We had a quiet family life there.

From recording prepared by
Gertrude Mantha,
November 2004–March 2005
NEW IDENTITIES

Upon leaving Cache Bay, the lovers take refuge in Ottawa, the individualistic nature of life in cities making it easier to hide their love. They adopt new identities. Joseph anglicizes his family name: the francophone Joseph Roy becomes the anglophone Joseph Ray and Marie-Louise Labelle introduces herself from now on as Marie-Louise Ray. I wonder if when they change their names Joseph reveals to Marie-Louise that he was baptized Désiré Jérémie and that he was known as Jérémie Alphonse during his stay out West. Maybe not. After all, she has only known him as Joseph A. Roy.

Marie-Louise surely hopes that Joseph will marry her. Living in a common law relationship is not socially admissible in those days. In leaving Hanmer, her parents, brothers and sisters, she gave up everything for him, including her reputation. But Joseph chooses an ambiguous position. On the one hand, he has rejected the Church in leaving it without asking for a dispensation. On the other hand, he refrains from turning his back on the Church completely by marrying Marie-Louise, since if he were to do so he would be excommunicated. For a man of the cloth, being excommunicated is unthinkable. So he chooses instead to not break definitely with the Church and to not commit himself permanently to Marie-Louise. After all, it is easier to live in ambiguity than to commit to a definite choice. Easy for him. More difficult for Marie-Louise.

OTTAWA

Moving from Hanmer to Ottawa constitutes a major step in Marie-Louise’s life. Hanmer had only about one hundred inhabitants whereas Ottawa in 1916 has a population of 100,561. In contrast with the homogeneous francophone and Catholic population of Hanmer, Ottawa distinguishes itself by its cultural diversity. Irish and French-Catholics mix with Jews, Germans and Italians. When Joseph and Marie-Louise arrive in the capital, the war in Europe is
breathing new life into the country’s economy. Ottawa is undergoing a transformation passing gradually from an economy dependent on the forest industry to an economy based on the growth of the civil service. On Parliament Hill, work is in progress to reconstruct Parliament’s Centre Block, destroyed in a fire on February 3rd that same year. Grand houses are starting to go up in the Glebe, on Clemow Avenue among other streets. Lansdowne Park is home to summer and winter sporting activities and to the annual agricultural and industrial fair in the fall.

It is the first time that Marie-Louise lives in a city and everything represents novelty and learning. She must get her bearings, distinguish “upper town” from “lower town,” and travel through them on a streetcar. Around her, women have gradually started to join the labour market as men are marching off to war. Women are discovering the advantages of earning a salary and are gaining a taste for independence. Many of them have a “career” in the service industries, particularly as domestic help, before getting married.

Marie-Louise discovers the abundance of department stores with the latest in feminine fashions, material by the yards as well as ready-made clothes. On sunny days, she and Joseph can stroll along the canal where high society ladies ride their horses down the Driveway lined with hundred-year-old trees. Every day brings something new and, for this newly arrived couple, the general environment of growth and expansion inspires them to make plans for the future.

RIDEAU PARK (MAY 1917)

While awaiting the baby’s birth, Marie-Louise and Joseph look for a good place to bring up their child. They want a location where they can have a garden, raise some animals, and sell the fruits of their labour. They need money. Joseph has subdivided into two lots one of the parcels of land that he had bought in the township.
On 3 January 1917 he sells one of them for $2,000.

On 12 April 1917, Marie-Louise gives birth to a son. For any woman in love with her partner, such an event is a source of great joy and pride. All the more so for Marie-Louise, as this birth marks an important milestone in her relationship with Joseph. They are no longer merely lovers. They are now parents. For Marie-Louise, this child represents the foundation of a new family that will fill the void left by the absence of the members of her family who are no longer part of her daily life. Joseph baptizes the child himself. They choose to call him Joseph Ray. An influenza epidemic is raging in the Capital and Marie-Louise undoubtedly takes extra precaution to protect her newborn child from this threat.

