

Road Allowance Interview, Jeanne Pelletier

Conducted by Scott Duffee
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SD: Can you please tell me your name and your home community?

JP: Jeanne Pelletier, and I live in Yorkton, Saskatchewan.

SD: And what was your home community that you grew up in?

JP: Crooked Lake, Marieval.

SD: Was that a road allowance community?

JP: Yes, part of it was. I was born on the road allowance, and it's on crown land. The way people call it

SD: Who were your parents and grandparents?

JP: Roger Desjarlais was my dad, and Seraphine Lavallée was my mom, and my grandparents were Jimmy Desjarlais and Thérèse Pelletier, and Napoléon Lavallée and Annie Feather or Louise-Anne Sparvier. He married twice.

SD: Did those folks always live in the road allowance community?

JP: Most of them, yes.

SD: Okay, what other Métis families lived in Crooked Lake?

JP: There were Beaudins, Pelletiers, Flamonts, Perraults, and Lavallées, Lafromboises, that's all I can think of.

SD: Did any non-Métis live in that community?

JP: Yes, all around the lake Crooked Lake. There were beach owners and they were white people. We were cut off by the river and the lake, and the other side, the south side was all reserves. We were on the outside, over the bridge on the outside over the hills.

SD: So, there were beach owners, would that be like a resort?

JP: Yes, resort areas. Some of them lived there all year round. We did at the time, and that's where I grew up, in the resort because my dad got a job to look after one. It was owned by American people. We were there for 10 or 11 years. That's where I grew up. And then after the place was sold, we moved east to the village, which is where all the Métis people lived.

SD: What was the village called, Crooked Lake?

JP: Crooked Lake.

SD: Did you live in any other road allowance communities?

JP: Just up here, I'd come every so often because half of our family was up here, too. Relatives were up here, so we'd come every so often.

SD: In Yorkton here?

JP: Yes.

SD: Right in town?

JP: No, nine miles south [Crescent Lake]. It's a really nice place, if you ever interview anybody else who lived there. They could probably tell you more than I could because there was a school that was founded by an old lady. Before they got sent away to up north. They shipped us Métis people like livestock. She got them a school and material to put on the roofs of their houses. And her brother, he was working for Crooked Lake, lobbying in Regina. Well for both places, I guess, but we got seven houses and a big school.

SD: That was in Crooked Lake?

JP: Yes.

SD: What was this community called, that's nine miles south of Yorkton?

JP: Crescent Lake. I can't think of that lady's name. Oh, and I know her so well. Because there was a controversy over the founding of that school, eh? I knew the lady because I was 14 and I was beside her. I was beside my grandpa. When they were talking, little did I know that this information would be valuable. I was just hanging out with them.

SD: What families lived in Crescent Lake?

JP: Lafontaines, Pelletiers, Flamonts, and Langans. There's another guy in Yorkton here, Philip Langan. He would know lots because he and Bev lived right in the village. And Edwin [St. Pierre] lived on the outskirts, but he was close enough to the village.

SD: Do you have his contact information?

JP: No.

SD: What's his name?

JP: Philip Langan. If you interview Harriet and Edwin [St. Pierre], you can get information. He's probably in the telephone book.

SD: Langan

JP: Langan. A-N.

SD: Did any of the people in your road allowance community own their own property?

JP: No, but there was some that got scrip. That's what I couldn't figure out, how were they able to get scrip and half of them stayed Métis. They have to have been treaty.

SD: Well scrip was for Métis.

JP: Oh, I didn't know it was for Métis.

SD: That was what Métis got instead of being treaty.

JP: That's what they chose?

SD: That's all they had and not all of them got it.

JP: No, because I couldn't figure out how come this person did, and they're from the same family. This guy chose to go this way and this guy stayed with scrip. There were one, two, three, about four in the valley there that had scrip.

SD: So, who got scrip land in the valley?

