

Islands

Every French Canadian lives on an island, surrounded by people who speak English. It can be a very small island — as when a single, French-speaking family lives outside Ontario, Quebec or New Brunswick — or it can be as big as a village or a province. The English speakers include not only fellow Canadians but also most of the people from the Mexican border to the Arctic islands.



‘What’s the situation?’ He tells me everything is fine. There are problems in Quebec, but I feel very optimistic. . . .

‘It’s still a problem [the isolation of the French-speaking hockey player in an English-speaking continent]. Maybe less now than it used to be. Every team now has French-speaking players. I think it is still a slight problem, because as much as I’ve

Guy Charron is not quite an island unto himself. For one thing his wife, their small daughter and he are all bilingual. Still he is a French-speaking hockey player in Washington, DC. All but one of the other players on the Capitals are Canadians, but only three of them are French speaking. Below we print some excerpts from an interview in which M. Charron talks about being French speaking and being Canadian.

‘I’m Canadian. I’m very proud of my country. As a matter of fact I’ve had the opportunity to represent my country two years in a row with Team Canada. There’s not a thing that has made me prouder than that. . . .

‘I’ve never been interested in political problems; and being away playing hockey I’ve given them less time. I talk about Quebec with my family — my brother-in-law in particular. I say

played — eight or nine years — it’s still tough if you can’t speak English. Throughout the league the other players don’t like to hear three or four French-speaking players talk in French in the dressing room or some place. English is still the language you have to speak. In Washington there are four guys who speak French. All of them are of a certain importance to the hockey club. If we do talk in French, they can’t really tell us to shut up; it’s not as if we were rookies. In Detroit we had five French speakers. The other players always thought we were talking about them, which wasn’t the case. We were just enjoying a conversation in our own language. Washington is the first team I’ve seen where we speak as much French as we like without anyone asking us to shut up.”

