

Paul Pelletier Interview by Norman Fleury – English Paraphrase

I think my sister Rose and I were born in St. Madeleine. The rest of the family were born in the Fouillard Corner across the river. They called these places these names because a person called Fouillard gave this land and was called Fouillard Town. He was the leader and a Selby gave the other piece of land, so that was called Selby Town. The Fishers and others lived there. My father was Louis Pelletier and my mother was Pauline Fleury. They were born in St. Madeleine. My grandpa lived with us. I don't remember my grandmas. My Grandpa Fleury died before Grandpa Pelletier. Grandpa Pelletier died in Winnipeg. There were twelve in our family. We lost two so we are now ten of us. I live here in Winnipeg. My brothers Frank and Kenny are in Winnipeg. My brother Gaspard is in Saskatoon. Beatrice and Jeannette are in Yorkton. Henry is in Yorkton. Alex is in Regina. Rabbit is in Brandon.

We used to go all go home and gather at my Dad's and Mother's place for New Years. New Years was our celebration. We met at our parent's place. They had a small house. Long ago at midnight you would hear guns firing, then we celebrated New Years and went visiting and eating at Métis homes. We celebrated for seven days until All Kings' Day. We would put all the furniture outside and the dance was on and we danced all night. Wherever we went we had to put the furniture out. Willie Boucher was a good fiddle player. Demontigny also played, but Willie Boucher was number one, a great one. Square dances and jigs were the main dances and round dances. We danced waltzes and a lot of square dances and polkas. My dad and Uncle Henry and Baboon Fleury called. I called and then other young ones took over. At the end I called mostly. I still call. We went home at St. Madeleine Métis Days. All the Pelletiers danced a square dance and I called. I still can call.

All Kings' Day was a give away day for the Michifs. Michif danced for seven days. An old custom. On this day you shake hands and exchange gifts. When we were young, mom gave us a fork or knife and gave Aunty, and exchanged gifts. You gave things away.

Also when I was a young child I remember seeing dad and others sitting on the floor in a circle and playing a game they called Koochuk. They covered themselves with a blanket and would hide objects and try to guess where they were. This was a hiding game. The Métis probably got this from the Cree. They sat there all evening. They played sometimes. Another game the Métis played was barouche. There wasn't much to do in winter for socializing so they would play barouche just about every night.

My mother cooked for New Years. She could cook whatever she would have. She baked pies. My Aunty Bayoo cooked lii boulette. I would go there first to eat. We didn't celebrate Christmas. We celebrated Ney Years. That's when we gave gifts. My mother said Christmas is for Jesus. On New Years, before midnight we knelt down in front of Dad, then we ate, then the table was set for other visitors to eat. People ate still at three in the morning. My dad sang old table songs for New Years. My uncle Chi Tom, my mother's brother, sang and also Damien Fisher. The songs weren't in Michif, they were in French.

All people came to weddings. They all went to church and then they went to eat at the wedding. I don't remember when they sold the bride's show. I remember when we had basket socials and sold baskets.

Years ago at funerals people had a wake for two to three days. They then buried the dead. All Métis are buried in St. Madeleine because that was our community. There was a church there. It was a community. They would say rosary every hour and they would play cards in between. Times have changed. It's not the same.

My dad wouldn't let the doctors do autopsies to see what my mom died from. The Métis had different beliefs, and had respect for the dead. He didn't want his wife to be all cut up for nothing.

My dad worked for farmers. He also cut wood for a living. He'd cut wood on day and then haul the next day for five dollars a load. My dad scrubbed bush to clear land, picked stones for farmers, and went threshing. I used to help also when I was young. We used horses to bring sheaves to the machine. I also stooked. I started working at thirteen years of age. People went to school in the church at the beginning. We used church benches since there were no desks. There were too many of us in our family so I had to help dad working out. My education was limited. I used to make a dollar a day. I worked for Lloyd Love for three years. Then at sixteen years old I started working on the railroad for 85 cents an hour. Now I made a lot of money. I worked on the gang. We paid so much a day for room and board. I then came to work in Winnipeg in construction. Then I worked in the mine in Gillam for seven years. I worked at the big dam they built. I worked twelve hours a day and seven days a week. There was nothing to do and no place to go. There was no roads, we could only get out by plane or train.

My dad had a 1928 Model T truck. Old Pete Ducharme always had cars. If you could afford it, you had a vehicle. Otherwise people used horse drawn vehicles. Some people had good horses. Jean Louis Fleury had a nice team harness with scotch tops and brass harness. Willie Boucher had a nice team of white horses. People put bells on horses for New Years. Jean Louis Fleury would leave his home at midnight and visit around the community on New Years. Eventually the old ways were lost. I try to figure out why people started to just speak English. The school had a lot to do with losing our old ways.

