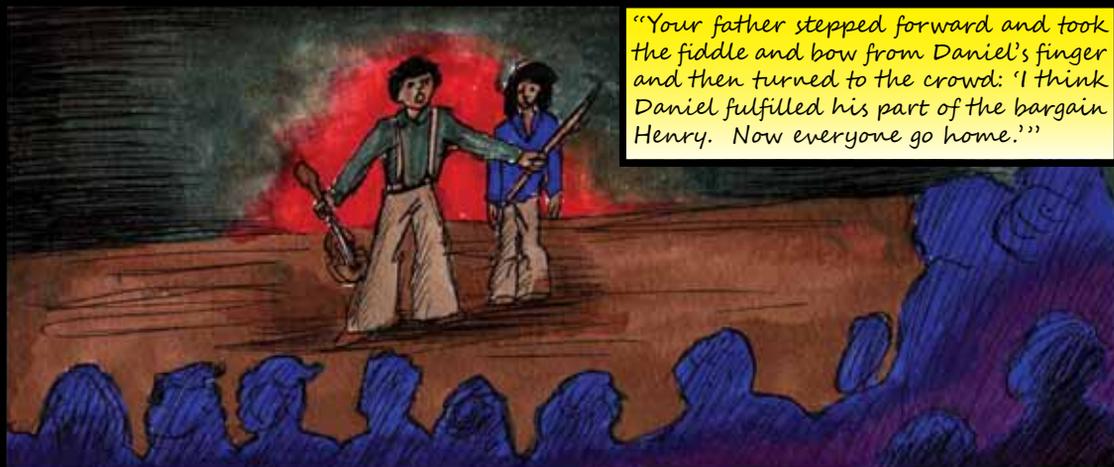
"It made such a squawk most of the crowd laughed."

"Then Daniel closed his eyes and applied more pressure to the bow. The notes came out slow at first, but each note was clear and pure. With each note Daniel became a little bolder and his hand moved a little quicker."

"Finally, he was playing with confidence and the people stared at him. No one said a word."



"Daniel played louder and faster. The hairs on the bow snapped and broke, but Daniel played on. The last note of the tune finally rang out and still, the crowd was silent."



"Your father stepped forward and took the fiddle and bow from Daniel's finger and then turned to the crowd: 'I think Daniel fulfilled his part of the bargain Henry. Now everyone go home.'"



"Your father took Daniel's arm and began leading him through the crowd."



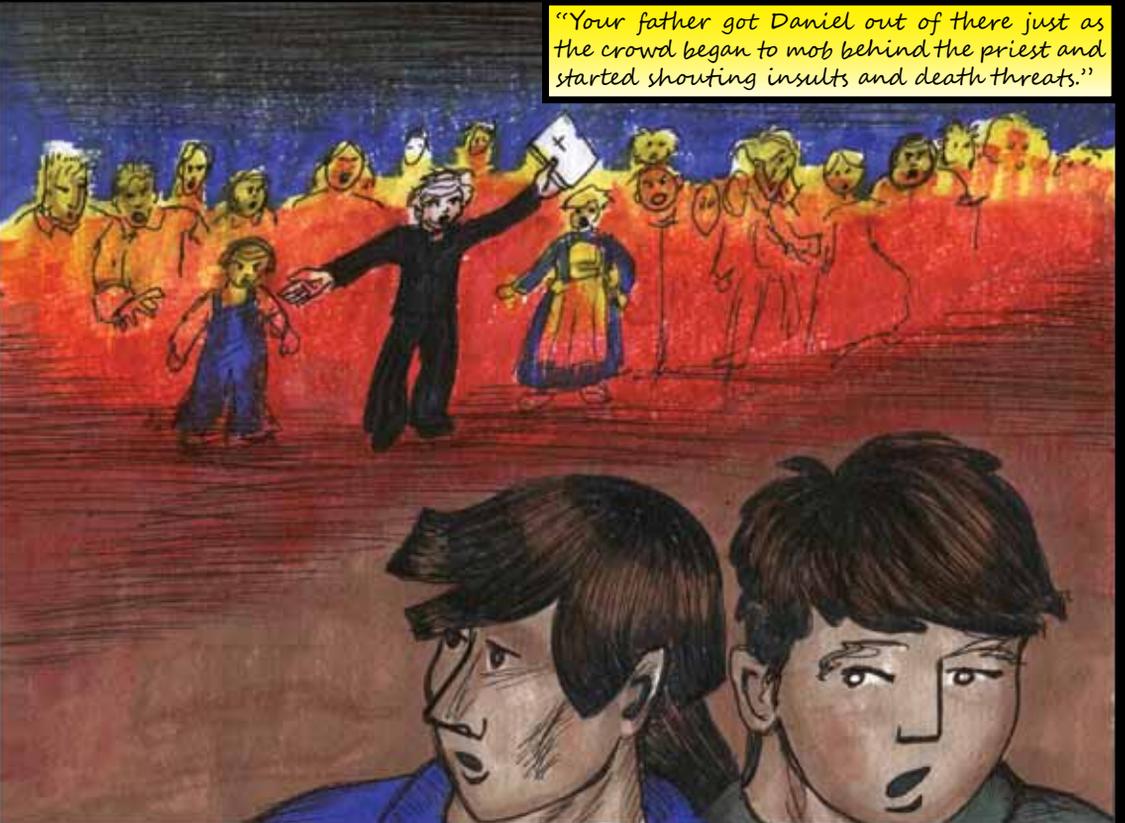
What was the tune you played? What was the name of the song?



