

Interviewer: Nicole Morin-Scribner (NMS)  
Interviewee: Valéda Gosselin Couture (MMC)  
Date: 1988  
Place: Couture farm, Sainte-Marie Beauce, Québec Canada  
Transcriber and Translator: Nicole Morin-Scribner

### **Introductory Note:**

Joseph Alphonse Morin and Aurore Couture were married in Sainte Marie de Beauce on July 11, 1953. In honor of their 35<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary, Martine Morin Boissonneault had the brilliant idea of going to Québec and capturing the memories that their family members had about how they met and other recollections from their courtship. What we have as a result, is a priceless oral history about life in rural Québec from the early 1900's to the 1980's. It also includes a mother's story of seeing seven of her twelve children leave their country to build their lives in Biddeford, Maine.

This video was filmed in 1988. It features Valéda Gosselin Couture, known to most people as Memère Couture. She was almost 87 at the time. The interviewer is Nicole Morin-Scribner, her grand-daughter. The video is filmed by Martine Morin Boissonneault, grand-daughter. There are brief appearances by a very young Jamey Boissonneault, Martine's son.

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MMC (Memère Couture-Valéda Gosselin Couture): Is she filming me?

NMS (Nicole Morin-Scribner): She is just practicing, to make sure it works

NMS: You look nice. Is that a new dress?

MMC: Is this a pretty dress?

NMS: I know it's a pretty dress, I wondered if it was new.

MMC: It's old! Some time ago, Aline [note: a daughter] was here to play cards with us and said, "what a pretty dress". I like it because it's warm and comfortable, especially when I have a cold. I used to wear it every Sunday. Now it's starting to look worn.

NMS: It looks good on you. Do you want to sit down?

MMC: Oh no, I'm not tired. I have this other very nice dress that Laurent and Giselle [note: a her son and his wife] gave me for Christmas. I was saving it for New Year's Day [note: a traditional Québec holiday family gathering]. I'm not tall or very big. It was kind of long. I had to shorten it. They say it's the new style. With a belt it fit better.

NMS: How long have you had this wood stove?

MMC: We got this one the year we built this house.

NMS: You bought it new at that time?

MMC: It was relatively new. It had been owned by another lady, Mrs. Arthur Gallette. It was nice at the time, but she was fussy and didn't like it. So, Georges [note: her husband. Also known to many as Pepère Couture] bought it and we put it to good use and liked it.

NMS: When did you build the house? What year was it?

MMC: Hmm, what year. My memory fails me. It was the year that Normand Mercier [note: a grandson] was born. I believe he's 35 or 36. No! Wait a minute, you are 35

NMS: Thirty-four!

MMC: It was the year that your mother was married that we built the new house. And it's their 35<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary that you are celebrating?

NMS: Yes, its Mom and Dad's 35<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary that we are celebrating but I'm 34. I believe Normand Mercier is the same age as I am.

MMC: Yes, it was the year your mother was married that we built the new house.

NMS: So, it would have been 1953

MMC: I don't remember the year, but I remember that Normand was a baby. Laura [note; a daughter] had just given birth to him. She came here about 2 weeks after he was born.

NMS: Was Matante Laura pregnant when Mom was married?

MMC: She had already had the baby.

NMS: Maybe he is a year older.

MMC: Maybe you don't know this, but do you know how old Gilles Fecteau [note: a grandson] is?

NMS: Now that I think of it, I'm the same age as Nicole Mercier [note: a granddaughter], so Normand (Nicole Mercier's brother) is older

MMC: I believe Gilles is one year older than Normand Mercier

MMC: And you are 34?

NMS: yes.

MMC: let's see Mario's [note: a grandson] birthday is May 31<sup>st</sup>. I think Normand was born in June?

NMS: You have a lot of birthdays to remember! With your children, your grandchildren and your great grandchildren

MMC: I can't remember all of those!

NMS: Who could?

MMC: And I used to tell them when we started having our children, we didn't have books to write it all down like they do now. I didn't think of it at that time. If I had thought of it, I could have taken most any book and written down the date when someone was born. If I had, we would have all that information now. I didn't do that.

NMS: You had other things to keep you busy at that time! You had a lot of work to do! You didn't have just that to be concerned with.