A month later, on 21 May 1917, Joseph buys in Rideau Park for the amount of $5,000 a house with 2 acres of land, including a barn and an apple orchard. The deed of sale stipulates that it is Lots 133, 134 and 135 facing Stanley Avenue (today known as Pleasant Park Avenue) as well as Lots 187, 188 and 189 facing Billings Avenue. The new owner signs simply “Joseph Ray,” his own name and also that of his newborn son. Rideau Park is a small neighbourhood with wooden sidewalks, where a few French-speaking families live among a majority of anglophone families. It is located on the south side of the Rideau River near the train tracks, slightly removed from the “village” of Billings Bridge. The church, post office and stores in the village serve the inhabitants of Rideau Park and its surroundings.

Joseph and Marie-Louise have chosen a house that measures up to their dreams, a rather spacious house that would allow them to eventually raise a larger family. In addition to the living room, dining room and three bedrooms, a large summer kitchen makes it easier to make cider, to prepare butter, cheese, preserves, and slow-cooked meals, and to butcher provisions in the fall. When snow arrives, they close the summer kitchen and use the dining room as
the winter kitchen. Although unfinished, the basement serves for storage, and a hole in the floor hides a freshwater spring where Joseph and Marie-Louise keep milk, butter and other supplies cool. In the front of the house, a large porch with vine-covered pillars invites one to rest. This unpretentious home will witness the happiest and the worse moments of Marie-Louise’s life.

Today, 279 Pleasant Park (formerly Stanley Street), in Rideau Park

LIFE AS A COUPLE

We had a quiet family life there.

A family life! Marie-Louise’s dream has become reality. She lives with the man she loves in their own home with their newborn child. They are happy.

They got along well. They did not squabble. … They sang a lot. They sang folk songs. Yes, I remember that. I believe that they really got along well because I can’t
During the winter of 1918, Marie-Louise is once again pregnant. But the couple’s joy is tainted with fear because a terrible Spanish flu epidemic just hit Ottawa. It lasts all winter. City authorities take extreme measures to check the disease, but it will only abate in the spring of 1919. Thanks to countless precautions taken by Joseph and Marie-Louise, the epidemic does not infiltrate the little home on Stanley Ave.

Joseph, far-sighted, takes the necessary financial steps to care for his growing family. On 23 August 1918, he sells for $900 the second part of the lot that he had bought in the township of Capreol in September 1911 and had subsequently subdivided.

A few months later, on 30 October 1918, the day Joseph turns 60, Marie-Louise gives birth to a daughter in a small, private hospital located at 183–185 Somerset Street West, on the corner of Elgin Street. What a birthday gift! They now have a boy and a girl. This birth fulfills their happiness. As he had done for their son, Joseph baptizes the baby himself. Bent over the tiny face, how moved he must be to pour Holy water on his own child’s head! He must perform this ritual with all the love and tenderness that a father’s heart can hold. They name their daughter Gertrude Ray. Does the arrival of this new little life make Joseph feel younger or older? Perhaps he feels more intensely the difference in age separating him from Marie-Louise. She is merely 27 years old and probably only sees the bright side of this new addition: the joy of having a girl, an additional bond with the man she loves, and the pleasure of having given him this child on his birthday. As for him, he sees slipping away the time when he and Marie-Louise were alone to enjoy the simple pleasures of life. This child reminds him in a very concrete way of their daily life’s increasing responsibilities.

*remind any arguments. And, they had to love each other very much to have gone through all that. … It was true love.*

**CHAPTER FOUR: Family Life**
But such thoughts disappear like passing shadows when, less than 15 days later, on 11 November 1918, Germany signs the Armistice. The news spreads in the streets and houses like a warm southern breeze easing pains and soothing hearts. The war is over, to everyone’s joy!

**DAILY LIFE**

As with most semi-rural families of their day, Marie-Louise and Joseph raise a few animals, cultivate a patch of land and earn an income by selling their produce. They have known country living and have all the experience necessary. They own a horse named Carney, and a cow. They sell milk to people like their neighbours, the Christies and the Laings. In addition to housekeeping, Marie-Louise separates the cream from the milk and churns it into butter. She also makes cottage cheese in her summer kitchen. Gertrude remembers her mother’s sewing:

*She sewed all our clothes (as well as) our winter coats. And for the boys she made, until they reached a certain age, their pants and everything. A lot of sewing, you know.*

During my interviews with her, Gertrude comes back several times to her mother’s exceptional talents as a seamstress.