JP: There were the Lavallée, Pelletier, and Laframboise families. And that sold his scrip, I think to the priests, but he was able to live there until he died.

SD: And that was right in Crooked Lake?

JP: Yes.

SD: Did people squat on those guys' land?

JP: No, they stayed in their own little places.

SD: So, a lot of people lived there, but three or four families owned their piece of land? And they got that through scrip?

JP: Yes, my grandpa got his place to live from one of the beach owners. He stayed there until he died, too.

SD: But he didn't own that land?

JP: No.

SD: He was just allowed to stay there?

JP: Because he worked for the guys for so many years, and my dad didn't own any land of any kind because we moved out to the beach, too. Then when we came back, he built a little log house. That's where I was for maybe five years at the most.

SD: Did you move around within Crooked Lake a little bit?

JP: Oh yes, we lived as far as six miles east of the little village. That's where there was a house. We lived there for a while until ours was built, and then we moved close to the village. Then there were other people that lived down below where we were. There were Laframboises and a Flamont.

SD: How did your family and other Métis families make a living on that road allowance?

JP: Every so often, they would get the guys to cut brush and make pickets. They never got paid much, maybe three cents, five cents. Before they received any kind of assistance, they had to go to work like that. Lots of them worked for farmers, most of the time. My dad was lucky to get a caretaker job. We made our living off of fish, running the place, and renting boats. We had cabins to look after. My dad and mom were allowed to stay there for as long as they wanted, but when the other owners come, it was different. They couldn't work with them. So, we moved to the east.

SD: What sort of resources did your family harvest?

JP: Berries and wild meat. It was really nice. My dad couldn't go hunting because he was sick. The guys that brought him wood would bring wild meat, too, and they'd trade for fish.

SD: Oh, so you guys did a lot of fishing then?

JP: Oh yes, and we'd cut ice put in a building. We had ice all year round, and not too long ago, maybe five years before my mom died, I was laughing at her. I told her, "You had an ice box. You didn't even put ice in it. You just stored bread in there. You made us go in the deep water by boat to get some water from the lake to drink before it turned green. And all this time you had a whole bunch of ice in the ice

house." We had a good laugh over that. She said, "You know, I never even thought of it." And there she was boiling the water and straining, it, and all this time, the ice was sitting there. We had been talking about old things that I remembered

SD: Was there a certain time of year or place that you did this fishing?

JP: We did it all year round. We did ice fishing and we did summer fishing. We used to gather minnows with a little net in the water. Sort them out, and would put the shiny ones in a bucket, and when our bucket was full, we put it by the dock. We had a big container there in the water, and we would put them in there, and we used to sell them.

SD: Yes, that makes sense.

JP: And then we had three cabins and about five boats.

SD: And you picked berries and stuff?

JP: Oh yes, we had to pick berries. My mom would can them. We traded lots of fish for pork to the farmers, and potatoes. My mom would put in her whole garden in the first few years. I was three years old when we went there, but I started remembering. We lived in a little house on the road allowance there. I thought, "Oh my God, queen of the Road Allowance!" And when I remember opening my eyes, there was a big crack in the ceiling, in the roof. We could see the stars, and we started telling my dad what stars we saw then he started telling us about the Dippers. "Look for the Big Dipper, and beside it, at the tail end of it there's the Little Dipper. And then there's the Giant's Big Belt," he said. "That's those three big stars, and now go to bed," he said. So that was it.

SD: What sort of traditional medicines were used in your family?

JP: Well, my grandma was a medicine woman. She delivered babies. I don't know how many babies, loads of babies, and she worked with herbs. I don't know what kind. She made us pick some. I'd know them to see them, but I don't know the names of them. She was the medicine woman.

SD: And your grandma, which grandma was that?

JP: On my dad's side.

SD: What would have been her name?

JP: Thérèse Pelletier. Yes, she was a blind old lady.

SD: Did you have anyone in your family that made beaded or embroidered moccasins?

