

Louis Ducharme Interview by Norman Fleury – English Paraphrase

I was born at St. Madeleine. My dad is Pete Ducharme. My mother is Rose Anna Fleury. I think my mother was born in St. Ambroise and I think my dad in St. Laurent. My mom's dad was Frank Fleury. My dad's mother was Julie Lavallee. My dad's dad died when he was little. I think his name was Frank.

I remember dad being a good worker. My dad took the whole family along when he went out working. My oldest brother Kawtii helped dad. We stooked, scrubbed bush, and picked roots for farmers. I think I started working when I was 11 or 12 years old. We moved around a lot so didn't go to school. I went to school in Russell, MB. We lived two mile from here. I think I went for two years. I think dad bought a house there. I was born in St. Madeleine in 1936. It was in 1939 that they burned the Métis out of St. Madeleine. My dad kind of suspected this so we were already moved away to St. Boniface. He had work there too. My mother worked at home raising the kids. We were twelve in the family. My mother said we were sixteen but I don't remember when four died. We were eight boys and four girls.

My dad usually had horses. He raised a few pigs for meat and we had chickens. My mother made the gardens. She would sow enough potatoes for our winter's supply. We had carrots onions and other things. We had cellars to keep our vegetables. Mom would do some canning. She even canned rabbit. My mom picked berries like chokecherries and saskatoons. She would dry the chokecherries. She crushed them first. My mom called that li tooro. She fried them also. My sister Piipii's job was to crush the chokecherries. She would use a flat stone and a hammer for crushing or another stone. I don't remember but I think she dried them outside. When we left here (Russell) in 1949 or 1950, we moved to Minitonas, MB for two years. Dad trapped and we cut cord wood. We sold the wood in Minitonas, a little town. We lived two miles from town. I went to school there for a little while. I started working in the mill when I was thirteen years old. I remember us cutting thirteen cords of wood in one day. My brother Kawtii cut and knocked down and my other brother Gidiishe and I sawed the wood. We only used the swede saw. We were paid \$4.00 a cord.

We helped dad feed the family. My oldest sister was already married in 1947. My oldest sister la Siouxs would come when we were with her husband Leo. They followed us wherever we went. We lived in Fouillard Corner. We always had horses and we would always haul wood. At the Corner there were Ducharmes, Fleurys, Vermettes, Fishers, Demontignys, Smiths, and Bouchers.

At New Years you went to all the houses and wherever you went you were fed. There were dances wherever you went. There were square dances, jigs, and waltzes. Willie Boucher and I used to play for the dances. I played the guitar and mandolin and Eric Boucher the guitar. There were small houses and we sometimes couldn't all fit in the house. They sang, ate, and danced. Some people sang old French songs. My dad sang and he maybe made some up (laughs).

I remember my mom's dad Frank Fleury, he died around 1946 or 1947. I don't remember too much about his stories. I was around nine years old when he passed away. Grandpa lived with his children like us and Pauline Pelletier. They used to talk about roogaroos but I don't know what this is. It must be the devil (laughs). They talked about this during lent and it was told that if you dance during lent you will meet a roogaroo. I did things for lent and we went to church every Sunday.

I had eleven children. I have ten boys and one girl. I lost my only daughter and two sons. I have two in Brandon, three in Wayway, and one in Gambler Reserve. I have a lot of grandchildren and I have never counted them. I have four generations in my family. I think I have six great grandchildren. I help the Métis organization when I'm invited. I usually support the cause. I'm older and can't really do that much.

When I was little we spoke only Michif at home. Everyone in my family spoke Michif. Where I was raised some people spoke Michif and some spoke French. To save our language we must use it all the time. We already have some of the language on tape don't we?