MMC: I used to say, this new house, I won't live long enough to be here very long. Everyone has to go some time. When Georges died, I was 75. He was 80. We were 5 years apart.

NMS: Why did you build this house?

MMC: The other one was very old and too small for the number of children that we had. In the old house, there were no separations upstairs. We would put a big curtain across the room to make some separations. All the children were up there. There were no rooms and there was not enough space.

NMS: Was mom living here at that time?

MMC: yes

NMS: Before she was married? During the days when they were dating, did they used to come here?

MMC: Yes, most of the time they would come here.

NMS: Was there anywhere in particular where they were in the house?

MMC: In the parlor (living room)

NMS: When they wanted to have a date on Saturday night, with all of the daughters you had, did they all bring their boyfriends over here?

MMC: We worked it out. Sometimes they went out, but most of the time they came here.

NMS: Who else was around her age?

MMC: There was Florence [note: a daughter]. Aline was the first to get married. When Laura was married, she was 24 years old. Huguette and Lucille [note: two daughters] were younger. They were the last ones here before going to the United States.

NMS: So, when Mom was dating, she would bring her dates here and spend time in the parlor? Were they there alone or did they bring the rest of the family with them?

MMC: I was never the kind of woman to be in there with them. Georges, however, would keep an eye on them. During that time, we also had “la vieille maison” (that was an annex behind the “big house” which was in the front). I still had some young children at that time, and I would often go to bed...while the others were up. Georges was the type who would be more vigilant.

NMS: So Pepère would look in every now and then...to make sure everything was proper

MMC: Yes. If you asked your mother, I’m sure she could tell you more. We didn’t have the liberties that people today have.

NMS: Things were different back then

MMC: I didn’t go out much myself. My parents were quite strict. We couldn’t go out even in the neighborhood. It was dangerous. To say that I dated much...no.

NMS: Were you less strict with your daughters?

MMC: My father? Oh, me with my daughters? I was never very strict, but Georges was. I would say, you keep a much closer eye on the girls than our boys.

NMS: When they were in the parlor, did it ever happen that the younger children wanted to go in there to see what was going on? To bug them a bit?

MMC: I was the youngest of my sisters, so they didn’t bother me much.

NMS: I meant your children, here,

MMC: Not bad. Like Adrien [note: a son], he wasn’t one much to intrude on others. He was a bit shy. Armand [note: a son] was not shy...and he’s not now either! And Laurent. Well, they did tease each other. I can’t tell you all the stories. Is she filming me?

NMS: I think she is just practicing as she hasn’t used it for a long time.

MMC: If we are talking, is that disturbing her?

NMS: If it is disturbing her, she will tell us. She is not shy either. Is there someone arriving?

MMC: No, I thought I saw someone go by.

NMS: Were there sometimes when they went out to a dance?

MMC: That didn't happen very often. They did go out on dates

NMS: When your daughters went out on a date, did they have a specific time when they needed to be home?

MMC: I didn't give them a curfew. It wasn't as loose as things are now.

NMS: Was Père waiting for them at the door when they got back?

MMC: No. We had good daughters. In those days, we didn't hear stories like we hear today. Things were not as liberal as they are now. It is TOO liberal now.

NMS: Things have changed

MMC: It is now the norm for couples to live together.

NMS: Do you remember anyone else that my mother went out with other than Dad? Did she have any other boyfriends?

MMC: I'm sure there were others. I can't seem to recall. Did she go out with Cecilia's (André Gosselin's sister) husband, Benoit Turmelle (before they were married) Well, maybe she didn't go out with him but he kind of liked her. I guess you aren't about to go ask her that! Seems to me she went out with others, but I can't seem to remember.

NMS: Did it happen often that my Dad would come here to visit? That he would come to see her here?

MMC: Oh yes.

NMS: Did you know him before he was dating her?

MMC: No, we hadn't met him. I got along very well with him. He was nice. He was just like us. We got along very well.

NMS: Did you know his family?

MMC: No, I didn't know them...or know his sisters. Honestly, I never went out very much.