JP: Everybody embroidered. Everybody knitted and everybody sewed by hand. They made quilts and rugs. We made lots of braided rugs and then we'd go and sell them in Melville, and we'd get three dollars a rug. Plus, we'd get clothing. And what we didn't use, we used to make some more rugs. And that's how we got dressed

SD: Beadwork at all?

JP: My aunts did the beadwork.

SD: You mentioned a lot of embroidery. Do you know what happened to any of these artefacts, these rugs or the blankets? Or any embroidered stuff?

JP: No, I had one embroidered apron for the longest time, and I lost it in the flood last year.

SD: How did your family celebrate special occasions like Christmas, Easter, or New Year's?

JP: Special occasions were really nice because we had the opportunity of having this big house. Everybody who wanted to celebrate something came and asked for use of the house. So, in the wintertime, we'd move into one of the cabins to keep warm because that big house used too much wood. So that's what my dad would do. I grew up in a dance hall. They'd have fiddle dancing then they'd have pow wow dancing, round dancing.

SD: Really, in that house?

JP: Yes, it was a big house. It was big and long, like this, and then on its side, there was a big, long kitchen. That was the summer house.

SD: So, Métis folks did round dances as well?

JP: Oh yes, well there were people from the reserve that we were related to. They used to come and rent the place or made a deal anyway because I used to sit and watch. If I saw two loads of wood coming across the lake, I knew they were going to be using the place. And I'd look to the north side. I'd see them coming with the hay racks. They all gathered there. And they'd have either a wedding or—

SD: Which reserve was that?

JP: From Sakimay and Cowessess.

SD: And your relatives from those reserves would use that house for a round dance?

JP: Yes, everybody knew one another. Somehow, they were all cousins. I never knew why I wasn't in the reserve. Six months of the year, I'd be with my Aboriginal people and six months of the year, I'd amongst white people. I turned around one time and got mad at my grandpa. He called me a "white girl." He said that "I should be speaking Métis." "Okay," I told him, "Have your language, from now on I'll speak English." And I gave up my Métis language, but I still remember it. It took me a long time to get it back, but it's back. I had a good tutor.

SD: That brings me to the next question. Did anyone in your family speak Michif?

JP: Oh yes, they both did, everybody did.

SD: Everyone did, and do you speak Michif?

JP: Yes.

SD: Do you know any traditional Métis stories or songs?

JP: Everything. That's what I'm working on.

SD: Would you care to share one of them, a song or story or that?

JP: I'm going to be doing storytelling at the Regional High School on Mondays. I put some short stories together of Wiisakaychak because that's the time of the year for

him, right now. So, I have Wiisakaychak and the little dogs, Wiisakaychak and the cranberries, and Wiisakaychak and the ducks. That's a funny one. You know in all my little, short stories, I put in a dance or a song? Like a song called, "The Shut-Eye Dance." So, it's a song, it goes (starts singing).

SD: And you made that song?

JP: Yes, it's good because we get up half way through the story and everyone is humming it. I stop the story and get the students to get up and do it. And then sit down again and finish the story off. That's what I do.

SD: I'm just curious, was there a lot of singing in your community?

JP: Oh yes.

SD: Métis type songs, French-Michif songs?

JP: Yes, I heard them when they were drunk. Yes, I come from a singing family, very musical.

SD: Traditional Métis songs or were they country songs?

JP: Country songs.

SD: What are your best memories about living on the road allowance?

JP: I didn't like living in the road allowance. I liked it when we lived at the lake. So, after my dad passed away, when I was 15, I went right out of here and went back home. And then I came back to the school in Yorkton. I stayed here for one year, and in the following year, I went to Regina, stayed in that school. I stayed there until I got sick just before Christmas, so I went home. When I went home, I never came back. I went to Yorkton, got a job and that was it for school. I didn't go back to school until way after I was married. I was taking home school. I got a couple degrees from home school.