*She sewed BEAUTIFULLY really. ... She made everything: coats, suits for the boys, and ... There was nothing she couldn’t do. And it was VERY well done.*

Thus Marie-Louise’s days are very full. Since there are no modern appliances in those days, each task requires a lot of time and effort.
In those days, there were no conveniences. So laundry was quite an affair! They had what they called “duffle boards,” you know, and large tubs. Those must have contained approximately four huge pails of water. And you boiled your white linens in that to make them whiter. And naturally there were no driers either. So you had to hang it all up on the clothesline.

Joseph is also very busy. He has over 100 chickens and has developed quite a clientele. Gertrude reminisces:

I got up with my father sometimes at 5 am because … he had farm chores. So I often had breakfast with him. … He sold eggs. He had clients in the Glebe, I remember that. [She laughs as she looks at me, because I live in the Glebe.] And [his clients] gave him the crusts that they cut from their sandwiches, you know. So he made us French toast with those crusts. That’s what we had for breakfast. And I, I liked being alone with him because I guess he talked with me, and, I don’t know. And Mother slept a little longer.

Marie-Louise and Joseph also grow a rather large garden.

C: Did your father grow tobacco in his garden?
G: I think so because he smoked a pipe.
C: What else did he grow in the garden?
G: Well it was a fairly big garden. In those days, everybody had a garden. All the vegetables for the winter, you know. It was all there.
C: Carrots, peas, beans, and all that?
G: Yes.
C: Was it your mother who managed the garden?
G: Mostly.
C: And him? Did he grow his tobacco himself?
G: Well, I guess he was working in the garden too, you know.
C: They helped each other.\(^\text{11}\)

The garden’s constant guardian is named Fairy. He is the family dog, a mutt with a personality like no other who took upon himself the task of chasing out mercilessly the chickens that venture into the garden.

G: We sent the dog. We would say, “Fairy! Chickens in the garden!” and he chased them out of the garden. But you know most of the time, they were not loose, they were in a hen house.\(^\text{12}\)

When Gertrude’s brother, Lorne, comes back to this story, I ask him:

C: Who trained him?
L: Oh, we didn’t train him. He trained us!\(^\text{13}\)

The family eats healthy food. With produce from the garden, Marie-Louise cans preserves for the winter. She and Joseph know how to make the best of seasonal offerings.

G: They were interested in eating well. We ate dandelions, you know, when they were in season.
C: Yes, the leaves.
G: They were like spinach.
C: Yes. Yes. We still eat them today. They put them more and more in salad mixes because they are good for one’s health.
G: Yes, that’s right.\(^\text{14}\)
So the children grow up in good health, with fresh air and natural produce. Although Marie-Louise and Joseph help each other and share daily chores, there is no doubt that Joseph remains the undisputable head of the household. He manages the property, watches over expenses, makes any large purchases for the household and deals with the clients. It is the family model that Marie-Louise is used to. Her adoptive father, Napoléon, earned the family’s living. Since her domestic tasks keep her busy every waking hour, she no doubt appreciates having someone nearby on whom she can count to manage the finances.

Joseph loves his children. He takes his role as father to heart and participates in their education. Gertrude still has fond memories about those days with her father.

G: *I remember sitting on his lap and he would sing to me.*
C: *Oh yes? What kind of songs?*
G: *Songs like ‘La Poule grise’ and things like that.*
... And I remember combing his hair. And he had beautiful, wavy hair. So I would comb it in funny styles, to make him laugh. No, I have good memories of him like that.**

But Joseph can also be very hard on the children when they behave irresponsibly. The daughter of Marie-Louise and Joseph’s eldest son, Joe, told me a story that happened to her Dad:

My dad was terrible, a rascal, he would get in trouble sometimes. He went for a ride on a horse with another kid. They had horses. And had a great time! A big long hard ride and came back and put the horse in the barn and came in. ... And his dad whipped him for that because what he did was
he left that animal sweating in the barn and he could have died. … He was so angry at the careless, thoughtless thing that my dad had done by leaving that animal and not even thinking.16

It is true that Joe is full of mischief, like most boys of his age, and that he deserves a scolding from time to time. In those days, it was acceptable to hit a child as punishment. Sometimes they used a leather belt or the leather shaving strap used to sharpen razor blades. Joe understands that he deserves to be reprimanded but he does not agree with the method. All his life, he will resent having been hit by his father.

