

Living in French in the St. Lawrence Valley

by Sylvie Fortin

Our little house of wood, a century old, nestles in the countryside in the county of Lotbinière, somewhat to the south of the city of Quebec. There I live with my husband and our five children. Last fall, as my husband and I piled cords of wood in the cellar of our little house, I reckoned winters past in my mind. I tried to picture the long nights that were coming that would be shaken by the north winds—the ennui, a little sad from days without sun week after week, the coldness of the moon in the icy brilliance of the white countryside at night. And this winter has been more spectacular than I could ever have imagined. In January, Montreal was hit with an ice storm, and broke like a piece of crystal. For maybe a week, in the midst of ruin caused by the ice, the city bathed in cold Siberian darkness without electricity, without any modern amenities or comfort. But at last the spring arrives, and we have survived, like our little house of wood that creaks, moans, and trembles with each blast of wind, yet still remains standing.

In order to live in Quebec, you must get used to her ways and learn to live with winter. You must endure without becoming anxious, in quiet calmness and strength. And as a people, we have endured, and endured more, ever since the first days of New France.

The first of my ancestors in New France, Julien Fortin, was French and Catholic. A few years after Samuel de Champlain founded the city of Quebec in 1608, Julien settled on l'Île d'Orleans not very far from where I now live. My family spread out along the St. Lawrence Valley with a few thousand others from overseas until the conquest, when our country was ceded to the King of England by the Treaty of Paris in 1763. Every generation of children learns in school, with hearts a little hurt, how Quebec surrendered after a skirmish of about an hour. The English army had maneuvered against Quebec, and decimated the city with a two-month long bombardment. It was the end of September, and they would have had to lift siege in four or five weeks at most, un-

less they made a breakthrough. Otherwise, their warships would have become prisoners in the ice of the St. Lawrence River. General Montcalm may have underestimated the determination of those English troops; he certainly did not suspect the traitor among us who showed the invaders the path which they could use to climb Cap Diamant and reach the Plains of Abraham. A sortie too quick, our troops not well enough prepared, a battle fought as in Europe upon an open field—the results were disastrous for us.

We lost. Not many texts relate how, during the winter following the black September of 1759, the Ursuline sisters of Quebec sowed the socks of those English soldiers of the fallen General Wolfe—those English soldiers who suffered as much as we did from the want and misery caused by the Seven Years' War. From them, the English, we have enjoyed some gentleness, like the government under Lord Dufferin, an old Scot loyal to the memory of the “auld alliance” born of the marriage of Mary Stuart with Francis II, the young King of France. From them we have learned British parliamentary government, which is the origin of our modern democratic system in Quebec. And English businessmen invested their capital to build the foundation of our industrial infrastructure. But it is also true that the Catholic Church has looked after her little ones, like a hen watching her chicks, and you can see this in the names of our villages from the Atlantic to Ontario, from Lac St-Jean to the American frontier—St-Casimir, St-Gabriel, Ste-Clotilde de Horton, Ste-Anne de Beauré, and so on.

The English are like winter, not wanted, unloved, too close to us, but inevitable. We must endure in French against the enormous pressures of their language on all our frontiers.

As a child, I lived on St. Lawrence in Mortmagny, a little town on the south shore. I splashed in the thick mud and high weeds of the river, as in the adventures of Tom Sawyer along the Mississippi. We watched the boats moor at the dock and transport necessary wares for the inhabitants on l'Île aux Grues.

Right in front of us, in the middle of the river, was la Grosse Île. It was a mysterious island, and we were forbidden even to approach. We heard terrible stories about it. There were supposed to have been chemical experiments there.

A great metal ship, painted white, was sent there under charter, with sailors who never spoke with us, and hardly ever even looked at us. The island belonged to the federal government—to *them*. Our parents told us that thousands of Irish immigrants who had become ill were quarantined there when they arrived in the New World. Very few of the Irish from la Grosse Île ever lived long after they were sent to the hospitals on the island, and I could never appreciate as a child that the bones of thousands of Irish were buried there.

Yet here in the county of Lotbinière, where I live, the descendants of these Irish are everywhere. You can see the bright Irish locks of hair in the friends of our children. You can hear it in their family names—Ward, Moore, and so on—but they speak French like us, with the same accent as our own. These Irish founded some villages, after ours were founded, in places a little further from the banks of the river. On the road after Ste-Agathe is the village of Inverness—well, maybe these Irish, like the Irish branch of my husband's family, originated in Scotland. Like us, they are Catholic, they pray under the portrait of the Pope, with the same devotion as we have. They live with us in peace, they have become French like us.

But in the beginning, these Irish were “*anglais*.” In my youth, the word “*anglais*” bathed in the confusion of similarities. I never imagined that among Anglo-Saxon peoples there were differences as numerous as the stars in the sky. Only the Americans were different from the rest of the “*anglais*,” in our view of the world. Sometimes we say here with nostalgia (my husband says we are naive) that we should have been conquered by the United States rather than the English. After all, the Americans invited us to join them in the 11th Article of their old Confederation, and they have no prejudices against us, even though they think it is a little odd that we should want to secede from Canada. I know this much well, because my husband is an American, and I have lived in his country, where four of our children were born.

