

One Girl's Journey to Quebec

by Colleen Easter

I was lucky enough to be able to go to the Unity Rally in Montreal. We figured you saw enough of this stuff on the news that you know what happened, so here is my journal to tell you what it felt like.

Friday, October 27, 7:30 am

I am at the airport. I find it difficult to believe that I am actually going to Quebec. My prayers have been answered. I have been praying that somehow I will be able to make a difference in this debate. I actually slept a few hours last night, for the first time in a long time. Why am I going to Quebec? This country is the most important thing in the world to me. And Quebec is a great big part of that country. This hurts me. I want them to stay and am willing to do almost anything to try to make them stay. They get a vote. I get nothing. This is the only way I get any democratic voice. And I do mean voice. This rally is going to be loud if I have anything to say about it. My ears are already ringing, ringing with the sounds of Lucien Bouchard's warnings to the people of Quebec: "Watch out! It's a trick!" Trick! He is the trickster. I am mad. And desperate.

8:30 am

We are in the air on the way to Halifax. Airplanes are absolutely amazing to me. I have no idea how they fly -- all those physics classes have been no help at all. Years and years ago no one would have thought of a plane like this. But they wouldn't have thrown it away for a lack of understanding. I feel like that is what Quebec is doing sometimes. Throwing something great away just because they don't know entirely how to work it.

Catherine Callbeck has wandered up and down the aisles handing out PEI flags. At first I thought it was a little inappropriate, then I realized maybe it wasn't. While at first glance they may be represent provincialism -- the possible cause of the whole problem -- when we should be promoting unity, maybe they represent something more. They show that I am an Islander and a Canadian and very proud of both my identities. Maybe the Quebecois can get to that point someday as well.

Callbeck and Herb Dickieson are handing out PEI and Canada pins. I am glad to have them but I am still a little mad at them both. Or more truthfully, at all politicians. Why didn't they do something? Why couldn't they understand the severity of Meech and Charlottetown? Or

even a month ago realize what a threat Parizeau was? It has come down to four days and now we are going to show how much we love them. On the radio this morning someone said they are going to be mean to people because it was too late to show love. I certainly hope it isn't.

9:55 am

We are finally in the air. It seemed to take forever to get everyone seated on the plane. We have hitched a ride with approximately 190 Newfoundlanders. The PEI contingent is scattered all over the place. We brought students, senior citizens, young people, politicians, and possibly even a few normal Canadians. Every age group is well represented on this plane. I feel a little calmer now. Some Newfoundlander just welcomed us and decided we needed to have a little singsong to get us pumped up. Oh joy. He called us Flight Canada and I guess in a way it really is. There is oodles of media, cameras, and microphones from the Newfoundland press.

We have had our sing-a-long. I think we managed to miss the two most important songs of all -- national anthems. The last verse of "God Save the Queen" is ringing through my head:

"Our loved Dominion bless with peace and happiness from shore to shore, and let our nation be UNITED, LOYAL, FREE, true to herself and thee forever more." That is my prayer. The sing song didn't really cheer me up. I feel sad. Pat Mella asked us how we felt before we left and worried was the short answer. Worried and desperate. BLAST! I am taking this personally. I am sick and tired of people saying it is political, cultural or whatever, not a direct slap in the face. It is a slap in the face. And it hurts. This is my country and I don't want anybody to mess it up.

11:30 am

We are in Montreal and finally out of the airport. There are a bunch of people waving Canadian flags outside the airport. And on a pedestrian bridge over the highway a big Maple leaf was waving. Someone was waiting outside the plane to welcome us and thank us for coming. Wow. It feels like it might make a difference. We are on a bus and on the way to downtown Montreal. Some lady just handed us all Canadian flags. It is real. I want to wave it. I am sick and tired of all these reports of how un-Canadian this gesture is. I am a flag waving, song singing, in-your-face patriotic Canadian. Maybe it was being out of the country for an extended period of time or being in the

military which made me weird, but I cry when I hear "O Canada."

2:45 pm

Wow. I am trying to think of a better adjective but I can't. Wow. It is all over and I am on a bus waiting to go back to the airport. Some nice guy gave me a placard, so I got to wave it high. We found all the other Islanders who had come by bus, and all the politician types who had come on a different bus from Dorval. PEI flags were flying everywhere. It is all a jumble of memories and emotions. Screaming, and I do mean screaming, "Canada, Canada" at the top of my lungs. "No! No! No!" over and over again. All these people. Just so many people. And lots of them coming up and asking where we are from and then thanking us for coming and for the support. People everywhere. There is a little hill and when you got to the top and looked back there were thousands and thousands Canadian flags waving in the air. Hearing Jean Chretien talk. Sort of talk. We managed to find our spot behind the big speakers so what we heard was somewhat selective.

Jean Chretien speaks loudly in French and quietly in English so I didn't understand a lot of what he said. But I heard the passion in his voice. And we certainly heard when he thanked PEI for coming. There were so many people and flags. I think that was the point. To make an impact and show Quebec how much we wanted them to stay, not what the politicians did or did not say. We managed to take a somewhat circular route to find something to eat, thank goodness for Chris, and every street we were on was blocked off. I don't think a car could have gotten anywhere in Montreal today. In the middle of one street there was a huge truck with "MY CANADA INCLUDES QUEBEC" written on it and thousands of names signed all over the truck. Just in the middle of the street. Like an oasis in the desert. We all signed it and it was amazing. And after the Prime Minister of Canada finished we sang "O Canada". Usually I get the biggest tingles when I hear that song and a Canadian has just won an Olympic gold medal. Today I had more tingles. I didn't actually cry. Somehow I couldn't. All my hopes are in that song.

10:00 pm

After a long layover in Halifax we are finally back to Charlottetown. It has been a long day but much shorter than if we had been on that bus. It has been incredible. So many thank yous. So many

politicians have shaken my hand. So many flags. That is what I am still thinking about. The flags. My throat is sore. All those people. Some how it doesn't seem like the day should be over.

12:00 am

I am watching the National on Newsworld. Oh my goodness! While I was in Quebec I had only a small concept of what was going on around me. As I see it on the news I realize how many bloomin' people were there. Wow. I was a part of it. I hear them screaming on the news and realize my voice is one of them. I hope I made a differen

Monday, October 30, 10:00 pm

I am sick. I am trying to paint and I cannot concentrate. Yes is ahead. Always ahead. This is sickening. If Peter Mansbridge says "... but the Island of Montreal's votes are slow to come in" one more time I may scream. ARRGHH. I screamed. Oh my goodness, this is way too close. I really need a drink!

Tuesday, October 31, 2:00 am

We won. Sort of. Someone on television said they showed us they loved us but that is not enough, you need to recognize us. And I think that is true. We need to show that we do love them and recognize them. Jacques Parizeau blamed money and the ethnics for the loss. That is taken by a compliment by me. Some one had to pay for my trip to Quebec, it cost money from somebody. And I am an ethnic. An ethnic Canadian. Thank God we won. Now we can deal with this as a country, not as two states. Tell your politicians you love Quebec. I have already started my letter to Wayne Easter. I hope you start one too. In six months I don't want to do this again. Or in a year. Or two. But today I have my country.

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