



Je déteste la bouillabaisse: **The Power of Imagination and a Bilingual Journey**

BY DOUGLAS VANDOR, AUTHOR AND OLYMPIC ROWER

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I have always believed that following one's passion leads to success. I was passionate about rowing, and that passion steered me for 13 years on Canada's Olympic Rowing Team. Writing is something that I am passionate about as well. I have been writing for as long as I can remember and I have always enjoyed the creativity that writing requires, as well as the process that it unleashes. Although it is a different form of exertion from rowing, it can be just as intense.

As an Olympic athlete, writing provided a balance from my heavy training schedule. It was also a pastime that gave my aching muscles a respite from the endless kilometres rowing up and down the lake. Writing during my downtime put my brain to work, a change that I welcomed.

When I hung up my oars, I traded them for a pen. Quite suddenly I found myself writing and getting paid to do so.

The lessons I learned on the lake inevitably found themselves onto the pages of my manuscripts. My first children's book, *Salmon on Toast*, was about perseverance. My second children's book, *I HATE BOUILLABAISSE!*, is about the mind and the power of our imagination. In sport, the mind can be our ally or our foe. It can be the difference between a podium finish or fourth place. In life outside of sport, this is no different.

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Negative thoughts can trickle into our consciousness and dictate our paths. And when the mind gets stuck in some of these darker places, it can make us nervous, anxious and even scared. But if we learn to work with the imagination instead of fighting it, these perceived challenges can sometimes seem less daunting. They can even be converted into opportunities.



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Sophie's imagination always plays tricks on her when it comes to the unfamiliar dishes that her aunt makes. She doesn't recognize the names of the dishes nor how they look on her plate. Her imagination thus takes hold of her and changes her mood, it dictates her reactions. As the story progresses, however, Sophie starts to realize that the ridiculously yucky meals that she has been cooking up in her mind are the ones that she had been craving all along. She turns something that was initially negative into something that is positive by looking at it through a different lens. Her confidence and her self esteem are rewarded in turn; a lesson for us all. The situation didn't change, Sophie just chose to look at it in a different way.

I wrote the English version of the book first, but it was important to me for the book to be available in French as well (***JE DÉTESTE LA BOUILLABAISSÉ!***).

I have been surrounded by bilingualism my entire life. Growing up in a small town in Québec, I would switch from English to French then back to English many times a day. I was a part of both the English and French communities and effortlessly flowed in and out of each culture. Whether at hockey practice, boy scouts or in the school yard during recess, both languages were needed in order to thrive. Instead of resisting learning 'the other' language, the earlier one became bilingual the better one could navigate and experience the entire community, not just

a part of it. And, of course, food always provided an important gateway to sharing ideas between the English and the French communities. It was a way to create bridges between families and cement friendships that lasted generations.

Living in both Montréal and Québec City as a young adult, it never ceased to amaze me how people switched back and forth between French and English so effortlessly. It was very common to hear one person on the street speaking French and the other person answering back to them in English, carrying on a conversation as if it was the most natural thing to do in the world. That is life in a bilingual community.

In a way my wife and I are trying to recreate this experience for our own kids. They attend French school in Vancouver. They are completely bilingual and they were both born and raised on the West Coast! How cool is that? A testament to the importance of starting to learn languages at a young age.

We expose them to both the English and the French cultures in Vancouver, in addition to the many other cultures that surround them, and they are encouraged to soak up as much of it as they want. This is our little contribution to bilingualism (and multiculturalism) in Canada.

And, of course, I still make bouillabaisse every once in a while, for supper, with the hopes that one day they will enjoy it; they still hate it. And with copies of both ***I HATE BOUILLABAISSÉ!*** and ***JE DÉTESTE LA BOUILLABAISSÉ!*** on our bookshelf, they are now officially allowed to complain about my cooking, as long as they say it twice; once in English and once in French. ■

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