SD: Oh really, what kind?

JP: I have one in curriculum development. Yes, that's the kind of degree. I developed curriculum for the Métis. And you know, I took that to GDI [Gabriel Dumont Institute] in Regina? The guy that was there told me it was not Métis enough. Oh, was I pissed right off at that. I'll have to find out what his name is, I forgot. I was so mad. I took it to the Catholic school board, and they said it was very well done, but they couldn't afford it, they had spent all their money. So once more I went to the other board office, and they just took it right away. I figured if they don't take it, I was going to get at the Métis and tell them about my incident with Gabriel Dumont. They come close to being exposed that they weren't looking for Métis people.

SD: That would have been a while ago?

JP: Yes, that's about 30 years ago. It's changed. Well, different people. This guy lived in Saskatoon, and he used to come by plane everyday to work at the Gabriel Dumont Institute. That was just wasting money. I'll have to ask Calvin [Racette] what that guy's name was. He came from Saskatoon every day.

SD: Are there any bad memories that you had that you would like to share?

JP: Bad memories, no. The only thing I can remember real clear is the young people. I didn't hang out with them because they were always making fun of me because I had this lazy eye. They used to make fun of me, so I figured, "You're not smart being like this, so I don't want to hang out with you." I always hung out with the old people, and they asked me why. I told them, "They're stupid. They're laughing at me all the time because of my eye." So that was okay. That's the only bad memory I have.

SD: But you ended up with all the knowledge.

JP: Oh yes, and crazy stuff that I could translate now that I grew older. They were crazy old people. They were wild, too. I used to tell my mom of things that I remember. "Who told you that?" she'd tell me. I remembered it, and I remembered the names of the people, too, and I used to tell them. It was funny.

SD: How were the Métis treated in your community?

JP: They really had a hard time. If the guys didn't go to work to do those pickets, they didn't get any money to feed their families. They were more or less forced to go whether they were sick or not. My dad went when he was sick. He had some kind of heart problem, and he did lots of hard work. You could just see the water dripping right off of him. While working at the lake, I did a lot of work after my brother left home. I took his place, and that was lots of hard labour. I didn't like seeing my dad just soaked in water, and sometimes, he'd get laid up for a whole week.

SD: Did your family encounter racism from the larger community?

JP: Oh yes, there was a lot of that.

SD: Do you have specific examples?

JP: Well, when we were living at the lake, we got that, too. There was this one time we had rented out this place where they could play ball. And they were doing some kind of fundraising, but we didn't know what kind it was. Then I asked if I could play ball with them. I was about nine. They told me, "No, you're not the same as us, you can't play ball." And that was okay, so I turned around and my mom told me, "Why don't you go and play ball with them?" "No, they don't want me. They said I'm not the same kind as they are. I'm not the same colour as they are." Then she said, "Well stay in the house." She went outside and boy did she ever tell them. She kicked them right off the property. What really got her fired up was when she asked what they were raising money for. They were raising money to send to Germany during the war. And that, she just flipped out because her brother was in the army overseas. So, she just flipped out and told them, "You go and raise money for Hitler somewhere else." So, they left. That is the first one, and the other ones were not bad, just childish, childish things. But that was the first real one and I never knew what that was. When she came in, she told me, "Those people are no good for us." So, I sent them home. That's how she explained it. She told my dad about it. And this one guy he didn't know. We knew him well, and he had been helping them. And he brought in a whole big box of sandwiches and stuff that they couldn't take back, like ice cream.

So, we just put all of the ice cream in the ice house. And the sandwiches, well we ate some, and that's the first time I ate a sandwich with mayonnaise. And boy it tasted ugly. I thought, "Those people are kind of poisonous. I hate this sandwich." Usually, we ate what we were given, but that sandwich I couldn't eat it, it had mayonnaise. But that's about it, other than that things were nice. And when they had those celebrations, they'd last about three days you know? People came from all over and they'd bring food, meat. The women would be cooking bannock and bread, and fry bread, and they'd be frying up big pans of chokecherries and brought cakes. They'd have a go for three days.