We called our first child Gabriel, and our second (as one of her given names) Evangeline, because my husband likes the poem by Longfellow which tells of the removal of the Acadians by George III. Gabriel died in Quebec during a short stay of three years we had here. I

The Politics of Illegitimacy Rates

by Joseph E. Fallon

am not at all sentimental by temperament, yet I cannot avoid the tears when my husband reads to our children in English the last verses of Longfellow's poem, the part where the lovers are finally, after years and years, united.

The blindness of the English in Canada, who complain of the cost of governing the country in French and English without ever noticing the international prestige it attracts, is a root cause of our bitterness against them. Once more, in 1982, the English in Canada imposed upon us a constitution which we never wanted. In vain did Rene Levesque protest to the premiers of the nine English-speaking provinces. Levesque knew English, of course, because during World War II he had enlisted in the U.S. Army to avoid surrendering his right, as a Canadian, to speak French. He preferred to enrich his life elsewhere with a foreign language than to allow a foreign language to be imposed on his own country.

Living in French among us is like bringing the old soil of France here to this hostile climate. Quebec is a fragile country. The Catholic Church knows it, and has always known it. The most recent effort of the federal government to make us knuckle under is a reference to the supreme court debate on whether the constitution of Canada gives Quebec the right to secede. The government of Quebec has refused even to appear before the court, and we are consequently defended by a friend of the court named by the court. But Jean-Claude Turcotte, Cardinal-Archbishop of Montreal, has spoken the truth of the matter about which we are more determined than ever. No matter what the judges say, the people of Quebec will decide the future of Quebec, not the supreme court of Canada.

Looking out from the windows of our little house, I see a countryside frozen for eternity in great white waves of snow. For our children, winter is not an obstacle to playing outside, only an opportunity to enlarge their field of play. When they arrived in the St. Lawrence Valley, they had to learn French again. They live now as if they were born here, in peace and outside any shadow of worry about their future.

Sylvie Fortin is a member of the Quebec Bar. The original text in French was translated by her husband, an American lawyer and legal historian.

Since the early 1960's, compiling statistics on illegitimacy rates in the United States has been the official responsibility of the National Center for Health Statistics. However, the methodology employed by that federal agency to determine illegitimacy rates according to race has been inaccurate, classifying virtually all illegitimate Hispanic births as illegitimate "white" births. The result is an official illegitimacy rate for "whites" which has been deliberately inflated. Since most people assume "white" is a synonym for "European-American," the illegitimacy rate statistics—like FBI hate crime statistics which classify most, if not all, Hispanic perpetrators of hate crimes as "white"—officially promote a false and biased view against European-Americans, their culture, and their morals.

This flawed methodology stems from how the federal government treats Hispanics. According to Public Law 94-311 of 1976 and Office of Management and Budget Directive No. 15 of 1977, Hispanics constitute a separate "ethnic" category and can be of any race. When it comes to identifying Hispanics according to a specific race, however, the federal government classifies most as "white."

Prior to 1980, separate illegitimacy rates for Hispanics were not recorded by either the National Center for Health Statistics or any state government. This lack of interest in such a vital statistic was remarkable for three reasons.

First, federal authorities were already collecting other related data on Hispanics. In 1976, various Hispanic organizations, including the American G.I. Forum, the Latin American Manufacturing Association, the League of United Latin American Citizens, the National Congress of Hispanic American Citizens, the National Council of La Raza, and SER, lobbied for passage of Public Law 94-311. This law mandated "a Government-wide program for the collec-

tion, analysis, and publication of data with respect to Americans of Spanish origin or descent" that would indicate their "social, health, and economic condition."

Second, contrary to the repeated assertions of political and church "leaders" that Hispanic immigrants are an asset because they come from countries which respect family values, Hispanic countries have some of the highest rates of illegitimate births in the world. According to the most recent statistics available (the United Nations *Demographic Yearbook*, 1975 and 1986; and 1990 data from the Statistical Division of the United Nations' Secretariat), the illegitimacy rate (the percentage of births to unmarried women) in the Dominican Republic is 67 percent; El Salvador, 67 percent; Guatemala, 65 percent; Mexico, 28 percent (tabulated by date of registration rather than occurrence); Panama, 75 percent; Peru, 47 percent; and Venezuela, 54 percent.

And third, the size of the Hispanic population in the United States was dramatically increasing as a result of the 1965 immigration act and subsequent legislation which encouraged large-scale Hispanic immigration. Between 1961 and 1980, of the nearly eight million immigrants who were admitted to the United States, more than two and a half million came from Latin America (the 18 Spanish-speaking states and Brazil). This represented 33 percent of all legal immigration for those two decades.

As a result of these massive levels of immigration, the Hispanic population in the United States skyrocketed from approximately three and a half million (concentrated in the Southwest)—less than two percent of the total population—to nearly 15 million (nationwide), which is more than six percent of the total population. Even taking into consideration an undercount in the 1960 census, and changing definitions between the 1960 and 1980 censuses, that was an increase of over 300 percent.

During those two decades (1960-1980), while local, state, and federal authorities were recognizing Hispanics as a distinct "minority" group eligible for affirmative action programs, the same authorities were apparently registering most, if not all, illegitimate Hispanic births solely as illegitimate "white" births. Even when 22 states between 1980 and 1991 began to document Hispanic illegitimacy rates for their respec-