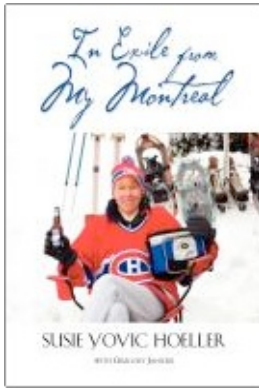


*In Exile from
My Montreal*



SUSIE YOVIC HOELLER

WITH GREGORY JANICKE



In Exile from My Montreal is a must read for everyone who loves Canada, and for all others who enjoy stories which illuminate a unique time and place that no longer exists. In this engaging memoir, Susie Yovic Hoeller tells her story about growing up in Montreal when the city was the cosmopolitan jewel of Canada. Three years after the Parti Québécois election victory in 1976, the author joined the "Anglophone Exodus" from Montreal.

In Exile from My Montreal

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By
Susie Yovic Hoeller

With Gregory Janicke

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Chapter 1. Coming to Canada

Our car plunged into the whipping winds and swirling snow as we drove through upstate New York, and across the international border into Quebec. We were not simply on an ill-timed vacation. Dad was transplanting us from Chicago to Montreal for his job.

It was a new frontier.

Touching down in and being touched by Montreal was certainly nothing new. Canada has a rich heritage of discovery. Flip through the pages of history and you'll find a French explorer who set foot in Canada as far back as 1534. He couldn't get the place out of his mind. He came back the next year and again in 1541.

He thought he had discovered the exotic lands of Asia, not the Canada we know and love. He was only off by thousands of miles. Still, it didn't stop him from planting the flag of France into Canadian soil.

To most people, Cartier is an expensive, exquisite timepiece. To Canadians, Jacques Cartier is the name of that explorer who sailed from France to find a north-west passage to Asia. His travels are something of an exquisite timepiece themselves, forever set in the history record.

Cartier came to a land the indigenous people called "Kanata," which simply meant a village or settlement. In his hubris, Cartier thought he had struck gold. During his time, his explorations were considered failures – he did not find the fabulous gold and riches of the Orient that everyone in France eagerly expected.

Like Cartier, our family came from outside of Canada. Unlike Cartier, we did not have to cross the Atlantic Ocean to stake our claim. And, unlike Cartier, our time in Montreal, before our exile, was anything but "a failure." All things, at first, had the unmistakable stamp of success upon them.

I was not born in Montreal. My birth certificate was signed by Richard J. Daley, then Clerk of Cook County, Illinois, later the most famous mayor in Chicago history. I arrived in Montreal in 1960 as a

six-year-old child, with my parents, my brothers, and our dog. Our status as “landed immigrants” meant that Canada had legally admitted us for as long as we wished to stay. My dad had accepted a sales position with a Canadian manufacturing company.

Our family had journeyed from Chicago to our new home in Baie D’Urfé, a suburb on the West Island of Montreal. My parents had driven through a March blizzard in the Adirondacks. Their route had taken them south of Lake Erie and Lake Ontario because the Trans-Canada Highway, which runs north of these two Great Lakes, had not yet been completed.

Here is how my mom describes our journey to the north and our first days in our new country:

“Over fifty years have passed since we left Chicago to make our new home in the town of Baie D’Urfé in the Canadian province of Quebec. The town is named after a French priest, the Abbé Urfé, because he founded the town on the banks of Lake St. Louis. Adjacent to the town is the village of Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue, which soon became our principal shopping mecca. We called it ‘St. Anne’s.’

“I was 29 years old at the time with my husband, Charles (‘Dad’), and our three children: Susie, six; Billy, three; and Jimmy, two. Always dog lovers, we were fortunate to have our beloved cocker spaniel, Taffy, along with us.

“I have been asked by my daughter to write about my memories of her time in Montreal because it was very dear to her, as it was to her brothers.

“Because I had been raised in the Midwest (according to my father, populated by the most normal people in the USA), I had had little contact with other parts of the country, and, of course, Canada. However, when I was young girl of 12 in 1943, my mother had taken me on a train trip from Chicago to Los Angeles to visit my grandparents, who had retired there. We then continued up the west coast and crossed the border into British Columbia. I remember there were lots of tea shops, china shops, and a few men in kilts – a thoroughly British atmosphere.

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“I had a vague idea of what Quebec would be like before we moved there – people speaking French to amuse the tourists like in New Orleans and a lot of French food, although I knew nothing of French cuisine.

“We all arrived safely on March 18, 1960. We had to meet our Mayflower moving van in downtown Montreal to have the seal broken by a Canadian Customs inspector. Why that was necessary I did not comprehend at the time, feeling somewhat like a smuggler.