SD: Was that the First Nations or Métis or both of them?

JP: Both of them, a mixture.

SD: And they would all celebrate together?

JP: Oh yes. They'd tell stories. That's where I heard lots of stories. I used to sit by the fiddle players. I was their gopher I guess because I'd get them whatever they needed. And I'd sit there, that was my spot.

SD: I'm guessing that the folks from Cowessess had a round dance and the Métis folks would go and attend that? Is that right or?

JP: Not necessarily, no. We just did our round dancing on the outside. Then we'd get out and do our own dance. You know, I saw a beautiful wedding. I was going to write a short story about it. I don't know how these people got together, but they were all Métis, and well some are from the reserve, they were Métis too. They had this wedding, and I can't remember whose wedding it was. I swear it was Jimmy Lavallée's wedding. I'm not too sure. I'd have to ask. I'll have to ask her sister when that wedding took place because it took place at my house, and it was well organized. I don't know how they organized so quickly. These people were eating down here. They were having their supper late in the afternoon, before they started dancing. And you know, you're not supposed to start dancing until the bride and groom dance? But while they were eating, this crazy bunch of people went and stole a dance. Well, the fiddle players were tuning up. While they played a tune, they danced a quadrille. They stole the dance. So that was okay, and they went outside and all of a sudden, my grandpa was telling this old guy. He always wore a police hat. I can't remember his real name, but they used to call him, "Shinabby." They hold him, "You're the policeman. I want you to look for all those people who were dancing. They all have to go to court." They had a little court made out, and he had to find all these people that were responsible for stealing that dance. So, after he got them all rounded up, they were taken two-by-two, and they entered their pleas and they were all guilty and had to pay a fine of fifty cents a piece. That's a dollar a couple. And that was quite a bit of money in those days. That was the way that they raised money to give to the bride and groom, if they stole their dance.

SD: Did they do it on purpose or was it just those folks happened to steal a dance?

JP: It must have been on purpose because they were laughing about it, you know? Then this old guy, maybe two or three of them knew about it, and then you know how it spreads after two or three? And then they stole this dance anyway.

SD: When did people leave your road allowance community?

JP: Well, all their children grew up, and there was a big school there, and finally only one room was being used. And finally, there were not enough children. They moved to Regina or to other towns. I think there's still one house remaining. I was going to go down there and take some pictures. The school was torn down.

SD: When the kids grew up and left home a lot of people left Crooked Lake at that time as well?

JP: They all left the lake. The only ones that are staying down there are some of the boys I went to school with, but they're white boys. They own the beach.

SD: Where were your parents and grandparents originally from?

JP: They were all born around Crooked Lake.

SD: Okay, your grandparents too?

JP: I don't know where my grandparents were born. No, I remember my grandpa coming from Red River. Near Frog Lake, that's where his family originated, and the women were all from around Lebret and Crooked Lake. That's where they got their wives. They all came to work at the farming mission, which was run by the priest, and that's where they ran and these women married them.

SD: Was your family involved in the 1885 Resistance?

JP: My grandmother was Cree, and they were coming home when the war was going on up there. She said, "We lived in the caves for three days because we got chased by the Sioux." She said, "If it wasn't for my dad, who created a mirage to light up like a big camp, they probably would have killed us all. So, when these Sioux saw a big camp, they took off and went back home, those ones that they were chasing us."

SD: And that was from after leaving Batoche?