INTELLECTUAL LIFE

Joseph had a classical education. He recognizes the importance of a formal education and cares about his children’s intellectual development. He always keeps in mind the fact that Marie-Louise had very little chance to attend school and that her capacity to read and write remain very limited.

G: She had almost no education really. …. She had learned to write a little, but she had difficulty spelling. … You know, she did not know grammar.

C: When she lived with him, after you were born, did she continue to learn reading and writing with him?

G: I imagine that he may have helped her. It’s possible, yes, because he read a lot. I remember that he would go to the Carnegie Library. Every year they would sell books; they would recycle books. He would arrive with boxes of books. I imagine that she must taken advantage of these books.17 There were always books in our house.18
One of these books is among the souvenirs that one of Marie-Louise’s grandsons, Patrick, has kept from his grandparents. When I met him for the interview, he arrived with a book in hand.

_I brought a book that supposedly belonged to my grandfather. … My grandmother gave it to me._

He hands me a book entitled _Les soirées du Château de Ramezay_, published by l’École littéraire de Montréal in 1900. It contains short stories, extracts of plays and mostly poems by Émile Nelligan and other poets.

_C: So he liked poetry._

_P: Well, I guess so._

_C: What about her, did she read that? Was she literate enough to read it?_  

_P: I wouldn’t think so._

It is quite possible that in the evening, once the children went to bed, Joseph and Marie-Louise, seated side by side, spend a few moments reading. Maybe he read to her, from this book, Nelligan’s poem “Immaculate Love,” in which mystical love fuses with profane love in the poet’s heart. As a priest, he might have been particularly attracted to this poem that starts with, “I know a marvelous stained-glass window in a church.” He might have lovingly bent over her while reading to her with a smile, “My romantic beloved, … you, the only one I love and will always love.” And the last lines, would he have read them with a sombre foreboding in his heart?

_You, who stay silent, impassive and proud,_  
_Perhaps you will see me, sombre and desperate,_  
_Wander in my love as in a cemetery._

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SPIRITUAL LIFE

The Ray family lives the life of a typical Rideau Park family, except for one important difference: they keep their spiritual life private. They have cast aside weekly religious rituals. The family does not go to mass and does not pray at all as a family. Yet, they remain believers. Joseph insisted on baptizing his children and he wants them to take their First Communion and their Confirmation. He still thinks like a priest. He can’t erase from his mind the clerical education he received and practiced for the greater part of his life. They do not go to church because he considers that he and Marie-Louise are “living in sin” and that consequently they cannot receive the Sacraments. Nonetheless, their home is a Christian one, where the children are taught charity, kindness, honesty — in short, love for thy neighbour and a sense of responsibility.

FIRST RETURN TO HANMER
(November 1920)

Gertrude, Marie-Louise’s daughter, hands me a tape on which she has recorded some recollections:

Today is November the first [2004] and why this comes to mind, I will never know because my grandmother, mother’s mother, died November 1, 1920. And she was just fifty-one years of age. And mother went to her funeral with my brother Joe who was two and a half years old at that time. So you can imagine the stir that it must have made in Hanmer when she was there, when she showed up for the funeral. There must have been a lot of talking going on. “Did you see who is there?” Anyhow, just reminiscences. 21
How Marie-Louise must have been upset to learn of her mother’s death! Did she ever have the opportunity to talk with her since she fled Hanmer and to explain to her the reasons for her departure? During the four preceding years, Marie-Louise in her quiet moments certainly imagined several times what she would tell her mother if she saw her again, the chat they would have and the confidences they would share. But now it is too late! Georgianne is gone. The only chance Marie-Louise has to silently tell her mother that she loves her and that she regrets having caused her sorrow is to go place a flower on her grave. And this time she won’t wait until it is too late. Marie-Louise is firm about going to her mother’s funeral. She does not know to what extent people in the village know her story. She is afraid to be asked questions by the village gossips. She certainly cannot reveal that she is living in common law with a man and that this man is, on top of that, the ex-curate of Hanmer. She would be immediately categorized as a loose woman and shunned by all scrupulous, conformist people. But the prospect of having to navigate in an explosive social environment does not stop her. She takes Joe with her and goes down to her sister Claire’s to whom she has remained particularly attached and with whom she can openly share her grief. She possibly confides in her that she is pregnant once again.

