

STAYING CANADIAN

Dedicated to Stephane Goyer's Daughter

Stephane Goyer Author

LeeMarie Artist-songwriter

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JE ME SOUVIENS...

Je me souviens when sending your child to an English school in Quebec was simple and natural. It didn't matter if you were English, French, or an immigrant family — parents had the right to choose the future they wanted for their children. Je me souviens when Bill 22 (1974) first restricted access to English schools. They said it was temporary. It wasn't.



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Je me souviens 1977, when Bill 101 arrived like a thunderbolt. Suddenly, our schools, our institutions, our very language, were under government control. It was no longer about what parents wanted — it was about what politicians decided.

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Je me souviens families whose dreams were shattered because they simply wanted to give their children a bilingual future. Francophone and immigrant parents crying outside English school doors, legally forbidden from enrolling their kids there.

The promises came: “Your rights will be protected.”

But every decade, those rights grew smaller, chipped away piece by piece Bill 86. Bill 104. Bill 115. Bill 96.

Each new law brought more restrictions, more inspectors, more walls between communities.

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Je me souviens when businesses were fined for a misplaced apostrophe, when government agents came with rulers to measure whether the French letters on a sign were big enough compared to the English ones.

Je me souviens the immense contributions of English Quebecers and immigrants who helped build this province: the roads we drive on, the bridges we cross, the factories that powered our industries, the railways that connected our towns.



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Je me souviens the universities, like McGill and Concordia, founded by people who believed education should be open to all. McGill was created thanks to James McGill, a Scottish merchant who donated land and money to build a world-class university.

Je me souviens hospitals like the Royal Victoria, Montreal Children's, and Jewish General — built with donations so that no one would ever be denied care because of religion, language, or income.



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Je me souviens names like Molson, who built not just businesses, but stadiums, theatres, and public works. The Bronfmans, who funded cultural institutions and charities. The Redpaths, Greenshields, Birks, and so many others who gave generously to schools, hospitals, and the arts — gifts meant to serve everyone, not just their own community.

Today, those contributions are too often erased from our history books or twisted to feed resentment.



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Je me souviens the public shaming — politicians and media painting us as oppressors, while we were simply families, neighbors, people who wanted to live here, contribute, and build a future for our kids.

Je me souviens my grandparents, who worked tirelessly to build institutions that served everyone, French and English alike. Today, many of those schools, hospitals, and libraries have been renamed or absorbed, as if our contributions never existed.



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Je me souviens the half a million
Anglophones who have left Quebec
since the 1970s, and the communities
they left behind — empty schools, silent
churches, boarded-up libraries.

Je me souviens what it felt like to
become a stranger in my own home.

Je me souviens when people told us
English was a threat to be eliminated,
even as my friends and I spoke together
freely in two languages without hatred.

Je me souviens the humiliation of being
told to “speak white” in the past, and
later being told to “speak French only.”

Two extremes. Two different eras. Same
ugly truth: coercion never creates
harmony.

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Je me souviens trying to explain to my daughter why she couldn't attend the very school where I had studied as a child. She looked at me and simply asked: "Why?"

And I had no answer.

Je me souviens that English schools are legally required to teach full, rigorous French programs — and they do, with pride. But French schools are not held to the same standard for English. If learning English there was truly enough, why would so many families fight so hard for access to English education?

Je me souviens being told all Quebecers are equal, yet watching as my community was treated like a threat to be controlled.

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Je me souviens the brain drain, the exodus, the birth rate so low that our very future feels fragile. Quebec needs every child, every mind, every dreamer. But instead of building bridges, we keep building walls.

Je me souviens a time when hope felt possible.

Now, too often, it feels like we are the architects of our own decline.

And still, je me souviens... because forgetting would mean accepting it. And I can't.