My mother never spoke English, but then we started to speak English at home. I also think that the Métis were embarrassed to speak Michif. She was afraid to be laughed at. Really, some English-speaking people would laugh when you spoke Michif. They don't understand. Most people used to speak Michif. Mom spoke French and Dad spoke Michif. But Michif was spoken in our home. Not everyone spoke Michif. A lot of people spoke French. Old Fisher and Aunt Bayoo spoke French. My dad spoke Cree, French, Saulteaux and Michif. On the Gambler Reserve the Tanners and others spoke Michif, not Saulteaux. I know all people on the Gambler Reserve. I sit and think and feel sorry that I didn't always practice my Michif. The people that are good Michif speakers are like you said, Victoria Genaille, the little Fleurys Alphonse and Sonny Boy, the Ducharmes. Chi L'homme Gidiish and Piiyapii speak Michif.

I am related to Pelletiers and Fleurys and Ledoux. My mother's mom I think was a Ledoux. I'm related to Bouchers. Joe Bouche's dad and my dad's mother were brother and sister. Joe Boucher was my dad's first cousin. My dad and his family came from Lestock, SK. But I don't know if was born here or there. My mom and dad met here. I was too young to know Grandpa to ask him history. My grandpa's story just a joke. Grandpa made homemade mash (home brew) with bran, he threw the mash out, the horses ate and got drunk and passed out. He thought they were dead. He started skinning, then jumped up and

took off (laughs). Who is going to believe that? All kinds of stories were told in those days. My Grandpa Fleury used to pretend he had lice. He got us to look. He did this for the fun. Some told legends, stories, and that's why he got us to sit in a circle around him and he taught us morals of the stories. The main legends were Chi Jean, Nanapoosh. He would scare us and the kids wouldn't sleep.

The Indian people knew medicine. My sister Mary was sick so my dad sold his horses and sought help from a medicine man. My mother was afraid of bad Indian medicine. My Aunty married an Indian man and when they came to visit us, mom was uneasy, afraid of medicine. She was told about bad medicine. Mom made li boom and belle anglique that is wild mint and rat root.

In my family, three were born in the hospital. La Schwette was the nurse. She married Willie Boucher. She was a Demontigny, that was Kooshish's mother. There was Kooshish and Rita. Rita was shot in an accident. And Eric Boucher. La Schwette was the mid-wife.

When I was small we berry picked. We picked cranberries in winter, hit them and they would fall in the pail. Mom used to crush chokecherries and dry them. I wish I knew how she did that. She made patties and fried them. They canned berries, saskatoons, raspberries, and strawberries. We had all kinds of berries in the valley like pincherries, gooseberries, and others. We also picked wild nuts and mom hid them for New Years. She put them in a bag to dry and peel them. Sometimes we had apples and oranges for New Years but not many. People trapped all winter, that's all they did. In spring, they trapped beaver and muskrat. We set snares for rabbits. We ate a lot of rabbit. I don't know if I could eat rabbit now. Mom cooked it in water. Then made a soup, la rababoo, and sometimes she would cook it in the oven and make a gravy. It was very good. My mom used to can deer meat and it was very good. You couldn't keep meat in summer so we had to can.

My mom didn't go to school like me. I can't read or write. My mother was a good cook and baker and made anything with no recipe. She made pies, cookies, and cakes. My mother and Eleanor Fisher and Aunty Bayoo sang old songs. Years ago only the old men drank alcohol, not the old women. As they got drunk they sang songs.

Most of the old people came from St. Madeleine and St. Lazare and elsewhere. My dad told me how the Métis were thrown out of St. Madeleine. They were thrown out and houses were burned. The government wanted their land for community pasture. If you refused, you were burned out. In return, all the Métis were given a quarter section of land and how could they make a living. At St. Madeleine everyone had little farms. They had a few cows, three or four, and horses and they put a little crop. They went working and still had something at home. I was born in 1938 in St. Madeleine. My parents went to St. Madeleine to get married. My dad didn't have a farm. He worked out. My dad came to St. Madeleine with a team of horses and two cows. There was no feed so he sold his cows and kept the horses. My dad was a lot older than my mom. I've lived in Winnipeg at least 40 years. I've retired ten years now. We own our house here. I'd like to buy a bungalow house and sell this one. My house has a backache. My niece interviewed me in St. Madeleine. My cousin's daughter. Most of that family is gone. My dad's borthers were Edward, Harry, and Gerome. His sisters were Emma, Mary, and Amelia. My mother's family, Chi Tom, Zyeu Bleu, Roseanna, and Aunty Bayoo. The older people, your sister La Mikin and Mrs.

Joe Boucher. My cousins La Fii George Belhumeur's wife is the oldest. I have a cousin from Crane River that lives in Winnipeg. There are three left in that family.