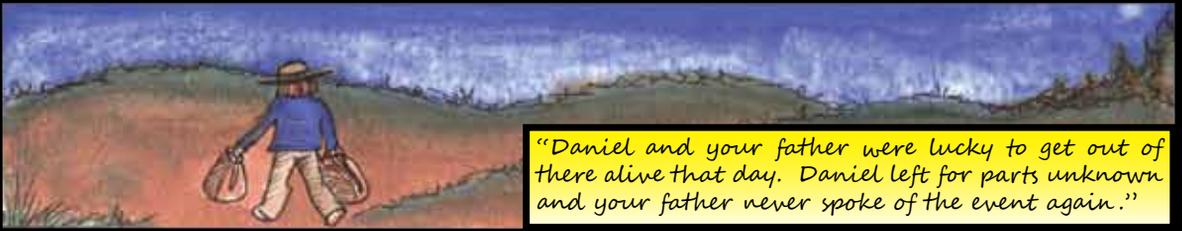
I'll tell you!
It was the "Devil's Reel."
Daniel sold his soul to the Devil so that today he wouldn't have to die.



Daniel, you're going to burn in Hell. You and everyone like you!

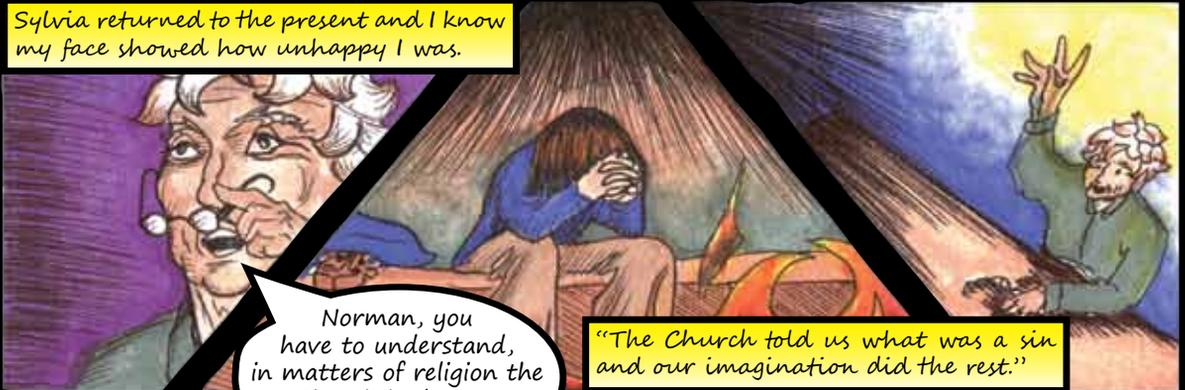


"Your father got Daniel out of there just as the crowd began to mob behind the priest and started shouting insults and death threats."



"Daniel and your father were lucky to get out of there alive that day. Daniel left for parts unknown and your father never spoke of the event again."