When I was young I liked playing baseball. We also played the knife game. You aimed from different parts of your body and then the knife was to stick in the ground. We played for the fun of it. I made lii Mivern with lii canell di fil (spools) to make tops and twirl them and spin. We didn't have toys so we made our own. We would cut wheels for our wagons from trees. In winter time we would go sliding. I didn't play much hockey. I played, hurt my head, and quit. I just about got knocked out. I made skiis and we would go to the valley. You soak boards in hot water, then shape them into skiis and tie them with wire until they dry. We looked at the patten from Simpson Sears catalogue. I had a husky dog. He could really pull so my dad made me a sleigh and I went all over the place. My dad made me a harness, the traces and the collars. I think he wrapped rags around rods.

I remember coming here around Russell, MB and setting up camp with my parents around the lake. We came trapping. That was at Grace Lake. Dad would come ahead and set his trapline to see where he was allowed to trap. When the trapping season was open, he was ready. We sometimes got ready and camped before the season opened. This was springtime and there was a lot of snow and ice. You have to find the push ups but usually were covered with snow so you had to find where they were and then open them up and set your traps in there. These were rat houses. You could catch (trap) two or three muskrats in one of these houses. You could catch around 30 a day. My dad skinned and made his own stretchers. He would bring boards from home. He used apple box boards for making the stretchers. He also made stretchers with willows. I think the muskrat season was for three weeks. You needed a license to trap. My dad sold his fur (pelts) to Frank Clement or took them to Oak Burn, MB. He sometimes sold up to one hundred or one hundred and fifty pelts. He trapped muskrat in springtime. He didn't bother trapping too many beaver but in winter he trapped weasels and mink and squirrel. He would shoot the squirrels.

I think there were model T cars. My dad already had a car when he left St. Madeleine. I remember dad having a truck. My dad had two teams of horses and sold wood. He didn't cut too many fence posts because there wasn't enough of those kinds of trees. I had many jobs, too many to remember. I worked the railroad, the mine, and for farmers. I was like a gypsy. I was all over (laughs). I liked being a heavy equipment operator. I worked in that kind of work for 16 years. I operated cat, dozer, and scraper. I ran a grader. Worked on road allowances and highways.

We lived well years ago, but some had a hard time, especially in winter time. Food was scarce, but you could shoot a deer in winter time. Money was scarce in winter time but a little easier in summer because of more jobs. People helped each other. My brother-in-law Leo Belhumeur would shoot a lot of

deer and go around feeding people in the community. He did this in winter time. I didn't hear dad talking about Madeleine. I started to hear about more in last years. I heard lately about how the houses were burned and their dogs shot. When the Métis left St. Madeleine they moved all over the place. My mom made clothing and also dad. Dad made mitts and patched your overalls.

My dad knew some healing medicine. Maggie Smith had good medicine. She had medicine for sore stomach, cramps, and diarrhea. They dug their own medicine. When I was in Winnipeg, we would go out to gather medicine. If you bought, you gave things like tobacco, tea, sugar, not money. The medicine doesn't work good with money exchange. You have to exchange natural. White poplar is good for curing diarrhea. You peel the outer bark and boil the inner.

Dad fished around St. Laurent, St. Ambroise, and Lake St. Martin. There wasn't much to fish around here. We killed goldeye and jackfish. Leo and I caught a lot of them. He'd tell me to make a fire, then we'd cook them in the coals. You didn't have to scrape, clean them. We had salt and a piece of bannock. When we camped with dad and mom we cooked outside. Mom made her bannock outside and sometimes she would wrap the bannock dough around a stick and cook it that way. It was called chiipatapokaywuk. I still like eating outside. I make soup and tea outside.

We go to the cemetery in St. Madeleine and cook, visit with family and friends. We play la barouche. We also go to Métis Days in St. Madeleine. We dance in St. Madeleine, play music, and visit. I am supposed to go and play this year. I play bass and the others play fiddle like Leonard Venne and Richard Venne, the guitar. We are also supposed to go and play in St. Lazare. St. Madeleine will be the 19th and 20th of July and then Sunday or Monday in St. Lazare. I think they will have their Métis Days.

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