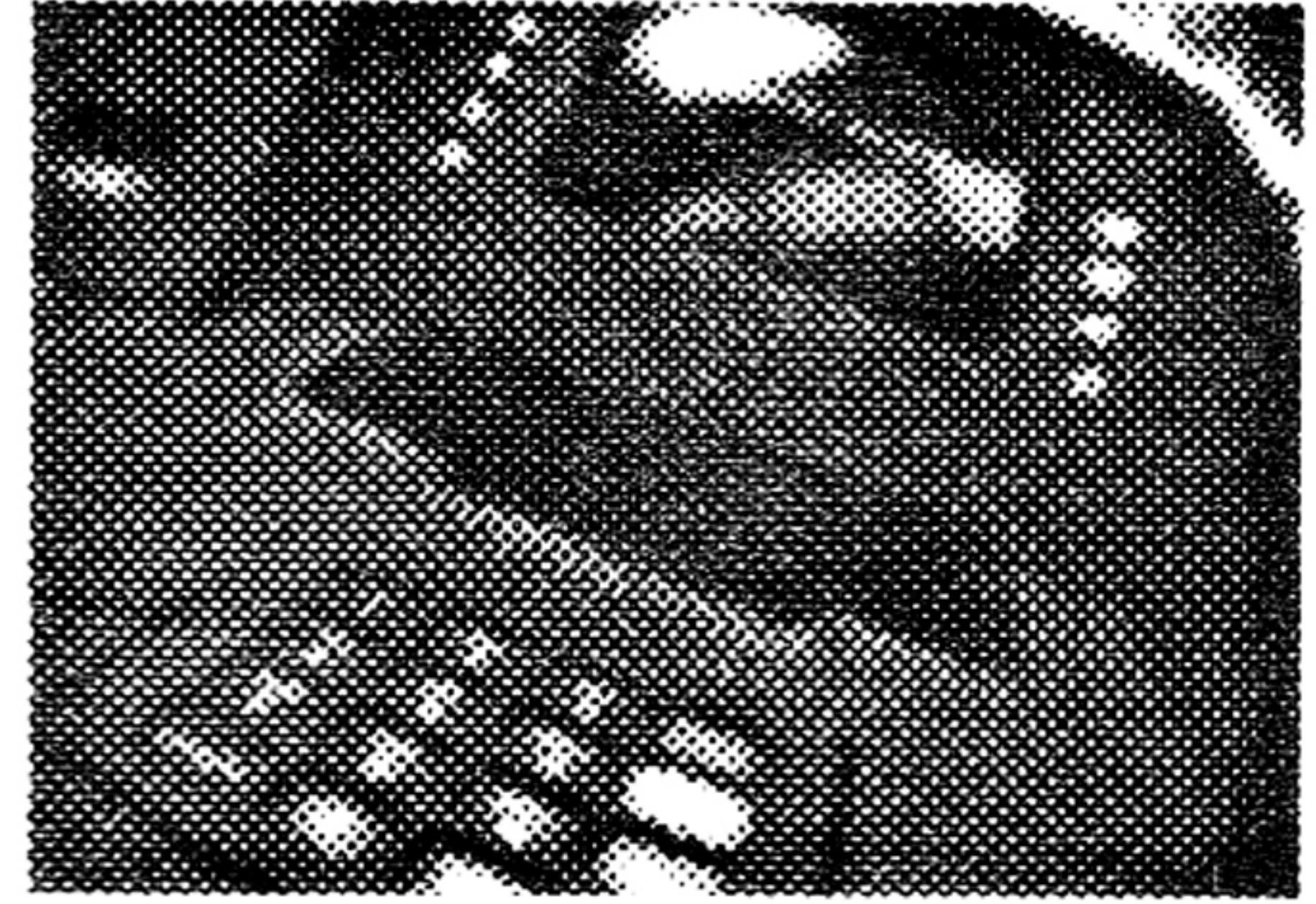


Hour (Montreal) - 1994



# INSTANT TELLER



Mingia! You must see dis!

The *official Official St-Leonard Dictionary* is ready, and it's funner than anything! The writers/compiler, **John "Rocko" Trivisonno** and **Mario "Buddy" Giulione**, have come out with an indispensable manual on how to speak St-Leonardese. St-Leonard is a fine Montreal neighbourhood of the Italian persuasion.

