

— Out of town —

Eye-witness report on life at U. of Quebec

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Michelina Trigliani is a York student and former Excalibur reporter currently studying French literature in Trois-Rivières, Québec.

By MICHELINA TRIGIANI

It all started when I discovered that as a student in French literature at York, I could study at Laval in my second or third year. Realizing that I was speaking very little French in Toronto and concluding that after receiving an honours BA in the language I should at least be able to speak it, I made my application to Laval.

As it happened, I was one of the 400 university students from across Canada to be chosen for a government busary but my bursary was granted me not to Laval but to the University of Québec at Trois-Rivières.

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

The programme, funded by the Department of the Secretary of the State and administered by the provincial departments of education, "is aimed at promoting the learning and use of the official languages through the interprovincial exchange of students who will act as second-language monitors."

So here I am, studying French at the UQTR, helping francophones with their English and getting it all paid for. But the transition is not without an assortment of adjustments.

For the Torontonians arriving in Trois-Rivières, the most difficult adjustment is a toss-up between being abandoned in an all-French milieu or adapting to a town of 65,000. I found the former the hardest with fits of frustration daily occurrences. Mustering up courage to approach a saleslady; working out a speech before using the telephone; endless "pardonnez-mois" and "comments"; nods in agreement to incomprehensible articulations and worst of all, ex-

pressing myself in basic baby talk; all contributed to a general feeling of, "Hey, I don't belong here. I should be in nice, neat comfortable Toronto where everyone understands what I say and where I'm safe as long as I know English."

In Trois-Rivières, what helps through the rough days is an obliging population that is actually interested and happy to know you are an anglophone and that you are here to learn their language. But good intentions cannot always alleviate the frustration of communicating in a language not your own.

So by now you have learned a bit about the town and you have spoken enough French to face the prospect of attending classes. The shock for the York student comes after a glimpse of "le campus." There are less than 3000 students at UQTR. All the classes are held in one building. There are no courses at noon so that everyone can eat in the only cafeteria. You actually see the same faces in every class with a few variations here and there. There is no mad rushing every hour because all courses are held in three hour marathons with a "pause-café" in between. You do not ask, "what classes do you have today," but rather, "what course?" This high-school atmosphere is promoted by the students who mainly come from the small towns surrounding Trois-Rivières. There is little pressure here; life goes more slowly; no one is in a hurry; students are rarely pretentious.

SMALL SIZE

Understandably, the small size of the university and the small number of students in each department results in smaller classes. Large lecture groups (the plight of many first-year students at York) are non-existent and courses where students do not speak are a rarity. The UQTR is tagged, "une université de partici-

pation." This means that students have a say in what is taught and how it is to be taught. When a prof presents his course material and marking system, students are "asked" if it suits them and class discussion usually follows. In a significant number of my courses, we have actually altered a teacher's proposed course structure.

The small size of the place also promotes a more congenial social atmosphere. Small groups have always proven more successful than large, frightening ones. If there is only one disco-pub on this campus in comparison to York's many and varied activities, the difference is that everyone attends (including students from the CEGEPs). There are film nights here also. Films are not as recent and not always as well-known as those shown at York (we recently had the Trois-Rivières premier of *Duddy Kravitz*), but nevertheless, the whole town turns out and people seem to enjoy themselves.

INITIAL SHOCK

The differences certainly stand out at first but after the initial shocks, the university somehow becomes more familiar. Like another I now so well, it is a new university with new buildings and no windows. It is in the northern part of the town at the opposite end of a well-known body of water (here, the St. Lawrence River), on a hill which will undoubtedly render it windy and colder come winter. Although the guys sport more beards here and the girls all dance together at the discos, students look pretty much the same dressed in their jeans, puffing their cigarettes and drinking their coffee.

Perhaps I may look like I belong, but I still feel outside of the circle here where heads turn if one utters a phrase to an English-Canadian colleague. It is still an ordeal to make a comment in a literature

class about some unknown famous Québécois poet. It has become tiresome after each new encounter to speak about the language handicap. It is hard to swallow a linguistic professor's criticism of an English phrase which has crept into "our" language or his condemnation of the fight by Italian parents in Montréal. It is infuriating to be the target of a drunk student's jabs at English-Canada. It is disheartening at times to actually start thinking that Québec is a different country altogether and that it should not be called Canada.

But then you see those same old bottles of Labatt's Fifty and Heinz ketchup. Trudeau sounds a little different at this end of the tube but you know his face is familiar and that you have heard his voice somewhere before. You walk into a classroom and someone says, "Salut, ça va?" or you leave friends at a brasserie after talking about anything besides the language or the province or Toronto or the politics. You are stopped in the street and find you actually know the place well enough to give directions. You go to Montréal to speak some English and because you miss Toronto but you discover you've returned having spoken more French more freely to more people.

Then you realize that you are speaking and thinking and dreaming in French and that it doesn't hurt so much. And that is when you realize it is worth all the effort and that perhaps whoever dreamt up this government programme to "promote the learning and use of the official languages" left out something more important in his description. He left out the heart of the matter: the actual contact, understanding and subsequent empathy for these people called "canadien-français", better termed, "our" fellow Canadians.

Rachel Pratt. Small-town girl out to conquer the big city. Pick the winner.

The city

Large cities may not be for everyone. But to Rachel there's no place more exciting or richer with opportunities.

Maybe she is a little starry-eyed, but Rachel has a far more worrisome problem. She's on a social merry-go-round.

Her day isn't complete unless she joins her friends for some pub-crawling after work. Much too often, pubs lead to parties. She's getting too little sleep, eating poorly, and her boss now regrets hiring her.

Rachel thinks it's all a great adventure. She forgets why she first came to the city. Truth is, unless she wises up and backs away soon, small-town girl may very well wind up big-city loser.


**Rachel**

Large cities may not be for everyone. But to Rachel there's no place more exciting or richer with opportunities.

Maybe she is a little starry-eyed, but fortunately for Rachel, she's a realist as well.

She's made some wise choices, including her decision on drinking. Not too often, not too much, is Rachel's motto. That goes for beer, wine or spirits, no matter where she is or with whom.

The interesting thing is, her moderate lifestyle hasn't made Rachel less popular. Nor has it made the city a less exciting place. It's just making her stronger. Strong enough to win.

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