

AUTOBIOGRAPHY I

I was born in 1909 in Baker Brook, N.K, about 15 miles above Edmundston, N.B., and five miles below Fort Kent, Maine, in a little house built by my father, who was married to Anastasie Nadeau from Clair, N.B. in 1904. My father's name was Joseph B. Marquis. The "B" stands for Ben (Benoit) who was a farmer-lumberman, married to Catherine Cureux St. Germain, daughter of Jos. Cureux, farmer-lumberman employed by the Cunliffe Lumber Co. of Fort Kent. Grandpa Cureux gave half of his farm to his son-in-law and when he retired from his lumbering life, died soon after. Grandpa Ben Marquis took over in the woods and Uncle Michel Cureux, his brother-in-law, took care of the piece of the farm that his father had left him. Those two half-farms were too small to raise a family on, but the Canadian government made concessions of extra land in back of the district already settled. So Uncle Michel took over a piece of land on the Baker Brook and Grandpa Marquis took a piece on a branch of the Sesson Brook about five or six miles north of his home. Remembering that Grandpa Cureux had given him land that naturally should have gone to his brother-in-law, he gave half of his new land to Uncle Michel. The two developed maple sugar plants about a mile north of that new land, a short distance from the boundary between Quebec and New Brunswick. My mother's father was Belonie Nadeau, son of Agapit and he had a big farm about ¼ mile west of the mouth of Caron Brook. He was married to Desneiges Michaud, daughter of Pierre Michaud from Wallagrass, Me., who had moved to the outlet of Baker Lake where he operated a grist mill and sawmill. My mother was one of 14 children.

I had an older brother, Emile, who died of diphtheria when I was four years old. I have two brothers and four sisters living (1981). Four sisters and two brothers are dead. I was baptized the day I was born by Fr. Antoine Comeau, the pastor of St. Hilaire, a very good priest. Baker Brook did not have a church and a pastor of their own then. I went to school at six and my first teacher, Annie Cyr, now widow of Antonio Albert, is still living, Thank God. (1981).

I had no nuns among my grade school teachers, but all those girls were first class Catholics. One of them became a nun. Marie Daigle with the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary. Her sister, Cora, also became a nun and her brother, Hilaire became a priest. Another teacher, Regina Martin, now married to Dr. Cyr in St. Basile, NB., had three of her brothers become priests. At 15 I went to college in the hope of becoming a priest. My Pastor asked me one day if I would like to be a priest. I was not sure that I had what it takes, but I said that I would like to. So it was decided there and then that I would go to college. When Dad objected

that he was not rich and had a big family the pastor promised that we would get the help needed and we did. Of course I did not have what it takes to be a good priest, but between that day and my ordination day 15 years later, I went through some good training. I studied in Ste. Anne de Ia Pocatiere, P.Q., one of the nicest spots on the south bank of the St. Lawrence River, about 75 miles below Quebec City. The college was built on a mountainside. It was about a mile from the river and is surrounded by flat land that extends all the way to the river on the north and south to the wooded rolling country extending all the way to Maine. To the east and northeast, the flat land extends for maybe 20 miles with a few high rocky outcrops here and there. We were 600 students at the college, mostly boarders. We had 40 priests professors and a group of 20 nuns were in charge of the kitchen and the laundry.

There I was influenced by many saintly priests. I graduated 50 years ago and very few of my professors are alive. Many of them had degrees from Universities in Europe and they were paid a dollar a day plus room and board! A section of the building was set apart for them when they retired. Because of this my father had to pay only \$200.00 a year for tuition plus books, laundry, medicine and of course travel, which were extras. This allowed many poor boys to go through college and become priests like myself. The college was started to provide priests for the Church, but those who wished to become doctors, lawyers, engineers, etc., were welcome too. The college year would start early in September with two weeks vacation at Christmas and the end of the school year came around the 19th of June. I played in the band and orchestra for five years and our training in singing was not neglected by far. The three Bourque brothers, Charles, Joseph and Albert were in charge of the musical program and later Fr. Leon Destroismaisons. I was never first in my class, but never the last. I succeeded in getting my B.A., Thank God. We were 38 students in my class and 25 of us became priests.

