

Stewart Goodings – Victoria (Now Comox), BC

I joined CPF for the same reason most parents do—to help my kids. We'd just moved from Ottawa to Victoria in 1979, and we wanted our two kids, aged 9 and 6, to be able to continue their bilingual education. At that time, French Immersion was a brand-new phenomenon in BC. At the local level, CPF had just started a chapter and we volunteers soon realized we'd need to fight to maintain and expand French language education. We mostly faced a lack of awareness of what French Immersion was. Administrators, parents and the general public worried that children would fall behind in English if they took all their classes in French. Of course, there were a few critics who saw this as a Quebec plot, but in the main, the general reaction was positive and curious. We were lucky in having a knowledgeable and supportive French language coordinator in the Victoria School Board, Geoff Mills. He was a great help as the program grew, and later he took on a similar position for the BC Ministry of Education where he had an even greater positive influence on the growth of French Immersion across the province.

Soon, I was persuaded by Judy Gibson, another of CPF's pioneers living in Coquitlam, to get involved in CPF's provincial executive, and then in 1983, I was elected National President of the organization, a position I held for two years. Though it is now 30 years since those days, I can still recall vividly the excitement of seeing CPF recognized by the federal government as a legitimate lobbying group. One of the initiatives we took in those early days was to commission a national public opinion survey, the results of which demonstrated a widespread national support for improved French language learning opportunities for English-speaking children. This was a big boost in CPF's public information efforts.

In those growing years for CPF, we were lucky to have Jos Scott as our National Executive Director in Ottawa. She was not only super-efficient, and an unparalleled source of information for all of us across Canada, but she was also the consummate diplomat in dealing with both volunteers and government bureaucrats. And it was a most happy experience to be part of this national movement—so many friendships developed over the numerous regional and national meetings, and even today, with all of the “originals” relishing their roles as Grandparents for French, I have maintained contact with CPF friends all over the country.

Last fall (2013), I was invited to attend the President's dinner in Victoria, and spent an evening with the current national leadership of CPF. Two of the people I met that evening are testimony to the evolving power of CPF's evolution: Jordan Wright, the Vice President, is the son of Mary Beth Wright, one of my colleagues from Newfoundland in the early days, and Sharon Lapkin, newly elected to the Board, is a distinguished academic who played a major role in the 70s and 90s carrying out research which validated the benefits of French Immersion.

CPF is part of my DNA, and always will be. With two grandchildren in French Immersion, I am still a believer, almost 40 years after my first involvement with this remarkable organization.

Stewart Goodings lives in Comox, BC, is a retired federal and provincial public servant, and was National President of CPF in 1983-85.