NMS: You spent most of your life on this road (Rang St Gabriel)

MMC: Yes. After we were married, Georges would go into the village (St Marie de Beauce) during the week to get groceries and do errands. He would also go see his sister, Marie. Of course, he would often work late so when Sunday came, he would rest. In the early days, I would have liked to go out and I would be lonely and kind of bored, but he wanted to rest. So, we didn't go out. Sometimes when we were first married, we would go visit his mother in Scott Junction.

NMS: You went to mass? That was your opportunity to go out?

MMC: Yes! We didn't miss mass. When we were first married with young children and lived down the road, my brother Albert was not married and lived next door to us. Well, then someone watched the children and I would go to mass with Albert.

NMS: Did it ever happen that you went to mass with all of the children?

MMC: No. In the beginning, they were too young. When they were old enough, I brought them. In the winter, when it was very cold, we would go in the horse drawn sleigh. There was a special little seat that we set up in the front where the children would sit. We would be covered up in a heavy pelt. We would get back and our feet would be frozen!

NMS: You didn't have to worry about wearing your seat belt back then!

MMC: No, there were no seat belts back then! Just think now, we sit comfortably in the car and we still find it difficult. We find it tiring to go a bit far. I had a sister who had died in St. Elzéar. We were still living down the road near Albert. To go to the funeral, I had to sit on the two men, Albert and Georges. We had collars that we put around us to be all wrapped up...with big mittens and we were still freezing! You can imagine how cold our feet got as well. It was tough!

NMS: Well at least their knees must have been warm, with you sitting on their laps!

MMC: They were not as chilly as I was! But they were susceptible to having cold feet as well. They didn't have footwear as warm as what we have today. They had boots. They were not insulated but they had felt in them.

NMS: Was my mother (Aurore) troublesome when she was young?

MMC: Aurore, no...she wasn't too bad that one. One who was a teaser was Florence. She would pick on Aurore.

NMS: When both of them went to find a job in town, they went together didn't they?

MMC: Yes, they both went to work at the Patisserie [note: Vachon Bakery]

NMS: Wasn't it at the Chassé mill that they worked?

MMC: Oh yes! Let me see, did Aurore ever work at the Patisserie?

NMS: I don't ever remember hearing that she worked at the Patisserie

MMC: No, it was at the Chassé mill that they worked. I don't know exactly what Aurore did there. Florence was on piece work. The faster she worked, the more money she made. She would get home and be so tired, because she had worked so hard. At that time, I don't know if you've ever heard of (I can't make out the name). He wanted to go out with Florence. He was

working at the same place and he kept looking for an opportunity to connect with her. He couldn't believe that she wouldn't be interested. Guy Fecteau [note: who Florence eventually married] was friends with this guy.

NMS: I remember my mother saying, you know your watch that you gave me to keep so I can hand it down to Valeda [Nicole's daughter and Valéda Couture's great granddaughter] as a souvenir from you?

MMC: Yes

NMS: My mother had told me that was the first Christmas present that she and Florence had been able to work and earn enough to buy you a present with their own wages.

MMC: Yes. They were both very generous. They've both always been very generous. Florence, as well, has always been generous and still is to this day. She keeps sending me money. "Ah bien, banale." Both of them are so generous.

NMS: That's why we kept that special. The watch that they said was the first Christmas present they had been able to afford to buy you.

MMC: That's exactly it

NMS: I am still saving it to give to Valeda when she is older, as a special memento of you

MMC: Really!

NMS: Do you remember how my mother met my father?

MMC: Well now...She must have told me, but I can't remember. They may have double dated some with Florence.

MMC: Did Aurore ever date anyone else? She would be in the best position to answer that, but you aren't likely to ask her! I'm not sure if Laura would know.

NMS: I know my mother lived at Laura's house for a while.

MMC: Yes, that is true. Florence and Aurore both lived there. It was the year that Daniel [note: Laura's husband] had been sick. It's best not to talk too much about that, but I know that Aurore and Florence were there at the time.

NMS: I thought maybe they lived there because they were rebuilding the main house here at the time.

