

Tape #8

Today I have some questions to ask you. First, I ask you what's your names? You, what's your name?

Edwin St. Pierre is my name.

You then?

Edna St. Pierre. I was a Pelletier before I got married.

Where were you born?

Here, this place, they call Crescent Lake. Twelve miles south of here.

South of Yorkton?

Yeah.

Were you born at home, or in a hospital?

No. In a log house.

Who helped your birth? Was a doctor there or a nurse?

No. There was just women. Women would get together for this occasion.

Was it your Grandma or who?

Yeah. My Grandma and her daughters.

The girls helped when you were born?

Yeah. That's right.

You then, where were you born?

At the corner, in a little log house too.

What was you parents' names? Your Mom? Your Dad?

My mom a Brushee, my Dad a Pelletier.

What is his name, your Dad?

Zron Pelletier.

And your mom?

Alice Brushee.

Where were they born? Do you know where they're from?

Ste. Madeleine, my Mom. My Dad is from somewhere in Saskatchewan. I don't remember.

Well maybe I'll help you a little. Was it somewhere around Lestock?

Yeah. I think that's where. Yeah.

That is where the Brushees come from, eh?

I don't know. Yeah. I am pretty sure. I had heard people talk and the Brushees came from Lestock. I know that the Pelletiers were from Lestock, but Brushee, I don't know. Them too, they came from there, but it's a long time ago they started arriving here.

You then, where does your parents come from and where were they born?

Mom is from Crooked Lake, about forty-five miles south of here. That's where they lived.

What was you Mom's name?

A Flammond. Vitaline Flammond, she was called.

Your Dad?

My dad hails from Turtle Mountain.

Was he born there?

Yes. In the reserve by Turtle Mountain.

When did he come here?

Hm, hm, 1914, I think somewhere around there.

Was he alone or did he come with his parents here to Canada?

No, his sisters. In those days, it was easy to go back and forth across the border.

Where were his mom and dad born?

Over there in Turtle Mountain.

Is that that place they call Belcourt?

Yes. On the other side of Belcourt there.

Did your Dad come from a large family of brothers and sisters?

Two brothers and I think seven sisters. I think there were nine kids. A large family.

What language did they speak? The same way we speak?

Yeah.

And the families of long ago, did they help one another a lot, long ago?

When they had something, they would gladly share with others that needed. Ones who were in need they would help out.

Did you borrow a lot?

Yeah. We were very poor when we lived here.

How did people make a living in those days?

Mostly hunting, muskrats, gophers, coyotes.

Deer too?

Oh yeah. Those were good. There used to be a lot of deer then.

Long ago, did they make clothing out of hide?

Yeah, my mom used to use it, hide.

Was it hard to tend to the hide?

Yeah. She would hang the hide over the tub with the hair on, then she'd soak it in water for two or three days, but not in the house and she'd use the hoe to scrape off all the hair and the use of the horns.

No one uses or does this anymore?

Oh no. That was long ago.

What did they use with the leather?

Moccasins and mitts mostly.

But your clothing, did they buy or did they make these?

My Mom used to make them. She was good at sewing. You know there was eight of us in the family.

Like your shirts, did she make them too?

Yeah. Hm, hm.

And your pants?

Yeah. She used to make all that.

What about the material?

She would buy from town and when it was outgrown, it was passed down to the next or she would remake.

What about shoes?

She would mostly make us moccasins.

When did you start wearing shoes?

Sometime in the late fortys. They used to buy what they'd call gum rubbers long ago.

But what about the big shoes?

Oh Yeah. We used to call them "mush kush" and the white people call felt socks. You used to slip them on.

Long ago do you remember? The people had what they'd call mitass? It was like a piece of leather?

Oh yeah. They wrapped up so not to get wet. Oh yeah.

What about beads? Did they used to sew them on jackets and such?

No, they didn't.

Were they too poor to buy beads or what?

I don't recall, but I don't think I've seen any. They just used to sew them. Nothing fancy was ever done.

What about horses? Did you have horses?

Oh yeah. My Dad always had five, six horses. He used to drive them, hm, hm.

How did your Dad make a living?

He worked for farmers and hunting and fishing. He used to do a lot of hunting of muskrats and prairie chickens and coyotes.

Yesterday when you started to tell us, did you go digging potatoes?

No. We went and picked potatoes.

Tell us about this.

Oh yeah. This was in 1950. I think when we went over there, there was seven of us. When we drove over there to work, my Dad pulled us out of school to go pick potatoes on the other side of Bar Coulee for one month. I think just about two months we worked there picking potatoes.

Did you make lots of money, or what?

Ah, we made, but my Dad would spend it.

When you came home, now again, you had to work?

Yeah. We cut wood for families.

When you went to the States, did you have any relatives there?