Joseph does not accompany Marie-Louise to Hanmer. Someone has to stay home and look after the animals and the business. He probably also fears the reception he would get from Napoléon should he show up at the funeral. Marie-Louise decides to leave little Gertrude in her father’s care.

**Birth of Lorne**

Back from Hanmer, life returns to normal. On 16 March 1921, Marie-Louise gives birth to a second son. When I ask Gertrude where her young brother was born, she answers:
A short research into the living habits of the day provides a plausible answer to this question. In the early 1900s, many women chose to give birth at home assisted by a midwife. In Marie-Louise’s neighbourhood, it is a common practice and midwives are appreciated as much by the doctors as by the women giving birth, as revealed by the following testimony of a Billings Bridge inhabitant:

My grandmother … was a midwife. She was as important as the Queen. All the doctors counted on her. If they knew that she was taking care of a case, they didn’t bother to come.

It is thus quite possible that Marie-Louise receives help from a midwife while Joseph walks back and forth in the kitchen. As he had done for Joe and for Gertrude, Joseph baptizes the baby himself. He and Marie-Louise have chosen a very French name: Albert Laurent. However later on, since all his friends speak only English, Laurent will ask to be called Lorne.

1921–1926

The country’s economy is gradually improving in the war’s aftermath. Women’s status is also improving. In 1917, suffragettes have earned the right for women to vote. Many women who worked outside the home during the war are reluctant to return to unpaid housework. The fairer sex feels the wind in its sails and fashion...
attests to it. Haircuts and hem lengths get shorter. In high society, cloche hats replace the large “My Fair Lady” hats ornate with ribbons and feathers. New conveniences, such as the famous Frigidaire refrigerator, come onto the market, making tasks easier for wives and mothers. “Telephones are used more and more. Between 1915 and 1925, the number of telephones in Canada doubled. By 1925, more than 13% of Canadians are using Bell’s invention.”

In the Stanley Street home, Joseph and Marie-Louise might very well be contemplating some improvements to the house and might need additional money to do so because on 2 June 1925, Joseph sells, for an amount of $500, the second part of Lot 2, Concession II that he had bought in the township of Hanmer in 1913.

Days and months fly, punctuated with happy events that remain in the children’s memory to this day. Gertrude recollects going to Carlsbad Springs with her father to get spring water.

G: We went there by buggy, you know. He would go there and take me with him. Sometimes he would bring Joe or Lorne.
C: Each in turn.
G: Yes, yes, that’s right. It was a major excursion. It took the whole day you know.
C: It’s far.
G: Yes.
C: So you brought spring water back to the house?
G: Oh yes.

These are carefree days, full of games: tag, hide and seek, hopscotch, marbles, skipping rope and spin the bottle. One day when Joseph is absent and Marie-Louise is busy, the boys go up to the attic. Their father keeps a trunk there and the boys are dying to know what it contains. They open it and find all the religious objects belonging to their father: a paten, a ciborium, a chalice, etc. But their
amusement rises tenfold when they discover a rifle amongst these religious objects. One can wonder, of course, why a priest would own a gun. But Marie-Louise’s niece explains to me:

In those days, it was normal for people to carry rifles, on the farm, to protect from bears, etc. Priest or no priest.66

Sometimes, unexpected events occur and their reminiscence still makes one laugh. For example there is the day when Joseph bought a cow at the annual rodeo in Lansdowne Park. Gertrude and Lorne tell me:

L: They had a rodeo, down at Lansdowne Park. And after the rodeo, they sold all the cows [that] the cowboys [used] to ride, something like that. Is that the way it went?

G: Yeah.