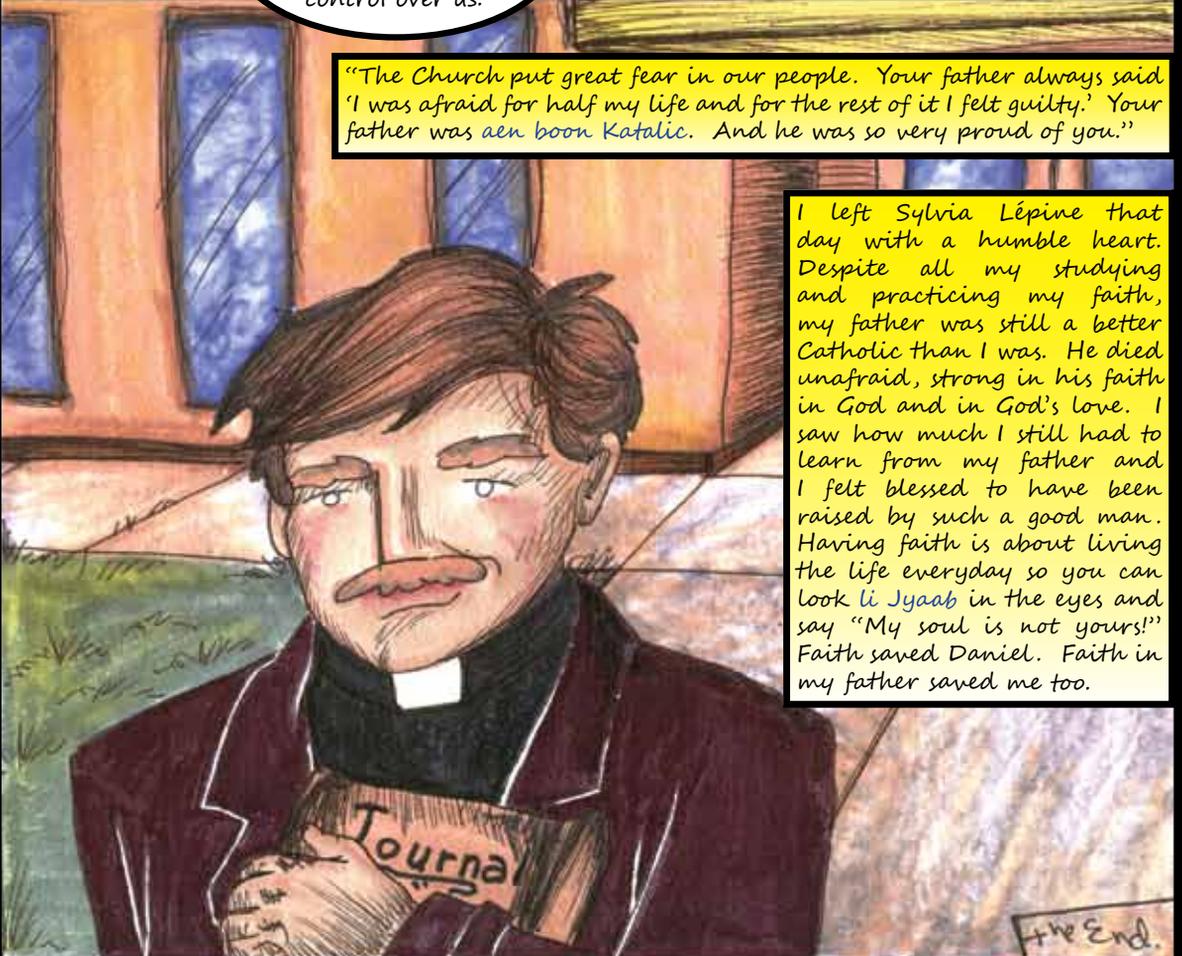
Sylvia returned to the present and I know my face showed how unhappy I was.



Norman, you have to understand, in matters of religion the Church had great control over us.

"The Church told us what was a sin and our imagination did the rest."

