

# ELAN film series explores history and belonging

RUBY PRATKA  
RUBY@QCTONLINE.COM

To watch the six episodes of *Waves of Change*, a web series released on YouTube by the English Language Arts Network (ELAN) in collaboration with the Secretariat for Relations with English-speaking Quebecers, back-to-back is to receive a unique overview of the history of Quebec's English-speaking communities.

Each episode features a small group of English-speaking Quebecers, seated in a physically distanced circle and sharing family lore or their own reminiscences. The first five episodes focus on the anglophone Montreal experience through the years – *Colliding Solitudes* (1820-1945), *Le Vote Ethnique* (1945-1970), *Classe d'Accueil* (1970-1995), *Crashing the Party* (1995-2010) and *Invisible Hoops* (2010-2020). The last episode, *You Just Have to Find Them!*, explores the regional anglophone experience, through the voices of people from the Gaspé, the Eastern Townships, the North Shore, the Lower North Shore, West Quebec, the Lac-Mégantic region, Abitibi-Témiscamingue and the Magdalen Islands.

The speakers come from a wide range of ethnic, religious and educational backgrounds and age groups; some are recent immigrants, some are transplants from other parts of Canada and others have roots in the province that go back generations. Their stories encompass decades of political change, from the early 20th century, when most immigrants were placed in English schools, to the decades after Bill 101 when non-French-speaking immigrants were funnelled

into the French public school system via *classes d'accueil*.

They take viewers from the months before the 1970 October Crisis, when English-speaking Montrealers lived in fear of mailbox bombs, through the divisiveness that reigned around the 1995 sovereignty referendum, to present-day debates about language and belonging. Participants in each episode are asked to rate, on a scale of one to 10, their own sense of belonging to their city or region, to Quebec and to Canada, a moment that seems made to inspire similar reflections in viewers.

The series was produced and directed by filmmaker and longtime ELAN director Guy Rodgers. He said the idea came about after the Secretariat for Relations with English-speaking Quebecers, created by the Couillard government in 2018, ran a series of community consultations and “found, to no one’s surprise, that anglos don’t have a strong sense of belonging in Quebec.” Rodgers wanted to create a participative work of art to explore identity and belonging in English-speaking communities, and eventually hit on the idea of a film series.

“We have a million people who identify as English speakers in the province, so how do we begin to talk to them in any meaningful way?” he said. “We eventually decided to approach it in terms of immigration, because people’s relationship to Quebec is often decided by when their family came here and under what circumstances.”

The English-speaking community shown in Rodgers’ short films defies the popular stereotype of an insular community clustered on the West

Island of Montreal, “all related to General Wolfe” as Rodgers put it. He observed that some francophones still see this caricature when they picture English speakers in Quebec.

“It’s funny that the English-speaking community has been portrayed as a white Anglo-Saxon Protestant monolith. One of the most interesting takeaways from the whole thing was that we [didn’t find many] people who called themselves Anglo-Saxon. Most of the people would prefer to call themselves Celts, either Scottish or Irish. Amongst the people we found who do self-declare being English, very few are Protestants. That makes me wonder if most of those who left [in the latter part of the 20th century] were white Protestants. There’s also a demographic shift from the regions to Montreal that I’d like to understand better.”

The films also explore the evolving relationship between English speakers and the surrounding francophone community, from people who were raised in isolated anglophone communities within majority-francophone regions to the children of bilingual or trilingual households. Rodgers said he hopes to use some of the content from the films to make a longer production, to be shown in schools, to newly arrived immigrants and to politicians who continue to use language as a wedge issue. “We can negotiate some sort of a shared possession of this place, shared ownership, shared use,” he said. “I’m hoping that will happen.”

*The six short films of the Waves of Change series can be seen on the ELAN Quebec YouTube channel.*



Guy Rex Rodgers  
Roots: Scotland,  
Ireland & England

Screenshot from *Waves of Change*

Former English Language Arts Network (ELAN) director Guy Rodgers directed and produced the *Waves of Change* film series.



Photo by Betty Esperanza for *Waves of Change*

Guy Rodgers (foreground) listens as *Waves of Change* participants Adriana Ruffini from the Abitibi region, Megan Mullin from the Gaspé, Linton Garner from the Gatineau region and Madeleine Lawler from the Lac-Mégantic area speak during the Montreal taping of *You Just Have to Find Them!* Although most participants attended the taping in person, Shelley Fecquet (Lower North Shore) and Catherine Kohner (Baie-Comeau) attended by videoconference for logistical reasons. “It’s winter on the Lower North Shore, and we have no ferry service,” Fecquet explained, noting that even in the best of times it takes more than a day to travel from the far northeast of the province to Montreal.