

## Unit 1: Video 2 Transcript

**Q8: How do you approach research? Have you encountered something distinctive about the story of Quebec?**

A: I did my MA research on Carnivale in Quebec City. And as I was doing that research, it kept coming back to me that the real strength of traditional culture was being lost in cities. Quebec City in 1894, that's when I looked at. But the real strength of this popular culture that was being borrowed for a businessman's celebration was in the countryside. So I thought when I go back to school and do the PhD, I want to go back to find out the roots. Then the question is, well, where do you go? And fortunately I thought of the Beauce right away because I've known people there for a long time. And so I thought, I'll go there and see what place I'm going to study. I thought, maybe I should do three parishes anyway. I drove from Montreal and didn't take the direct route, but then I came over the hill from Asbestos and took the road to the Chaudière Vallée. And I came upon Saint-Joseph, one of the three places I thought I'd study. The other was Saint-Marie and the other was Saint-Francoise I think. One is north; one is south of Saint-Joseph. I come over the hill across the bridge, and there it is in front of me: This big tall church, a convent, a palatial rectory, what else? There was something else. Anyway, there it was [inaudible]. I thought this is the place I want to study. So there's one.

And then when I was there in the local archives, which were in the old convent, I started reading the priests' reports of people's behaviour. And my motivation for taking up the subject in the first place is, well, if the church controlled people's lives, how did they do it? What is the process of taking people who in the French regime were considered by religious as well as civil authorities to be rebellious, uncontrollable, not terribly religious—good Catholics, but not in a demonstratively religious way—so what changed them into the docile people of the 19th century? But the more I looked, after I started reading the first couple of reports, I thought no, the narrative's wrong. If the priests are saying, "We're not controlling these people." I thought, well, maybe I better believe them and find out what it is that the priests have a problem with.

So the other “a-ha” moment was I guess at the Vancouver Folk Festival when— which we’ve been going to for, I don’t know, 35 years or something like that. When you see Quebec culture or, at one point, Newfoundland culture, the culture of the time, you think, yes, this really moved people. This gave them the possibility to affirm themselves. They can be members of a political community, a religious community. But at some point they’re a community of like-minded people who celebrate together, who have these little moments of community solidarity that are not quantifiable, but are nonetheless real. And all of these things, I guess it wasn’t one moment, but a number of moments, that kind of crystallized around this. So I had wonderful years going to the archives in Saint-Joseph, and I have to say the diocese and archives in Quebec City as well, where a lot of the reports were, that made me see that there’s something in the affirmative power of popular culture that gave these people a sense of who they were.

Italian historian Levi basically said the same thing. People can find their own moments of solidarity and give them autonomy within the structures around them. What is this thing? And the more I looked at their popular culture, the more I thought, this is their means of autonomy.