L: Something like that. So anyway, he bought one. And the cowboys brought it home. They herd the bugger and put it in the barn. He [Dad] goes out of the barn and closes the door, you know. And then the baker came along and [said], “It sounds the big deal you got with this cow. So let’s go and have a look at it!” So they go out to the barn and mother comes along …

G: and she opened the door …

L: and the cow ran away!27

It would seem that the cow, worried about its fate, considered it wise to make a bid for freedom and to seek refuge with the neighbours, the Billings. Gertrude and Lorne still laugh over the memory of their father galloping behind the cow to recapture it, just like in the finale of a Charlie Chaplin movie.
GERTRUDE’S FIRST COMMUNION

On 21 April 1926 Gertrude gets up with a mix of joy and apprehension in her heart. Today is her First Communion and her Confirmation. She is anxious to slip on the pretty dress that Marie-Louise has made for her. But at the same time, she is a bit apprehensive about having to go to church. She has never been there and doesn’t know exactly what to expect.

G: My mother was sick that day and both my brothers had the mumps. So I went by myself. My father took me to the church in a horse and buggy. He left me at the door of the church and went away.38
C: But were the other parents in the church?
G: Oh, yes. The other children all had their parents present and they were all dressed in white with a veil and everything. And me, I was dressed with a blue dress, a beautiful dress that mother made for me, all embroidered with roses, I remember, very pretty. So that I felt … not with the gang, you know. And I remember that a woman, a nice woman with a dozen children, took care of me.39

This woman is called Mrs. Brûlé. She brings Gertrude to her home for lunch and lends her a veil for the Confirmation that takes place the same day in the afternoon.

G: The First Communion was in the morning and the Confirmation was in the afternoon.
C: On the same day?
G: On the same day, because the Bishop made the rounds, that way. That’s how it worked. And then my father came to get me afterwards.40
This day stays carved in Gertrude’s heart like a notch made with a knife in tree bark. She is 8 years old and it is the first time she realizes with unease that her family does not follow some of the social conventions of their neighbours.

You see, my mother had not been to church for many years. We did not belong to the parish. So these things were a bit different from everybody else.31

It will not be the last time that her family situation causes her embarrassment.

FACING FACTS

During the weeks following Gertrude’s First Communion, Marie-Louise’s health continues to decline to the point where she must be hospitalized.

G: She had a hysterectomy … In those days, it was a big operation … And I remember that while she was in the hospital, [he] set up an altar in the hallway upstairs and he would say mass.
C: In your house?
G: Yes, yes, in our house. I remember that. It took up a lot of room because the hallway wasn’t that wide. Anyway, I imagine that he was very worried.
C: Did she stay in the hospital for a long time?
G: A couple of weeks.
C: So while she was in the hospital, he took care of you?
G: Yes.
C: And he got no help from the neighbours?
G: I don’t know. He was a pretty good cook, I suppose. With all the travelling that he did, he must have had to cook for himself in all those small places.12
I can only imagine the impact on Joseph of having to take care of the children by himself. He suddenly realizes how much the household management depends on Marie-Louise: cooking, laundry, cleaning, and mending. On top of his work, he must now plan and prepare meals, answer the children’s questions and oversee their activities. For the first time since they began living together, he is asking himself: what would happen if I lost Marie-Louise? He suddenly confronts the possibility of finding himself a widower at 68 years with sole responsibility for three children less than 10 years of age. This thought throws him into turmoil and deep inside he is overcome with secret fears. He fears that he might have chosen the wrong path in his life. He fears that he got himself and Marie-Louise into an adventure that makes no sense. He fears to face the doubts eating away at his heart.

The only recourse he knows for confronting fear is prayer. He climbs to the attic, opens his trunk, takes out and holds the religious objects he had put away at a euphoric moment in his life. His heart is pounding. These familiar objects speak to him of calm, silence and inner peace. He sees himself back then saying mass in the little chapel of Wolseley, out in Saskatchewan. He hears the altar boy softly answering: “Kyrie eleison.” “God, have pity.” He thinks, “I am a priest. There! There is the truth. I am a priest and I will always be one.” This certitude suddenly appears like a beacon amongst the doubts casting a shadow over his thoughts and brings him inner peace. Calmed, he goes downstairs and erects an altar in the hallway. He must have faith in the future. During the mass that he celebrates under the astounded looks of his children, what does he promise to God in exchange for Marie-Louise’s recovery?