“There had been a huge snowstorm the day before, and our new home seemed to be barely visible as we drove up. The driveway was filled two feet deep with snow. The moving van driver suggested we drive into St. Anne’s to find someone to plow the driveway out. Finally, a snow plow truck came from nearby Ilê Perrot (an odd name, I thought at the time, not knowing any French words).

“I asked the driver of the moving van if he could possibly find the two cribs or even the playpen, as the boys by this time were very tired and cranky.

“While the moving van was being unpacked and daylight was fading, our next door neighbour and my first Canadian friend, Dot Hare, came to our front door with a complete roast pork dinner. Nothing, then or since, has ever tasted so delicious!

“We had arrived on a Friday, and Dad had to leave for California on Sunday afternoon. We all piled into the car and set out to find Dorval Airport. Dot Hare had said, ‘Just stay on the 2-20 Highway,’ and that is what I did.

“On Sunday evening, I went down into the basement of our new home to do laundry. Much to my dismay, I found a pit in the floor filled with water and some kind of machinery. I called Jack Hare, Dot’s husband, and told him there was a hole in my basement floor. He came right over and told me that it was the sump pump. I had no idea what this meant but accepted the fact that it was somehow important.

“On Monday morning, it was time to take Susie to the local school. The day was bright and beautiful, like a winter wonderland.

I dressed Susie in a red plaid dress with a lace collar and brown 'Mary Jane' shoes. The first thing the principal asked me was whether we were Protestant or Catholic, which I thought was a little personal. I was soon to learn that public schools in Montreal were divided by religion.

"We were taken down the hall to the first grade room or, as they say in Canada, 'Grade One.' It was very austere, all the little girls in navy blue tunics and white blouses, and all the boys in grey pants and white shirts. The desks looked pretty scuffed up, and there was one lonely piece of chalk on the blackboard rim. What had we done?"

"Of course, I had to leave her there, and I fretted all morning until she came home for lunch. She was overjoyed with her new school and told me she had two new friends, Guy and Goldie, who were twins (a boy and a girl, I assumed). They turned out to be two identical little boys who could only be told apart by their parents and their friend, Steve Hare.

"We soon ventured into St. Anne's as we needed groceries and school uniforms for Susie. We found a store called Watiers and discovered that they delivered groceries. This was a great help since we only had one car. At the beginning, when I called the store to place my orders each week, I didn't always receive the exact groceries I thought I had ordered because I could not speak French. Also, everything came in giant sizes because the French Canadians had such large families. I asked for a bag of potato chips and received a huge can of Maple Leaf brand chips. I think we had that can for 10 years. Jam came in quart jars, potatoes in 20-pound sacks, eggs in cartons of two dozen, and flour and sugar came in 10-pound bags.

"We bought Susie her tunics, white blouses, navy blue knee socks, Oxford shoes, and something my neighbours recommended called 'Billy Boots.' These were knee-high rubber boots lined in flannel to be worn during the spring thaw, which was not yet upon us."

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Our family discovered rather quickly that Montreal cold was very different from the Chicago cold we had known. The Windy City on Lake Michigan had that “creep into your bones” dampness that seems to overtake every thought and heartbeat. The winters had overcast grey skies. Sometimes in Chicago, you just wanted to run to somewhere inside and not stay out in the cold.

In Montreal, the brilliant, almost blinding sunshine glistening off the white snow banks was a marvel to behold. It was inviting, welcoming you to a frozen land. We watched as our neighbours in Baie D’Urfé eagerly embraced the weather. Where were we? People loved being outside in the winter?

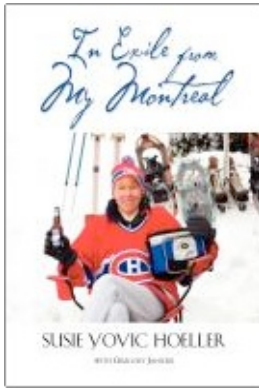
Little did we know that when my dad accepted a job in Montreal, we were not just moving northeast several hundred miles from Chicago – quite a bit shorter than Cartier’s sea voyage from France – we were also embarking on an unforgettable, life-changing adventure.

Robert Frost once wrote a poem called “The Road Not Taken.” It ends:

*I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.*

In the 1960s, our family could have stayed in Chicago or moved to another part of the States. My parents chose to move to Canada. We lived there for nearly 20 years.

And that, to me, has made all the difference.



In Exile from My Montreal is a must read for everyone who loves Canada, and for all others who enjoy stories which illuminate a unique time and place that no longer exists. In this engaging memoir, Susie Yovic Hoeller tells her story about growing up in Montreal when the city was the cosmopolitan jewel of Canada. Three years after the Parti Québécois election victory in 1976, the author joined the "Anglophone Exodus" from Montreal.

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