At the end of my college years I hesitated before joining the clergy, and I tried Agriculture for a year but did not finish the three year course. My nervous system was never up to par. Also it was in the early thirties and Dad could not help me financially. So I worked in the woods as a pulp cutter. The first year it was with my brother Willie. We were paid \$2.50 a cord to cut it and haul it four miles to the nearest stream. The second winter I worked for my Uncle Ernest Marquis, who paid me \$15.00 a month with room and board. More about that later. My pastor, Fr. Albert Poirier, did not approve of that. He said that with my college education I could do more for my family and my Church. Fr. Emile Saindon, originally from my parish, was working in the Indian missions of James Bay as a Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate. He came around in the winter of

1934 and Fr. Poirier arranged an interview. There was a possibility that I would be admitted as a helper (brother) to the missionaries. So early in July I went to Montreal and was admitted at the Novitiate at Ville LaSalle. This was at the west end of the city at the foot of Lake St. Louis on the St. Lawrence River above the Lachine Rapids. It was close to the Lachine Village and the old starting point of the birchbark canoes of the fur trading companies for the Great Lakes and the Far West. Because of my college education, the good Oblate Fathers suggested that I enlist as a candidate to the priesthood, and I did, Thank God. The support and inspiration I get from my daily Mass and Breviary are a safeguard and my best consolation.

After a year at the Novitiate of Ville LaSalle, I made my first vows, was admitted in the Congregation of the Oblate Fathers and moved to Richelieu where I studied philosophy and theology for two years. There I received a call from Saskatchewan where the good fathers had a school of priestly studies. We were 60 new oblates in my class and out west they were short of students. So 12 of us volunteered for work in Western Canada and we were sent to Labret, Saskatchewan to finish our training. Our school there was a beautiful place on the South Shore of Lake Qu'Apelle, in a wide valley about 200 feet below the prairie. Saskatchewan is a plateau about 2,000 above sea level. The Southern half of it has no forest, only a few poplars and willows in low places. The Northern part is covered with spruce and fir; the forest belt. That was in 1937, and the farmers there were fighting to survive. They were mostly wheat growers and grain did not sell. They were also recovering from a series of dust storms that killed the grain and starved the cattle. The provincial government had to take their debts and the poor farmers tried a new start. In Manitoba life was hard, too, but they practiced mixed farming and if they could not sell much they produced enough to survive, not comfortably, though.

Across the lake from our school there was an Indian school directed by the Oblate Fathers and the Gray Nuns. The students were children from the Sioux, Assiniboine and Objibwe Indians living on the Reservations around there. It is during the three years that I lived there that I got acquainted with the Indians and began to appreciate them. In 1939 I was ordained a priest by Archbishop Monahan of Regina, Sask. My studies were not complete, but it was a custom in the religious orders to ordain a young man a year before his graduation. The six years I studied with the Oblate Fathers did not cost my family a penny. The good fathers took care of the expenses which amounted to some \$400.00 per year for each student. After our ordination we were allowed to say Mass and the stipends we received helped to pay our expenses. We were not allowed to absolve sinners in confession before graduation.

I graduated in 1940 and after a visit to my family I was appointed professor of physics, chemistry and nature study at the college in Gravelbourg, Sask. We had a couple of hundred students and we were ten professors. It was a busy life but the other teachers had a bigger load than I had. We would help in the parishes around there at Christmas and Easter. During the summer holidays some pastors would go on vacation and we would take care of their parish. I did that for a couple of years and then one day as I was preparing an experiment in the laboratory, I sprayed my face with sulfuric acid and nearly lost my sight. I recovered from that accident thanks to the know-how of a good doctor but the work was too much for my health and I was transferred to parish work in different parts of Saskatchewan and Manitoba. During that time I served in quite a few parishes of North Dakota and Minnesota. Minnesota has the lakes and trees of the east and the nice farmland of the prairies. In Edgeley, N.D., I was just a short distance from the place where Custer was killed. In International Falls, Minn., I was at the foot of Rainy Lake. Laverandrie had crossed it on his way to Lake of the Woods, Lake Winnipeg and the far west. I worked in parishes and Indian missions for seven years and my health gave up, so I came to Maine for a rest. I went back after a few months but did not last long and six months later I was back in Maine. I spent the summer of 1950 in Greenville, Maine, near Moosehead Lake helping the pastor, Fr. David Surette, who had two churches and many summer visitors to take care of. I spent most of the winter of 1951 in Calais, Maine, when the pastor, Fr. Louis Surette was in Florida. I spent part of the summer of 1951 with Fr. Daniel Hagerty in Ft. Fairfield. I liked his dry Irish humor.