Some of the over 200 definitions include:

**Gription:** traction, specifically on running shoes.

*Dese shoes are no more good... they have no gription.*

**No more good:** broken, used, worn out

**Zip:** sip

*Could I have a zip of your slush?*

**Embomballated:** from "discombobulate"; confused, disoriented

*When that ball hit me in the head, let me tell you, I was all embomballated.*

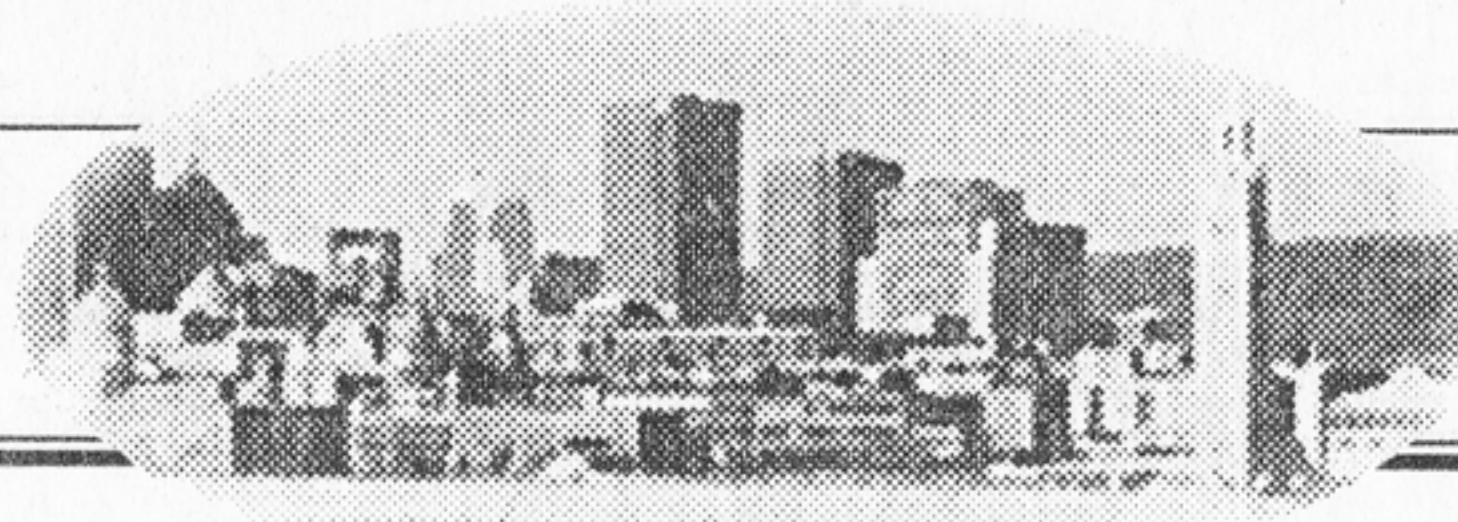
**Grew him up:** raised him

*His mother used to work, so his grandmother grew him up.*

**Floor:** concrete or asphalt outdoors *Oh! Don't eat that gum... it fell on the floor!*

For info, write to **chapter 11 productions**, 4659 Place Neully, St-Leonard, PQ, H1S 2R5, or call 725-0573.

Montreal 2000



Pride &amp; prospects

# Broken Frenglish

*When it comes to language, word on the street is anything you can get away with*

PEGGY CURRAN  
The Gazette

**L**eave the politicians to squabble about official languages. Word on the street is whatever you can get away with.

At least 160 languages are competing for air space in this city these days, according to the Montreal Island School Council. And while the proper folk speak the language of Bernard Derome and George Balcan, in reality anything goes, often all at the same time.

Here's a glossary to help recognize variations on Montreal creole, the mishmash, free-for-all of broken dialects spoken by the street-smart Montrealer:

## Last of the Mohicans

It's easy to spot elderly anglophones who speak little or no French. Listen for telltale words like Gene Talon, Long Gail, Ver-din, Decorie Blvd., St. Dennis, Craig and Noder Dame Sts. These are the same people who still buy car tickets. Yet there may be unconscious French influences on the speech. Listen in case your grandmother uses serviettes instead of napkins, asks you to close the light before taking coffee on the gallery, or says a-yoille instead of ouch.

## Fractured French

This is the patois of lifelong English Montrealers, usually over the age of 35, who picked up most of their French on the job. Pre-immersion babies, they gave up trying to acquire Parisian accents. Often native to Verdun, Rosemont or the Point, they speak fluent French. Just don't ask them to explain the difference between the passé composé and the imparfait. The problem, however, is that guided by ear and instinct, they may not know the difference between navette (shuttle, as in space shuttle) and navet (turnip).