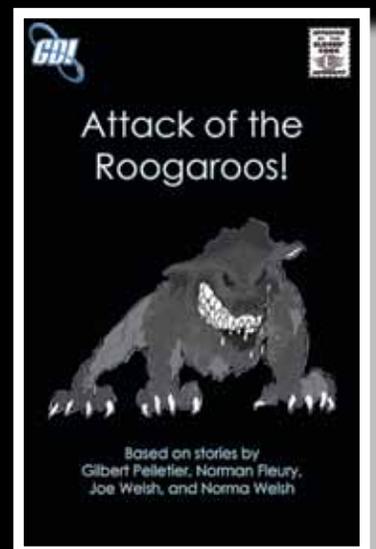
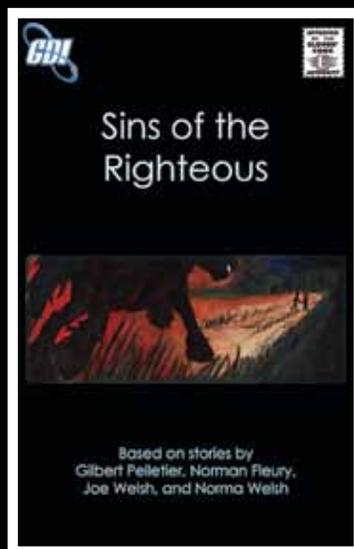
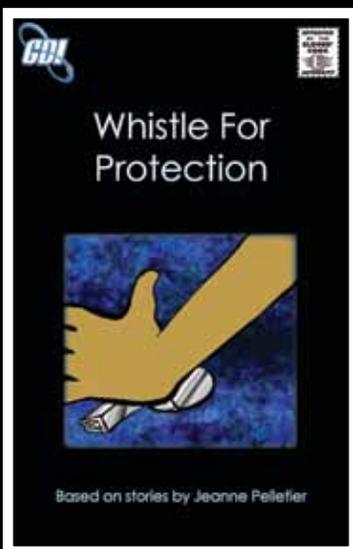
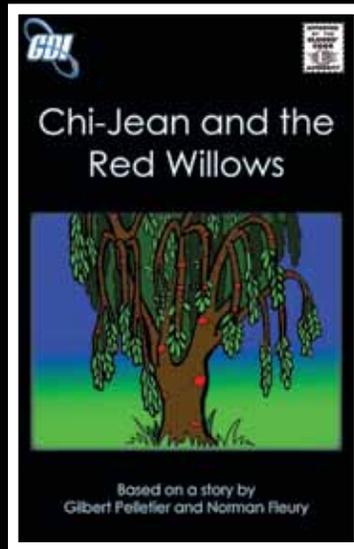
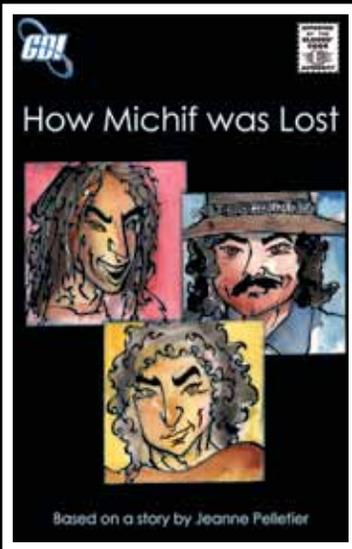
"The Church put great fear in our people. Your father always said 'I was afraid for half my life and for the rest of it I felt guilty.' Your father was aen boon Katalic. And he was so very proud of you."

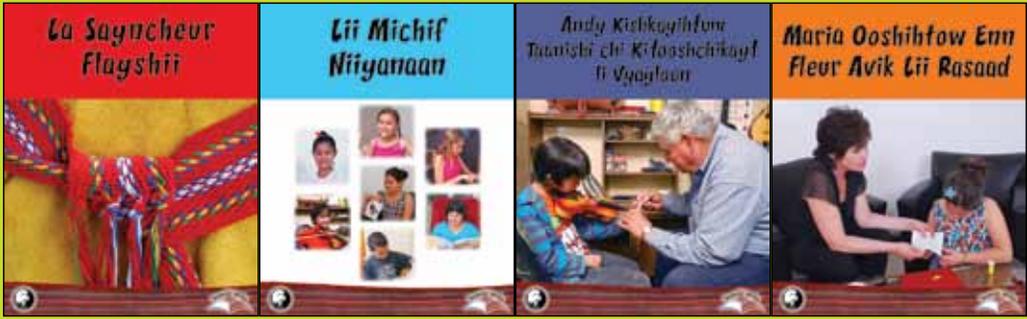


I left Sylvia Lépine that day with a humble heart. Despite all my studying and practicing my faith, my father was still a better Catholic than I was. He died unafraid, strong in his faith in God and in God's love. I saw how much I still had to learn from my father and I felt blessed to have been raised by such a good man. Having faith is about living the life everyday so you can look li Jyaab in the eyes and say "My soul is not yours!" Faith saved Daniel. Faith in my father saved me too.

the End.

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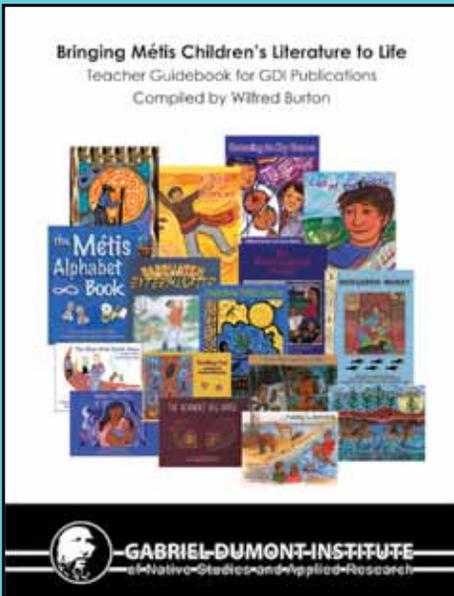
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How Michif was Lost
Chi-Jean and the Red Willows
Whistle for Protection
Sins of the Righteous
Attack of the Roogaroos!



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