SYNCHRONICITY

Marie-Louise comes home and resumes managing the household. The storm has abated. Joseph can now truly value his wife’s hard
work and must surely tell her so more often, which makes her happy. Months pass and numerous events make the headlines in Ottawa. They keep conversations going in the household and provide the opportunity to go on nice outings. For instance, in August 1926, Ottawa celebrates its centennial. Many festivities take place and people hurry to see the military parade and the floats. In 1927, the city cinemas present *The Jazz Singer*, the very first talking film. It’s quite possible that the family went to see it. Marie-Louise adores movies!

Then Joseph begins to receive frequent visits from a neighbour, Mr. Christie. This married man has many children. He is also a Minister in a Church that allows priests to marry. He might be Protestant, Presbyterian, or Anglican, I don’t know. Gertrude says to me that each time he came over to the house, Joseph and he had long conversations. What do they discuss so intensely? They possibly debate whether priests should marry. Joseph would love to be able to rationalize his dilemma of being a Catholic priest and living in a common-law relationship with a woman he can’t marry for threat of excommunication. He would prefer not to be forced to choose between saving his soul and staying with his loved ones for whom he feels responsible. He is most certainly interested in the beliefs and rituals of his neighbour’s religion. So there are religions where you can consecrate yourself to God while being married? Marie-Louise leaves both men to their discussions but undoubtedly feels a little insecure when she sees Joseph so captivated by the topic.

And, as if by coincidence, news concerning the Catholic Church soon makes the newspapers’ headlines. On 28 March 1928 Monsignor Guillaume Forbes is named Archbishop of Ottawa. Joseph surely talks about this with Marie-Louise over the supper table. She listens to him with interest as she always does when he reports the latest news. She is not surprised that Joseph takes special notice of this news, but she is far from suspecting that this Archbishop’s arrival in the Capital will provoke an upheaval in her life.
Joseph has a very good reason to be particularly interested in the news. Monsignor Forbes was ordained on 17 March 1888, by Monsignor Fabre. Joseph had also been ordained by Monsignor Fabre, only three weeks earlier, on 26 February 1888. Guillaume Forbes and Joseph were therefore colleagues in the Great Seminary. Does Joseph entertain the idea of renewing his links with him? Given the long conversations he has had recently with his neighbour, we can assume that he has not yet rid himself of the ambiguity that prevails in his heart. Meeting Monsignor Forbes would give him the opportunity to discreetly discuss his situation with a Church representative. He could ask for his opinion and informally explore with him possible solutions to his dilemma.

**THE BIG DECISION (1928)**

What follows is only speculation on my part, as Marie-Louise brought Joseph’s story to her grave. We can surmise that he meets with Monsignor Forbes and that the latter adopts a very clear stance. He reminds him of the proverb from the Bible: *He who has a crooked heart finds no happiness.* He unequivocally demonstrates to him that his duty is to save his soul by giving himself to God only. Finally, he assures this “lost son” that the Church is ready to open its doors to him on certain conditions, the first being that he leaves forever this woman that he has not married and their illegitimate children.

This unambiguous position seems logical to Joseph if he is to save his soul. He understands it because he received the same education that his colleague received and his fundamental beliefs have not changed over the years. He is tempted to follow this course. Moreover, he thinks that the quiet life of a man of the cloth will suit him better at age 70 than the daily struggle of making a living for a woman and three young children. But he feels pangs of guilt at the idea of abandoning Marie-Louise and leaving her the responsibility...
to raise their children alone. He wants to ensure that if he returns to the priesthood, he will have put in place the means to protect them one way or another. It is therefore highly probable that he negotiates with the Church an arrangement to that effect.

Joseph spends the days following this encounter on the “Mount of Olives.” He knows now what he wants to do. But he wonders if he will ever find the courage to go through with it. Finally, he comes clean with Marie-Louise, describes to her his internal dilemma and narrates to her his visit with Monsignor Forbes. Could she understand and forgive him if he should return to the priesthood?

Marie-Louise’s happiness crumbles like a house of cards in a gust of wind.