JP: It was right close to Batoche because those caves are in Batoche. She said both sides were fighting up this way and those Indians were chasing them. Like there were two wars going on. They were looking for guys up this way that needed help. She said she was seven years old when this happened. I wrote a nice story. I was about 14, the last year I was in school down there, me and my cousin. She told us everything. You know, I had that book for the longest time, but when we were moving around, I lost it. It was really nice because it was exactly what she said. That's the only time she ever talked about her dad. And when I did research on him, he didn't have an English name, he had an Indian name. It was in a whole bunch of letters. Now I have look for that name. I have it someplace. I have to look for that name and see if I can read it.

SD: And those folks travelled down to this area like?

JP: The reserve is down this way. What they were doing toward North Battleford, around there. I don't know. They were following game, I guess, and they were on their way back home when they got involved with the Sioux.

SD: That sounds like a very interesting story. What happened to your family after 1885 Resistance?

JP: Well, that's when they all started living in the valley. They got houses, got jobs.

SD: In Crooked Lake valley?

JP: Yes.

SD: Is it called the Crooked Lake valley or?

JP: It's called Crooked Lake because of the lake, but the place itself where we got our mail, it's called Marieval.

SD: Marieval, and when you say the valley, what are you talking about?

JP: Marieval.

SD: Marieval, okay. Did or does anyone in your family serve in the military?

JP: There were my brothers. One served in the navy, the other one in the army. One served in the Korean War and the other one in Vietnam. They're both dead.

SD: Do you mind saying their names or?

JP: Vern and the oldest one was Fredrick. I had uncles in World War One. In World War Two, I had grandpa's and my grandma's brothers. There were lots of people that served in forces. I joined up, but I got kicked out because I was too young. I lied and they caught up to my lie.

SD: Was anyone in your family involved in the Métis Society?

JP: Well, we all were until the Métis society disappeared. I was involved lots when they had it in Regina. I lived there for a long time. And when I come up here, I can't find anything. I did find one guy, but he wasn't interested in anything. I was interested in the Crescent Lake School, nine miles south of here. It's Métis property you know? I think it was leased out for a hundred years. Well, the hundred years are not up. It's far from being up. I asked Edwin, "Did you try and get that?" "Yes," he said but "they won't help me with any kind of money anyway." "You go for it," he said. "You don't go for the money, you go for the property," I told him. "Find out who got it and how they got it, and why they got it." I told him because that it was leased out for a hundred years and the hundred years is not up. And I told him, "You guys could sure make use of that place. It's a heritage place." I think a lot of them are ashamed of their heritage. They all turned white. That's what I noticed around here, and just like they're split. Some of these families go this way and some of these families go that way. So, if they were to combine together, there would be a strong community. But no, I don't think that will ever be, unless somebody takes control of the young generation. But even those young people don't exactly know where they come from. You know, I went and did a Métis story at the Regional High school and that was the first time they had ever heard of anything Métis. I've been going there once a

month, and I share with them. I go counsel with some of the girls who need a grandma.

SD: Well, do you have anything else that you'd like to share about living in a Métis road allowance community?

JP: No, it was a lot of fun. I have no regrets living there. I had no choice. But when I come to think of it, it was a learning experience. There was this one guy, he was a cousin, oh he mad me angry. We were living up the hill, and my grandmother lived down this way. I'm going down and my brother asked me, "Where are you going?" "I'm going down to koohkum's," I told him. And this cousin said, "I'm going down to koohkum's, too." And you know, as little as I was, I was so ticked off at that guy. I never said anything to him. He was mimicking me all the time. And my brother told me, "Aw, he just found you cute. That's why he did that" "I don't like it," I said. And I tormented that guy all my life after that. Every time I'd see him after, he was working with wild animals. Oh my God, they put you in the right place because I'm telling you now, he was with the skunks. After that, he was riding these little chariot wagons, and when I was working up here in Yorkton, he came in with his wife and he said, "Did you know we're cousins?" I said, "I'm not related to you." And that's the way I kept it, but I knew and he knew. But it was just a part of us. He died last year. He was a funny guy, a hard worker, so was his wife.

SD: Well, thank you, you probably got to get cracking now.