

Edwin St. Pierre

My name is Edwin Norman (Boy) St. Pierre

I was born south of Yorkton in a Métis community called Crescent Lake 12 miles from Yorkton.

My mother was Vitaline Flamand.

My dad was Alexandre (Chakwana) St. Pierre.

I married Edna Pelletier La Kanayenn Pelletier.

We had four children. The oldest Darrell, then a girl Renee, a boy Dale, and the youngest Gerrard.

We have two grandchildren, two little girls. My daughter Renee has a little girl.

My son that lives in Halifax with a woman has a little girl.

My dad worked for farmers in winter and spring. He also trapped. He cut wood for farmers and harvested.

My mother worked like a man. She hunted and fed us when dad was away working. She killed deer and rabbit. In springtime we stole duck eggs from the mud hens in the marshes. They were good eating. We would get them by the full pails. The mud hens are stupid, they will always lay. You would go back a week after and there would be around four eggs in the nest.

I was born in the house. My grandma and my aunty were the nurses.

My dad was born in the Turtle Mountain reservation. When he was around 20 years old with his parents, they moved back home to Turtle Mountain and Dad stayed here.

I think they came here for work and they also had relatives here in Canada already. The relatives were Pelletier's and others. My dad very seldom went back to the States. I don't think he went back to his dad's funeral. When someone died it didn't bother dad very much it seemed. I haven't seen them for a long time so it's no use going, he'd say. I don't know them anymore.

I used to go to visit in the Turtle Mountain to visit my cousins, my aunts and I had only one uncle.

In 1952, we left from here with a taxi to work in the Turtle Mountains to pick potatoes. We stayed there for two months. We went with mom and dad, three of my brothers, and my little sister, and one of my cousins.

Once I was married I worked for both the Federal and Provincial Governments and I also worked for the Michif (Metis) organization and I was carpenter for a while. I was in the army for 13 ½ years. I was in the east coast and 3 years in Germany.

I raised my children mostly in Regina. Two were born in Regina and two here in Yorkton. I worked for veterans affairs for 20 years.

We were two boys and two girls in our family. My father and two sisters passed on. There are only six of us living with mom.

Years ago it seemed like the Metis (Michif) had a better heart to help each other. They were always willing to help. People borrowed and gave each other what they needed especially food when they got short of things. My dad raised hogs and when we butchered in the fall and someone helped dad he would give them pork (meat). When dad worked for farmers he would get two little pigs and raise them.

I think of Crescent Lake especially when I was a child going to school, there were a lot of families with a lot of children around us and we had a lot of fun. When we left and lived elsewhere there weren't as many kids. When we lived at Crescent Lake there were dances, games, and ball, a lot of fun.

People had house dances. It was all fiddle music and guitar. We watched the older people dance square dances and jigs and that is how we learned. The dances were jigs, round dances, and other dances like waltzes. The Allarys played the fiddle and my grandfather played. There were a lot of callers like the Pelletiers and Flamands.

In those days people got along. Everybody was equal and nobody had more than anybody else. Today if someone gets money again people seem to be jealous. Money has caused trouble.

My grandfather, my mom's dad was Alexandre Flamand and my grandmother la Vyeille, la Belle.

I didn't know my dad's father but I remember my dad's mother, she was called la Vyeille Li Nwayr. She lived around here then she married a Tanner. She married Chi Jean Tanner. She didn't stay with him too long. She returned home to the Turtle Mountain reservation. She died there in the Turtle Mountain. They had the same kind of work in the States as we do here. They would cut fence posts and sell them to farmers and ranchers. They did a lot of hunting. There are a lot of Lakes over there.

Oh yes, I really remember New Years. At midnight you would hear bells on horses coming. They would wake up the kids. The first place we went to was our Mooshoom's place since he was the oldest. Wherever you went you ate. They fed you lii boulette and pie and other things. We would celebrate for a week. It was like a family reunion as some people lived a long way from each other. People shook hands and hugged and Grandpa and Dad gave us the benediction. We visited everybody. You didn't miss anyone.

We lose tradition because Metis live too far apart and maybe resentment. Years ago people were willing to express themselves. I still think money has changed things. We would visit and not warn people and we were welcome. You stayed overnight with people whenever you visited as we traveled with horse and wagon depending on the season. It seems that even brothers and sisters don't visit each other, it is pitiful it is like they don't know each other.