MMC: Yes, we were rebuilding at that time. We were living in the older annex of the house. The boys were living in the building we had been using as the chicken coop. They cleaned it all up and moved the beds in there. They had to stay somewhere! The girls would sleep in the attic

of the older annex of the house. Was Aurore and Florence staying up there? That's right! That's one of the reasons when your mother got married, she needed to be somewhere else as she couldn't get ready and all dressed up in the attic on her wedding day! With her long white wedding dress, it was hard to keep things clean up in the attic. They were lucky to be able to stay at Laura's! Laura worked hard. She had painted inside her home in preparation for the wedding.

MMC: Oh, that is going to disturb Martine with what she is trying to do

NMS: Its ok, he loves his mom! Did they buy their wedding dresses and everything else they needed at that time? It wasn't homemade? They bought them?

MMC: Oh yes. It was in Québec City. I don't know exactly where. That's where she also bought her going away wedding outfit.

NMS: Had she gone shopping with Florence? It wasn't with you that she had gone shopping?

MMC: Oh no. I wasn't any good at that. I've never been very good with that. They did those themselves.

NMS: You never had much of a chance to go visit Québec City?

MMC: Oh no, I've never gone!

NMS: You've never gone? Even though it's that close?

MMC: No. You know, raising a family of 12 children and working all the time, as I was telling you, I couldn't go out. It was only once the children moved to the United States that we went to visit them. Laurent used to take us to go visit them.

NMS: What did you think when your children decided to move to the United States?

MMC: Well, let me tell you, I found that difficult. They all left one, one after the other. The girls, the last ones, Aurore – no Huguette and Lucille. When those two, when they decided. At that time, they were working at Patisserie Vachon and were living here. Georges would bring them back and forth to work and sometimes they would travel with a guy named Travers who also worked there. Then they decided they wanted to move to the US as well. Now, that was hard! They were the last ones left. Then there was Armand, he was the last one to leave. When they all left ...and Armand used to help me sometimes. That was really hard when they left, and I was alone. But we have to get used to it. God gave us children but really, HE just lets us borrow them.

NMS: It must have been a difficult decision for them to make, to leave.

MCC: Oh yes. Huguette, as the youngest of the girls, she was here and helped out a lot. Huguette would say, "When am I going to be able to go away to work?" She would have liked



to get more education. Maybe be a secretary. She had an interest in doing something like that. But we didn't have the money so, she was only able to go to school the same as the others. I would say to her, "At some point it will be your turn to go pour *good* [note: Memère actually uses the English word!]. And when you are ready to go, I will let you go. I'll manage by myself." That is the way it turned out. When she went away, she did not come back. For a while, when she was working in town, she would travel back and forth here. But when she moved to the US...

NMS: They left before my Mom and Dad? The first ones to go were Florence and then the boys? Uncle Adrien, Uncle Clement [note: two sons].

MMC: Yes. I do believe Clement left the same time as Adrien.

NMS: And my father went then as well? I know we all moved after my father had been there a while.

MMC: Wasn't Guy Fecteau [note: Florence's husband] the one to go first?

NMS: With Matante Florence?

MMC: Yes. I think the others went afterwards

NMS: I think at first, Uncle Adrien and Uncle Clem lived with Aunt Florence

MMC: Yes. There were others too. The son of Albert Gosselin [note: Valéda Couture's brother), Gerard. They called him "Ti-Sous" at the time. It appears he thought he was the boss over there, especially about the food and all and "Ti-Guy" didn't like that too much. And really, that didn't make much sense, so he didn't stay there that long. So, Gerard came back to Sainte Marie and went to work at the Patisserie Vachon. No, it was the other shop where he went to work. He is still there to this day. He's not bad off at all. His wife works away. They have a good life.

NMS: When mom was married, was it a big wedding? She was married at the church in Sainte Marie?

MMC: Yes, she was married at the church in Sainte Marie and the reception was at a hall in Scott Junction. I can't remember the name of the place exactly.

NMS: I think I've seen pictures of it.

MMC: Let me see, did the gathering come back here that night? Of course, it was at Laura's house. And then, they left for their honeymoon.

NMS: Where did they go for their honeymoon?

MMC: I'm not sure. I don't remember.

NMS: That's understandable. You would have a lot of them to remember!

MMC: I don't know if Laura could tell you

NMS: Then they lived in Scott when they came back?

MMC: Yes. They lived in a house owned by Albert Couture [note: her brother-in-law].

NMS: Martine was born in that house?

