

Opinion: Montréal ... je t'aime. Lots.

I'm shocked at how easy it has been to settle back into the charming, incomparable joie-de-vivre that one can only find in cosmopolitan Montreal.

MICHAEL LECLAIR, SPECIAL TO MONTREAL GAZETTE Updated: August 17, 2015



The Montreal city skyline. DARIO AYALA / MONTREAL GAZETTE

A gut check indicated that my “tripes” (gut) were not happy. I was on edge. In unfamiliar territory after a 30-year absence, my re-entry into Quebec life was shaping up to be an inauspicious one. Not that it was, intended to be a

permanent return mind you. Still, I'd need seven to eight months to update and sell my parent's Montreal duplex before heading back to Ontario.

The first thing I had to deal with was the feisty and cantankerous 85-year-old woman who lived upstairs, and for some unknown reason had suddenly become an uncooperative tenant. I was dreading the inevitable confrontation. My ability to converse in French was painfully rusty and downright abysmal. And she didn't speak a word of English. This was going to be fun.

When Madame Lauzon finally opened the door, she rigidly stood before me with arms crossed — stern, steady, unflinching. Clearly, I needed to make the first move. Through sputtering determination and a haphazard recollection of my Grade 11 French classes, I soon found out that this sweet woman who had been living a harmonious life sharing a roof with my parents knew changes were coming. With a new landlord inevitably on the way, her worry-free living arrangements were now suddenly something very much to worry about.

After listening to her concerns and assuring Madame Lauzon that her rent would remain unchanged for the next two years, there was a gradual détente. We started having pleasant chats about current affairs and of course, about the state of our beloved hockey team les Canadiens. She wasn't impressed that my work ethic usually involved skipping lunch, and so pretty soon afterward there were regular knocks at my door around noontime offering me a hot, homemade meal and a glass of wine. How could I refuse that?

We got into a nice routine and my French comprehension grew exponentially. My spoken French got a little better, too, although I still keep butchering the poor language mercilessly. I'll never forget Madame Lauzon's kindness and generosity, and I was genuinely sorry to leave the house after it got sold. But the experience was a harbinger of things to come.

Able to work from home, I decided to stick around. I found a terrific place of my own and in the 10 months since moving, I'm shocked at how easy it has been to settle back into the charming, incomparable joie-de-vivre that one can only find in cosmopolitan Montreal. The city oozes a stylishness personified by the Hab's general manager Marc Bergevin. Everyone I've met — from clerks at "dépanneurs" (corner stores) to Hydro-Québec technicians to neighbours down the street — have been friendly, kind and helpful. I even met an amazing French-Canadian woman who is "gentille" (kind), "belle" (beautiful) and "pétillante" (bubbly). She has a most incredible spirit, and after time apart I look

forward to when we can “gazouiller” (have a private chit-chat) over dinner and “re-coller” (re-connect).

My senses and “tripes” are very happy.

It’s been a fun adventure re-immersing myself in this peculiar and sometimes wacky linguistic environment. Most restaurants and shops greet me with a “bonjour-hi,” signalling a willingness to converse in the language of my choice. Most of the time I choose French so that I can practice, but people quickly switch to English in an effort to be accommodating (or perhaps to save harm to their ears).

In most instances, the language makes sense, like the word “sous-verre” (coaster) which means literally “under glass.” At other times, a letter makes a vast difference, like the place where I get a driver’s license “SAAQ” versus the place where I buy a bottle of scotch “SAQ”.

Sometimes it’s just plain funny. When I had to tell the local, unilingual mechanic that I had a flat tire and proudly uttered that my car had “un pneu à plat,” he looked at me for a moment, scratched his head and then quizzically asked “un flat tire?”

I still inexplicably giggle like an immature child when I go skiing and see signs for “la salle de fartage” (waxing room). I suppose it’s only fair since my francophone friends have smiled for years at signs that read “no pets allowed” — now aware that “pets” en français is slang for passing gas.

