

My interest in the French language actually had started almost from the moment I could talk coherently. Living in a French neighbourhood meant that whenever you went out into the street, nine times out of ten the other children were speaking what I thought was a strange language. Little did I know that "ballon-chasseur" was dodgeball and that "cache-cache" meant hide and go seek. From then on I was determined to learn what they were saying so that I would not be at a disadvantage when playing with them. Oddly enough, this decision made when I was five years old would dominate the rest of my life.

Since English instruction in the French school system left much to be desired and I was already starting to learn French, I decided I would play ambassador. Just as an ambassador is a liaison in another country, my role would be liaison between the two languages. Imagine my surprise when I confronted the children in the street with my first garbled speech in French, my strained "bonjour, je m'appelle" was returned with "maudite bloke" a reference to the somewhat square-headedness of the English population. Chalk up one for French Canadian nationalism, I guess.

Good old Scottish stubbornness, or whatever you want to call it, made me decide to beat them at their own game. I excelled in my French studies through bilingual and immersion programs to a degree where my knowledge of the language and grammar was perhaps better than that of the French children themselves.

Unfortunately, the responses I received had gone from one extreme to another. Although I got along with the other children, I was never really accepted by them. I finally discovered the reason why. French Canadians hated the French from France almost as much as the English. My French accent was almost like that of the people French Canadians called "les snobbes".

By the time I was 13 I realized that French Canadian was a proper language and a culture all of its own. I decided to treat what I had already learned as a separate language and discover exactly what French Canadian was and is.

In my final years of high school I delved into dozens of written novels, the works of Savard, Thériault and Vallières, the plays of Tremblay and Gélinas and the poetry of Vigneault and Nelligan. From these pieces written by prominent French Canadian authors I was able to obtain a good grasp of the emergence of the French Canadian culture in Quebec.

It was interesting to witness the transition in myself. I was so involved with these studies that a few of my high school buddies started calling me Frenchie. I graduated from high school feeling very comfortable with my knowledge of French Canadians. As strange as it may sound, perhaps I had too much knowledge.

Just before heading off to Carleton University to study communications, something in my brain snapped. I began thinking I was French Canadian. I did everything to convince myself that I was. I had become a staunch Parti Québécois supporter. I even cried when René Lévesque lost the sovereignty association vote. I defended everything that was considered French Canadian.

At Carleton I was elected president of the Francophone Club. My plan for assimilation might have worked except for two things: my name and my ancestors. Once again my wise parents from the old country came to my rescue. They were able to grind into my thick skull that should the situation in Quebec worsen, my name alone would make me stand out like a sore thumb.

For most people it might have been too late to change, but at 18 I began learning about my own cultural history, the glory of the Scottish clans and all the benefits that Quebec and Canada enjoy today because of Scottish immigrants. Robert Bruce, Mary Queen of Scots and the poet Robert Burns are well-known names in Scottish history, but what of those who immigrated to Canada and gave so much of their time and efforts to build this country?

Lord Selkirk, a Scottish philanthropist and colonizer was responsible for bringing immigrants to Prince Edward Island. They later spread to Nova Scotia and established a colony there. Selkirk opened the west with his settlements in the Red River Valley in Manitoba.

Scottish immigrants were instrumental in the establishment of the fur trade in Canada and played the greatest part in the foundations of education in this country.

Early Scottish settlers placed top priority on education. The first non-sectarian school for higher education in Nova Scotia, Pictou Academy, was founded by a Scot. Dalhousie University, McGill University in Montreal, the University of Toronto, Queen's, St. Francis Xavier and the University of New Brunswick all owe their establishment to Scots.

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Sir Alexander Mackenzie, trader and explorer, discovered the Mackenzie River and was the first white man to cross the northern part of the American continent to the Pacific Ocean. Simpson and MacTavish are other names synonymous with the building of our country. Alexander Mackenzie, a Scot, was Prime Minister of Canada between 1873 and 1878.

In addition, Scotsmen and Canadians of Scottish origin have played formidable roles in communications and journalism. There has been George Brown, founder of the *Globe*; William Lyon Mackenzie, founder and editor of the *Colonial Advocate* and one of the leaders of the 1837 rebellion; John Nielson, editor of the *Quebec Gazette*; John Dougall, both father and son, of the *Montreal Witness*; and Hugh Graham, Lord Atholstan of the *Montreal Star*.

Suddenly a new dimension was added to my research for cultural identity. I realized that I was neither Scottish nor French Canadian. Talk about an identity crisis! Because Canada is not the melting pot that characterizes the United States, there is really no distinct Canadian culture. Therefore, I didn't consider myself to be a Canadian. I was a mixture, a part of three great nationalities.

After much deliberation I decided that the only way out of this dilemma was to combine the best parts of all three nations. To become a part of the French Canadian culture, to be accepted as an equal, I needed more of the expressions in daily use.

To accomplish this I spent the summer of 1981 working in a French children's camp. That summer was the turning point in my life. I not only picked up the oral requirements but also a large group of French Canadian friends.

I learned more about Scottish culture by reading books and poetry by Scottish authors, as well as the stories of the clans. I joined a curling club to get a taste of a Scottish sport and social gathering.

In order to become more of a Canadian, I relaxed my hard line views on independence for Quebec. I now try to picture Canada as a whole and am more sympathetic to the feelings of the people in other provinces.

I thought I was all set—I had satisfied my goals and those of my parents. The one thing I had forgotten to consider was my friends.

Each group of friends I had made in the past few years had accepted me in the way I related to them. I was the one who had adjusted easily to each group by simply changing my frame of mind and attitude to what each group was interested in and expected of me.

I went partying with my French Canadian friends, bar hopping with my anglophone high school buddies and was involved in intellectual stimulation with my university associates. Each world was different, yet I fitted easily into each one. What I had failed to consider was the interaction between the groups.

I soon discovered through trial and error that my old high school friends would not be accepted by my university buddies; nor would my English friends be accepted by my French Canadian friends and vice versa.

This created a situation which is similar to the problems of Quebec society today. Because of my personal experience, I feel French Canadians and English Canadians will never associate unless some concessions are made by both sides. We will always run into people of both cultures who will refuse to speak the other's language. There is animosity even within each cultural group—animosity caused by intellectual, social and economic differences.

If only we could learn from one another, if we would be willing to mingle, we could absorb a great deal by association. With understanding comes acceptance. Unfortunately the situation may not be resolved in my lifetime. To keep the peace, the cultures may have to remain apart.

I don't favour apartheid in the South African sense, where one culture is discriminated against on economic, social, political and colour levels. I do believe, however, that many cultures can coexist in one province as long as there is agreement on the equal value of each.

My plight is understandable. I enjoy the knowledge of many worlds, yet to keep harmony among them, I have to keep them separate. Therefore, in a sense, I am trapped in the middle of all three groups.

Because I can't combine all these worlds, despite the fact that each has so much to offer, I have to spend an equal amount of time in all of them.

Although it is satisfying to experience the diversity, you can't give 100 per cent of what we have to share and at the same time receive 100 per cent of what everyone else has to offer. The basic explanation for someone in this dilemma is that you can be acquainted with many, but totally involved with none.

It is another way of explaining and learning to live with loneliness.