We would go to Yorkton fairs. They had a piece of land where we camped and put our horses in the pasture. This was where we would have nice visits for around a week. The town of Yorkton, I remember, would give rations to those that camped like meat, potatoes, and other things and we didn't pay at the gate. We were given passes by the white people. There was a big camp of Métis and First Nations. A lot of people didn't go to the fair. They came here especially to visit and camp. The fair was like today, there were ferris wheels, kids' games, teeter totters, and other things. The fair was smaller then. There were a lot of horse races. There were sulky races and horseback races. There was what was called Indian races and the First Nations and Metis raced horses bareback, no saddle. It was so nice to see the women cooking, making fires and visiting at night. Everyone visited and enjoyed the friendship and we kept our culture.

It is a different way of life today. Everyone has cars and you can go home every night. They don't travel with horses which was a slower mode of travel and camping was necessary.

The women gossiped I guess (laughs), laughed while they cooked. They cooked the rations that were given to us or if they saved a little money they would go to town and buy what they needed. They would also bring their own food like wild meat, deer, ducks, they had worked for farmers and prepared themselves for this celebration. People also shared.

Some of the games they played was like Koochuk which was a hiding game. They would gather by the wagons and play. They played with little sticks. Most times they played just for the pastime for fun and sometimes they gambled and played for something.

Years ago we all spoke and only spoke Michif. Some people spoke some English and no French. We called our language Cree and our Nation was Michif. We called ourselves halfbreed because the white called us halfbreed. I never heard Métis until the sixties.

I do remember calling ourselves Michif. When we moved away from Crescent Lake we were called halfbreeds. The teachers said don't call yourselves halfbreed you are Michif you aren't half of anything.

For a pastime just about all the old people were able to tell stories and legends. They would make big fairs and sit around in circles and everyone would enjoy their visits. Some people would make up the stories and add to.

When the Métis had weddings they were all Catholic. The celebrations went on for two to three days. The horses were all dressed with bells, scotch tops and plumes. In summer, horses hitch to wagons, buggies and sulkies and in winter to cutters. It was beautiful, the older people and the bride and groom led the parade first. The older people sat at the table first. Songs were sung in French by the older guests. There were good singers.

In the older days everyone lived the same way and it was easier to follow because it was the same culture. Today we follow different ways and we don't live all together so it is more difficult to follow. When something took place everyone went in the old days, you could walk or ride. Times and things have changed. There is nothing today. Today we are married in different cultures so things change. I don't think it will ever be the same.

I travel a lot and talk to and see a lot of young people. They seem very interested in knowing things and are very inquisitive and ask questions. We older people have to work on things and share things. We must learn to get along to overcome jealousy and hatred. There are too many different here for instance where I live. I think money has ruined everything. They will not volunteer, they have to have money. We must learn to work together.

I also noticed those that are teaching Michif don't teach properly. They don't have a strategy. They aren't doing a good job and don't know how to teach. The dictionaries should be all the same. There should be a standard way and we should all work on a one way system. Those people that know should lead. We should teach those that profess to help and know how to speak and also make them understand the Michif language. Some outsiders work for us and don't understand anything. That is not good.

When people go to conferences on Michif they should concentrate on the one Michif and not all other languages. I couldn't go tell other people how to speak their language so we should be given the same respect. We all have to speak the same and write the same. It disturbs me the way it goes and it is our fault because we let it happen. There is only one English and there should be one Michif. The main thing is to speak Michif and then worry about writing because many couldn't write it.

Years ago all I spoke was Michif. I then learned English when I went to school and when I went with dad working for farmers. My dad spoke some English. When I went to school back home we spoke our language in the yard and teacher didn't say anything. We picked English up fairly quickly and of course our teacher was English. When we went to town we knew enough English to get by and if someone would visit we spoke English if we had to.

At the beginning mom was embarrassed of her bannock when we lived away from Crescent Lake. But later on we had a lot of visitors and mom would feed them what we had.

We had hard times in winter. I remember mom had twins and a baby to feed milk. I think dad worked for a farmer for mostly milk for his pay. Sometimes he got butter and meat. Us kids hung snares and we would trap weasels and we'd hunt. We caught skunks, mink, and other things. Mom and my sister would spin. The furs varied in price, the skunks were a good price, about three dollars, muskrats and mink. Beaver were hard to skin. They would also dig skunks in their dens. Dad hooked them with dry willow branches. Sometimes we'd get ten of them. That was very good. It was also good in the springtime when they looked for food. They were also coming out to get ready to have young ones. They would leave their family at a year old.

Maarsii we will see each other again.