That year came potato picking time. I joined a group from Ft. Kent working on a nice farm in Ft. Fairfield, Me. We were paid 20 cents a barrel and a child could pick 20 barrels a day. We paid \$2.00 for board and slept in a shed with a good stove. I would get up around 4:30 in the morning and say my prayers. We had breakfast and I was with the other pickers in the field at 6:00 a.m. I was planning to pick from 20 to 30 barrels a day but next to me was a lady who had a baby two months old and she was picking 60 barrels a day. I had to pick at least as much to save the honor of the clergy. One day I picked 75 barrels. I was pushing myself a little too hard. I caught a cold and Father D. Surette called from Greenville. He wanted to take a couple of weeks' vacation and he wanted me to take care of his parish while he was away. He kept me for the winter so that he could have me for the coming summer. During the winter I visited the many lumber camps in the neighborhood and the money the men gave me helped him pay me. The next winter I moved to a lumber camp and after a few months to Rookwood. He let me keep all the money the men gave me. Fr. D.

Surette was my pastor for five years. All that time the Most Reverend Bishop allowed me to serve in his diocese but he kept telling me that he could not adopt me as one of his priests. In the spring of 1957 he changed his mind and took me under his guidance and protection. In June he sent me to Ellsworth with the incomparable Fr. Daniel Honan. In September I came to Eagle Lake as assistant to Fr. Antonio Blais and chaplain for the hospital. Fr. Blais died of cancer in 1959 and Fr. Eugene Bettez moved from Sheridan near Ashland to Eagle Lake. I worked with him for a year and my health began to cause me trouble. My nerves were never reliable. So the good Bishop transferred me to Oquossoc with Fr. Joseph Allard. He stationed me at Stratton, one of his missions 25 miles east of Oquossoc where I lived until 1967. Fr. Allard was transferred to Braddley the next year and Fr. Gilbert Patenaude became my pastor. I had some good friends in Stratton and they took good care of me. Seven miles south of Stratton is Sugarloaf, the famous ski resort, which was growing fast. I said Mass for the Catholic skiers on Sundays during the winter. Stratton is a beautiful place. Flagstaff Lake is very close to town. I could see Bigelow Mountain from my window, a 4,000 ft. high beauty. In the vicinity we had Crocker, Sugarloaf, Abraham and Saddleback, all over 4,000 ft. high. Rangeley Lake was less than 20 miles from my place. West of it was Moose Lake, Meguntic and the Richardson Lakes. North of it was Kennebago, to the northwest was Parnachenee where Eisenhower came fishing. North of Stratton we had the chain of ponds: beautiful lakes between high hills all wooded and very colorful in the Fall. Many majestic pine trees grew around my house and two or three miles north we had the Cathedral Pines Campground. The Dead River and the Brown Paper Co. had camps in the neighborhood and I visited them in the winter. The Beaudry Lumber Co. of Sherbrooke, P.Q., had lumbering operations near the upper Moose River. They built a big sawmill at Holeb along the Canadian Pacific Railroad. During the summer many of the workers brought their families there and I was asked to go say Mass for them on Sundays. It was a beautiful 50 mile ride in the forest where I could enjoy deer, bears and bobcats. I got involved with the Boy Scouts as District Chaplain and Unit Commissioner. My little house was just 16 x 20 ft. with a lean-to in the back which served as chapel for my daily Masses. I had a garage for my car and a shed for my stove wood. I converted part of the lean-to into a woodworking shop. The first winter there I burned oil but the oil burner was too small and I was cold. So a good parishioner gave me a nice little box stove and I had no trouble finding stove wood. The first winter I paid \$100.00 for my fuel oil but the next winter my stove wood cost me \$25.00. Oil was 15 cents a gallon and wood was \$28.00 a cord. I would get my own wood from the forest nearby. Today fuel oil is over a dollar a gallon and stove wood over \$60.00 a cord. Times have changed...