MMC: Yes

NMS: I remember, we used to come here often. After mom was married, she would come here quite often to visit?

MMC: Yes. She would come on Sundays, just about every weekend.

NMS: That's what I was telling Valeda. When we lived in Canada, we would come often. Almost every weekend

MMC: Yes.

NMS: One thing I remember is when we decided to move to the US, Pepère Couture would tell me I would have to do something to be able to speak in English. Do you know what that is?

MMC: No.

NMS: He said I would have to flip my tongue to the other side in order to speak English.

MMC: He used to say that. He was not able to speak English

MMC: My father had gone to the United States with one of his brothers. He had gone there to work when he was married. He was a widower and then married a second time. He was poor so he went to find work in the United States. He knew how to speak English. He had learned how to speak English.

NMS: You have learned some English. You have learned a few words here and there.

MMC: Oh no, not me! I would get it all wrong! I would try, but oh no! That would work about as well as trying to get the cows to go up in the attic!

NMS: I think you have a wonderful family. You must have done something right!

MMC: I haven't done much! I was not a good cook

NMS: Oh no...that's why your children are all so skinny. It's probably also because they were so mis-treated that they never come back to see you.

NMS: You hosted a lot of people here. You've made meals for a LOT of people here!

MMC: I didn't do anything extraordinary!

NMS: With all of your children, and they brought their friends and their dates. Then they brought their spouses and children and now their children have brought their children.

MMC: Now I'm not good for anything. Most of the time when they come now, they do everything.

NMS: Well, after all at your age.

MMC: I'm not good for much now.

NMS: Want to know something? This house here, its HOME for a LOT of people!

MMC: Well, I've never been very good at hosting people. No...no

NMS: Oh sure, we've all been very mistreated by you... We consider ourselves VERY LUCKY to have you as our grandmother!

MMC: I can't do very much for you now. I often say that now I'm only good for being a nuisance.

NMS: for being a nuisance?!?!?

MMC: Yes

NMS: Oh, my goodness!

MMC: You know, when you get to be my age. I can still thank God, however, that I can still do some things. Like I was telling Rachel [note: Adrien's daughter], I have to consider myself fortunate, I am luckier than Jean. Rachel was saying "You say you aren't able to do much, but you are better off than Jean [note: her eldest son who was in a nursing home at this time]. You are home and do what you want. You are still able while Jean..." She was saying that I was better off than Jean. He doesn't get along well with the staff there and he is stuck there. When you get to the point that you can't even go to the bathroom by yourself. When you have to depend on others to lift you and dress you and bring you to the bathroom. He is in his bed and can't get up. He can sit up, but they have to put him in a wheelchair. Same thing when it is mealtime. He is fully dependent on the nurses and direct care staff. So, it's understandable that he finds life difficult and time drags on. Who is it that went to see him recently, that told me about it. I can't remember now who it was. In any case, they said he was crying. He was saying my mother is still fit at her advanced age while look at the condition that I'm in!

He is so overweight. Conrad [note: her youngest son who still lived with her] went to see him, last week I think as he didn't have time to go this week. Conrad went to clean out his electric

shaver as Jean is unable to do that himself anymore. Clement went to see him. It was his birthday and they brought him some chocolate. A little box, well about this size. He took a chocolate. It was chocolate covered cherry and he choked. They were afraid that he would choke to death. That scared them! So, he can't really eat any candy anymore. He has always liked candy, but he has stomach problems now and sweets are not good for him. He has all kinds of medicine that he has to take. Conrad buys some for him and then Conrad has to pay for the prescriptions that the doctor has ordered for him.

NMS: Does it seem possible that it has been 35 years since my parents were married?

MMC: It's hard to believe. I had lost track. Like the others, celebrating their 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. We were talking about that and it seemed to me hard to believe it was 25 years already...like Armand and Adrien. A lot of things have passed, we went to those weddings...your grandfather passed away...

You know the car your grandfather had, it needed to be fixed. He had made arrangements to get his car repaired, to make sure it was all in proper working order. Then he left for the hospital. And Ti-Jean had taken the car in to the garage where he was working, and it was ready the night he died. Your grandfather had planned to make a trip to the US.

