

## **The History of Mouvement Retrouvailles**

Mouvement Retrouvailles celebrated its 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1998. Volunteer movements always come into being to meet the specific needs of people with common interests. We are no exception to this rule. At Mouvement Retrouvailles, it was issues concerning adoption which brought together our volunteers, i.e. helping out adoptees, non-adopted people, birth parents and adoptive parents.

You have to go back to 1976 to retrace the first steps which led to the creation of Mouvement Retrouvailles. And more precisely to Sherbrooke in November, 1976 when Mr Jean McConnel established an agency whose purpose was searching for abandoned or adopted children, better known by its French abbreviation: AREA. AREA's primary goal was reuniting parents and children by looking for matches amongst the applications submitted by adoptees and birth parents.

It soon became clear that this wasn't enough and that other activities would be required to meet the needs of the growing clientele. As a result, the services aimed at birth parent-children reunions were supplemented by new political activities as AREA Montréal took up the fight to effect changes to the laws on sealed adoption files. Basing its demands on Québec's Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms and the positions outlined in the submission made to the Commission des droits de la personne du Québec, AREA Montréal began campaigning, in the name of all adoptees and non-adopted persons of Québec, for the right to know one's origins and for the right of access to information.

This struggle became its primary goal. Starting in March 1982, AREA organized demonstrations, petitions and visits to the offices of the Ministers to demand the opening up of adoption files. A moratorium and a parliamentary commission were called for.

Groups of adoptees, non-adopted persons and parents came into being all around the province and they, too, took up the struggle for the right of access to information. It was these groups which eventually led to the creation of Mouvement Retrouvailles, under the direction of Mme Reine Landry of Montréal.

It was in 1983 that Mouvement Retrouvailles was founded with the recognition and support of more than 4,000 members. Over the years, the work done by both Mouvement Retrouvailles and its founder, Ms Reine Landry, have earned them great respect. The organization was officially registered in Québec City on February, 9 1983 by its founder, who teaches in Montréal, Mrs Gisèle Falardeau, an auxiliary nurse in Charlesbourg, and Mr. Gilles Bertrand, a dispatcher from Montréal-Nord. These three people made up the board of administration during that period. Fifteen years later, there are more than 14,000 members spread across 15 regions of the province who are still fighting for their rights to their origins and access to information.

Since its establishment, Mouvement Retrouvailles has expanded its work to all regions of Québec. Each region has an office which is run regionally and offers well-structured services. To date, our provincial registry has more than 12,500 entries (birth parents and children). The entries are co-ordinated by our Head Office in Longueuil.

The services offered by Mouvement Retrouvailles are:

- regional café-rencontres
- links to all the Youth Centres
- regional telephone networks
- counselling throughout the procedures leading up to reunion
- etc.

Since its conception, many volunteers of Mouvement Retrouvailles have headed up various special projects, both of governmental and public nature, for example:

- Cadeux Commission (1985);
- Access to Information Commission;
- Reform of the Québec Civil Code (1990);
- Reform of the Québec Ministry of Health and Social Services (1998);
- Participation in Salon de la Femme (1988);
- Presence at Salon de la Famille;
- Held two provincial conventions;
- Two television specials (1991 and 1995);
- Coalition with Groupes familiaux de retrouvailles apprivoisées and Adoption-Émotions.

Mouvement Retrouvailles uses many media outlets to increase its visibility:

- Search notices in Le Lundi; Journal de Montréal; Journal de Québec; Hebdo-Védettes; Echo-Vedettes; Photo-Police
- Diverse TV and radio shows, Janette Bertrand, Claire Lamarche, Le Point, Le Match de la Vie, Droit de parole, Coup de coeur (Shirley Théroux), Enjeux, Droit au coeur (Marguerite Blais), En toute amitié (Marie-Josée Longchamps), Second Regard (Hamed Marlski), Bonjour Chez-vous, community television, La Vie en Mauricie, CKUL, CJMS, CKNU, CKAC;
- As well as numerous interviews in the Journal de Montréal, Journal de Québec, La Presse, Le Soleil, in the regional weeklies, Le Lundi, 7 jours, Dernière Heure, Le Bel-Âge, F.A.D.O.Q., Écho Vedettes.

Some people, who were part of the Adoption Circle and who are also supporters of Mouvement Retrouvailles, have published books (in French) on the subject of adoption, more particularly "*Le défi de retrouver ma mère naturelle*" (Normay St-Pierre) and "*Le cri de l'adopté*" (Reine Landry).

Although many small steps have been made, we still have not reached our main goal (amending the legislation which seals adoption files).

The activities of Mouvement Retrouvailles in 1998 have focussed more on counselling and support services to our members. We hope one day that the will to change and the collective effort will meet up with people who are in a position to make changes to the laws on adoption. With this goal in mind, a provincial political committee has been working hard in close collaboration with the different regions and the government officials who are responsible for matters linked to adoption issues.

The work of Mouvement Retrouvailles continues in the province of Québec and we hope it will continue for a long time to come so that all adoptees and non-adopted persons will be able to find the answers in the search for their identity and roots.

Mme Solange Vien, 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President