Oh yeah. My Dad had sisters there, some friends, uncles, some cousins.

Did you have fun?

No. Not really. Not at all.

Not like us today, eh?

No. Not at that time.

Just work, eh?

Yeah. One of his cousins had a family. That's where we used to go and stay, eh. He helped him, eh. When we came home, we bought the gas, as he had a truck. There we used to go help stooking, eh?

Your Dad didn't have a car?

No.

When did your Dad start driving? Did he have a vehicle?

That's what he said, but I don't know if he ever did.

You never seen this?

No. Never. No.

But, maybe the old kind, eh? Like a model T, eh?

As long as I can remember, he's never driven a vehicle.

Did he ever play the violin?

No.

What were they called where you lived, the old guys that used to play the violins? Do you know?

Oh yes, mostly the Allarys, the Flammonds, the Pelletiers.

Alex Allary's Dad?

And, and his parents. Oh yeah.

How did they have fun when they were living there in Crescent Lake? Did you have parties?

Oh. A lot.

Was there a large gathering of people?

Yeah.

What kind of dances did they have?

Mostly square dances.

Did they dance those old dances we talked about earlier, like the jig, the waltz, the two-step, the hanky dance? Did they dance that, then?

Oh yeah. They used to dance on New Year's Day for two or three days. Oh yeah, every night.

Not at the same place?

No, at different places.

Was it in big houses?

Well some were small. Some were big, eh? We used to throw out the stove, the table...

To make room?

Yeah. To do some fast playing.

The people, the Métis, of long ago sure used to have good times, eh?

Ah ha.

You'd say sure not like today?

No. No.

Do you think we lost a lot here?

Oh.

What they call in English our culture?

Oh. We sure lost a lot.

What should we do to understand what we had lost?

I think we have to use it all the time. We have to try and teach the younger ones.

Now I am going to ask you. When did you get married?

1963.

Do you have children?

Four. Three boys and a girl.

Where are they living?

Three are in Saskatoon and one in Moose Jaw.

Where did they go to school? And did they finish high school high school?

No. One is still in university. Eh ha.

Do you have grandchildren?

Yeah. Two.

What kind of work have you done? What kind of jobs did you have?

Well, when I was seventeen, I joined the army. I went to Turkey.

Where were you stationed?

Out east in Ontario. I also went to Germany. I was there for three years.

Did you like being in the army?

Yeah. Oh yeah. But I always thought I was gonna come back here.

Oh yeah. Were you lonely?

No. Not really. I thought to come help our people, eh, and when I was there, I thought I'd get experience so for when I come back. When I was in the army, I started to drink too much, eh, and my partners seemed, were a bit too old, too quick from hard drinking. They'd get a red face, wrinkles and white hair and I thought, that is what's going to happen to me if I stay here any longer. They are pitiful. Oh yeah.

So you came home and what?

Yeah. So after that, I came and followed the Métis. I joined the Métis Society that time at the friendship center. Oh yes.

Was there very many Métis and Indians then?

Eh ha. Mostly Métis. Just about all Métis. Yeah, oh yeah. There was a lot of them. That's when they started arriving. Long ago you wouldn't see Indians around.

All friendship centers were all Métis, eh?

Yes. Just about all Métis.

What sort of job did you have there?

I was the director.

You did all programs?

Yeah. We did mostly education. I also looked after secretary courses. Also sewing. The women did sewing. We also taught carpentry courses. How to use tools, eh. They did a little bit handy craft.

What did they make?

Purses. Wallets. All kinds of things like that and belts.

This language we speak in Michif, what do you think we should do so the young could start speaking it? How?

Ah ha, I think that the young and the old should work together. Help each other.

Do you like this, you too, helping out here?

Very much so, eh ha, because I don't like what's going on. Kids don't even speak Cree now.

They lost it?

Yeah and us, we try to always speak Cree at home.

At your home?

Yeah, at our home. Them, they don't even speak.

Is it because they can't or they don't hear it enough?

Oh all the time, they hear it. We speak to them in Cree.

And them in English?

Yeah. All their friends, they all speak in English, eh.

Just like what we said yesterday. You said it too, the people were able to speak their tongue because that is how we lived. Just one language was spoken by everyone.

Yeah. All the people lived close together and all spoke the same language. Now, today, they live all over the place and so we've lost it now and too, they get laughed at if they don't speak it right. When they try, others laugh.

Is it the Englishmen that laughs at us or is it our own people?

I think it's both. These people too. You know I don't know if they are ashamed.

Do you think they are ashamed?

Yes, that is what I think.

Do you think the people of today would like to learn to speak their own tongue?

I think so, yeah. They would like to know.

Well I guess that's all. I want to thank you for talking to us here. Eh he.

Yeah.