Yet the one thing I still can’t understand or come to terms with involves the expression “I love you.” During one of our amorous evenings, I looked tenderly into my “blond’s” eyes and innocently expressed “Je t’aime. Beaucoup.” (I love you very much). She suddenly looked dejected and hurt. I wondered what I had done. I quickly translated the phrase in my head; I was pretty sure I just told her that I loved her. Lots. I was puzzled until I was informed what I actually said. Apparently, when one says “je t’aime beaucoup” it means you like them only as a friend, which in my circumstance, came across as a demotion. So what I’ve learned is that there is no way of expressing a deep, profound, superlative love for your partner other than the simple and ubiquitous “je t’aime” — except perhaps doing it in a more deliberate, deeper voice. For such a passionate and romantic language, it just doesn’t seem right. I may have to take this up with the Office de la langue française. In the meantime, I’ve got a workaround for my sweetheart, which is quintessentially “Montréalaiseque”.

I now say “Je t'aime. Lots.”

Being back in Montreal has filled me with “émerveillement” (wonder). My experience has made me realize that things which don’t seem promising at first can really work out for the best. I think the key is to keep an open mind, smile, relax and most of all — listen to your “tripes.”

Merci Montréal, je t'aime. Lots.

Michael Leclair is a Montreal-based writer and multi-media producer.

TRENDING STORIES



0

Me and my hijab: 5 Muslim women speak themselves

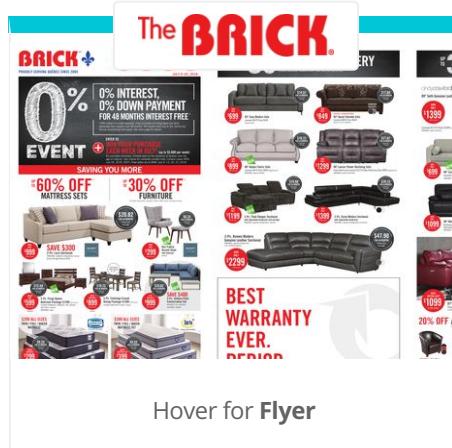
“I’m tired of having our story told by others,” says Fariha Naqv...

◀ Previous

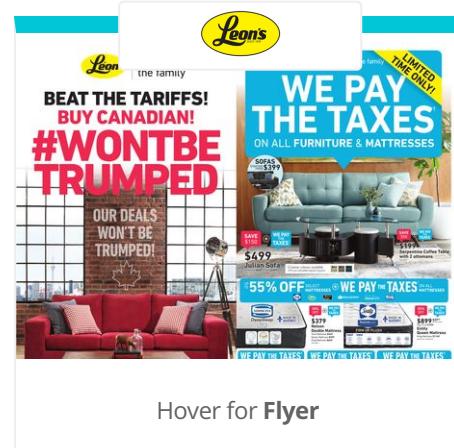
This Week's Flyers



Hover for Flyer



Hover for Flyer



Hover for Flyer

Powered by

Comments

We encourage all readers to share their views on our articles and blog posts. We are committed to maintaining a lively but civil forum for discussion, so we ask you to avoid personal attacks, and please keep your comments relevant and respectful. If you encounter a comment that is abusive, click the "X" in the upper right corner of the comment box to report spam or abuse. We are using Facebook commenting. Visit our FAQ page (<http://www.montrealgazette.com/news/story.html?id=7195492>) for more information.

0 Comments

Sort by Oldest



Add a comment...

Facebook Comments Plugin

(HTTPS://WWW.POSTMEDIA.COM)

365 Bloor St East, Toronto, ON, M4W3L4, www.postmedia.com

© 2018 Postmedia Network Inc. All rights reserved.

Unauthorized distribution, transmission or republication strictly prohibited.

Powered by WordPress.com VIP (https://vip.wordpress.com/?utm_source=vip_powered_wpcom&utm_medium=web&utm_campaign=VIP%20Footer%20Credit&utm_term=montrealgazette.com)