You know that Ti-Jean liked to go the races. That was on a Sunday. Your grandfather died on Monday. Gisele was going out with Laurent at the time. Gisele, she was so nice! She really liked your grandfather! Conrad and I had gone on Sunday to visit your grandfather in the hospital. He'd had prostate surgery. When Conrad and I arrived at the hospital, Gisele and I took the elevator and the Laurent and Conrad had taken the stairs as the elevator was full. Gisele and I arrived before the men. We went to speak to your grandfather, and he was answering but we couldn't understand him. When Laurent arrived in the room he said "Papa, was it that tough to have that surgery?" He responded indicating that he never anticipated that the surgery would be that painful. He had waited too long. He should have had that surgery a long time ago. It was difficult to carry on a conversation. We came home after a while. Your grandfather had been in the middle of preparing some cuts of meat and the incomplete work was still there. Conrad had made an effort to finish what your grandfather had started. Adrien had come to visit on Sunday as well or maybe it was on Monday that he made the trip. Your grandfather kept asking for Adrien. He kept asking over and over to see him. That's when we called him to see if he could come to Canada. So, he made the trip and brought Rachel, who was young at the time. She did not like going to see her grandfather at the hospital. She did not want to go there at all, so I had stayed here with her. Then we got the news. Adrien said he had a good conversation with his father, but something told him that he was failing. He no more than had arrived back home in Maine when he got the news that his father had passed away.

NMS: Martine and I were talking about the fact that we felt we were lucky. We had also made a trip to come visit Pepère in the hospital. I believe it was about a week or so before he passed away.

MMC: Yes, you had both come

NMS: He was doing well at the time! We'd had a nice chat. We had showed him some pictures. He was the one looking after the other man sharing a room with him.

MMC: Oh yes. Liniere Lehoux, one of our neighbors, was in the hospital as well, a couple of rooms down from Pepère. Mr. Lehoux would get up in the middle of the night and walk to the window. Pepère would look after him, trying to get him to go back to bed. Everybody liked your grandfather!

NMS: Do you remember all the cards you received at the time of Pepère's funeral?

MMC: Gisele took care of all of those. There were a LOT! And a lot of people bought masses for him as well. Laura sometimes says that she wonders if they were all held. I don't know. She had spoken to the secretaries who handle that. She knows them well. They responded that most of the masses paid in memory of Mr. Couture had taken place. Now I paid to have another take place this spring. I don't have a chance to go to town and Conrad often doesn't have time to fit that in, so I have Laura take care of it.

NMS: I just told him to watch out for the stove

MMC: Do you think we should give Jamey something to eat?

NMS: We'll ask him in a minute

NMS: I wanted to ask you; do you have any wishes you would like to extend to my parents for their 35<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary?

MCC: Oh yes, I have something ready to give you, that I want you to put in your purse and bring back to them.

NMS: What are you doing Jamey?

MMC: ...let him be, let him be.

MMC: Give this to Ti-Phonse [note: Joseph Alphonse Morin's nickname in Canada] and Aurore on their 35<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. The card is not pretty! I can't get to the village to buy one. But I'll show it to you. I wrote it myself. You might find it silly! There was already something written in it.

NMS: Is it ok if I read it?

MMC: Certainly! May the day of your 35<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary bring you joy, health, happiness and a long life. From your mother who thinks of you, Valéda.

NMS: Its beautiful!

MMC: There was already something written. It isn't an anniversary card, but I couldn't go buy one. I happened to have this one. It is made by someone handicapped, who make it with their feet.

NMS: Wow, they make it with their feet?!

MMC: Yes.

NMS: I see that you were also very generous!

MMC: Oh! It's not much!! After all they have done for me! They are always giving me presents, Aurore and Ti-Phonse! This is nothing, and it will probably look like not much compared to what others give. It's not a pretty card.

NMS: NO! As long as it comes from you and it comes from the heart, we know it is special. It's not the actual card that counts, but who it comes from!

MMC: In any case.

NMS: I'm sure they will thank you very much for it!

MMC: I don't need to be thanked for a little thing like this!

NMS: Little thing? It's a BIG thing!

MMC: Oh no...

NMS: It is very special!

MMC: I didn't want to send it through the mail

NMS: I'm sure they will appreciate it!