In 1967 I was named pastor of the little St. John Parish, 10 miles west of Fort Kent in the St. John River Valley in Northern Maine. I was there six beautiful years. A friend gave me a canoe and I bought a snowmobile. I fixed an old wood camp near Carter Brook about 10 miles south of the rectory. Some good friends from Fort Kent moved it a short distance to a public lot and it became Snowbird Snowmobile Clubhouse. In summer I would canoe the St. John and the Allagash Rivers. In winter I would ride my snowmobile on the woods roads of the vicinity and even as far as St. Pamphile, 80 miles west of Fort Kent, where my brother is working. We would drive our cars and trailers part of the way and then on the snowmobiles over the frozen river and old woods roads. When the weather was right and the trail in top condition, I had two friends ready to come with me but they backed out at the last minute. So I called my brother that I was coming alone and to send help if I was not there for supper. I had an axe, snowshoes, matches and food. I drove slowly and was there before four o'clock. I was prudent but not scared. My experience as a woodsman and scout leader made me comfortable. But some of my friends were worried. The good Bishop let me use my canoe and a snowmobile but he let me understand that I better be prudent and thank God, I still can use them when I am 72 years old.

After six years in St. John I realized that I was getting old and tired of living alone. I had a beautiful rectory and a nice little church. There were three good sisters of Presentation in a convent across the road from the church. They took care of the sacristy and taught C.C.D. St. John was a little special to me for this reason: Around 1931 we were pulp driving on the St John River nearby on Sunday morning. Dad was the boss and the pastor of the little church was one of his boyhood friends. The bell was ringing for Mass so Dad said, "We are not in a hurry, let us go to Mass." And we threw our pickeroons on the shore and went to Mass. In our work clothes we stood in the back of the church during the Mass and the sermon. I do not remember what was said, but I remembered that Mass 40 years later when I came back as pastor. I succeeded Fr. Roger Proulx who had been pastor there for six years and left the place in top condition. After I asked for a transfer the Most Reverend Bishop sent me to North Caribou, Pastor at the Church of the Sacred Heart. Father Abel Hebert had been there for eight years. He was also in charge of the Catholic Church in Stockholm, 11 miles from his rectory. There was a nice big old rectory, a big church and a parochial school that was used for Catechism classes and other parish activities. After a few weeks I asked a Mrs. Bouchard for a housemaid. No question about it she was real good but I had been alone all my life and could not get used to living with a lady. I was real sad when I brought her back home after a few months. The future looked bleak. I would live and

probably die alone ... but a few weeks after that I fell sick and resigned. I spent a few months of convalescence in the Nursing Home in Eagle Lake, Me., and was appointed chaplain at the Northern Maine Medical Center in Fort Kent and that is what I have been doing for over six years now. Once in a while the good Bishop sends me to vacant parishes to act as administrator until a permanent pastor is appointed. That way I spent a few weeks in Limestone and seven months in Grand Isle, where the good parishioners made a celebration for my 40 years of priesthood. In the Fall of 1979, I was in Upper Frenchville after their pastor of 19 years died of a heart attack. In the Spring of 1980, I spent three months in Orono when the pastor went on sick leave and in November of the same year I was three months in Eagle Lake for the same reason. In 1949 I joined the Knights of Columbus and became a Fourth Degree member in 1958. Lou Ayoob of Fort Fairfield gave me both degrees. In 1951 I joined the Catholic Foresters. Ernest Michaud of Eagle Lake was their field representative and doing a real good job. He was backed up by Adrian Jacques of Wallagrass who was also outstanding. In June 1980, I joined the Curcillo Movement in Millinocket, Me. Ted Landry from Lincoln, Me., was in charge and Fr. Royal Parent was spiritual director. It was a real booster for my spiritual life.