## Rumpled English

Even francophones who speak English well sometimes give themselves away by speaking in the present tense — I live in Montreal since five years instead of I've lived here for five years — or by using the wrong phrase while still managing to get the message across. Correcting may put them in a bad humor. Be careful, it's contagious. These days even anglophones sometimes find themselves giving conferences, attending congresses, and applying for subventions. We make precision and economies, have fond souvenirs and expose ourselves when we meant to exhibit.

## Me, I speak Itlish

In The Official St. Léonard Dictionary, John Trivisonno and Mario Giulione capture some of the fine points of English as spoken by many Italian Montrealers. While Trivisonno admits many traits also hold true for Ukrainians, Poles and Italians from Ville Emard, LaSalle, Montreal North and Rivière des Prairies, key research was done in St. Léonard.

Their manual features English words that have been taken for a spin in a souped-up black Camaro by chil-



GORDON BECK, GAZETTE

The mix that is Montreal is evident in the language of signs.

dren who often learn language by ear — as in "What's wrong witchoo? Broom the floor, comb your hairs, and eat your sangwich before going out to play hangle seet (hide and go seek), unless you have the chicken pops." Also Italo-English phrases corrupted from French, such as patows (firecrackers, from French "pétards"), block apartments, the ville, and Jan Talo (see Gene Talon above).

Other neighborhood distinctions include replacing gs with ks — "Is there somethink the matter?" Residents of N.D.G. often refer to Concordia's western campus as Lie-ola. English-speaking natives know their city as Muntreal, while newcomers call it Mawitrayal.

## Hybrids

Randy Mylyk spoke Ontario high-school French when he came to Quebec nearly 20 years ago for an immersion course at Université Laval. Now he's the executive assistant to the leader of the opposition at city hall, so fluently bilingual he sometimes frets about losing his English.

Mylyk still watches television mostly in English and reads *The Gazette* before Montreal's French-language newspapers. In a crowded room where several people are talking at once, he finds himself picking up on English conversations first. Yet his French accent and vocabulary are so smooth he can breeze through un cocktail or explain a complicated policy without fumbling.

Mylyk notices subtle but perceptible differences in the personalities of even his most bilingual friends when they switch from one language to another. Fluent as he is, Mylyk freezes up if he has to speak French in front of a microphone, although he takes the mike in English without flinching. And learning a language as an adult can leave strange gaps in the vocabulary. Mylyk's weak spot is nature.

"Owls, lizards, red-tailed sparrows, I have no idea. I can write a detailed press release on privatization, but put me in a park and I'm lost. A 4-year-old could show me up."

Indeed, there is no such thing as a red-tailed sparrow.

## With six you get eggroll

Why get stuck speaking one language when you can speak three? Montrealers are notorious for mixing their languages in the same sentence, either



because they don't know the word in French, because the English word just seems right, because they are nervous or want to make absolutely certain the message is understood. As in "Ça sera un vrai happening," "Elle est en break," or "Ferme ta gueule, c'est un holdup."

A francophone teenager describes the new Molson Centre as super hot, a dopehead is likely to tripé and flipé if he est stone, and the restaurant owner promises "patates god-like."

The Journal de Montréal declares race-car driver Jacques Villeneuve "le New Kid on the Block" and tells of the rift between Jean Chrétien and the Police Montée. La Presse columnist Lysiane Gagnon worries that an anglo influence explains why so many Quebecers have abandoned the polite "vous" for the democratic "tu," yet her own newspaper is sprinkled with words such as box office, talk show, snowbirds, groupiemanía, wow power, fashion victims and dropé out.

Even the stuck-up Le Devoir has been known to lapse into the demon tongue from time to time, sprinkling its stories with English words like british, remake, marginally acceptable and middle-class America.

## Borrowed, stolen, co-opted

Are there really English words for CLSC, HLM, PME, and, even so, why would you bother? Words like dépanneur, autoroute and caisse have sneaked into the average anglo's vocabulary until they no longer sound like you're trying to show off. Does it really matter what language it is if the word works? For instance, the standard Que-

becism for kitsch is kétéine, which reputedly originated with a tacky family named Keaton in St. Hyacinthe. What could be more descriptive than pain de fesse? Or gentrified inner-city neighborhoods which have been "Outremon-tisée."

There are several theories about how poutine, that Quebec delicacy of greasy fries, cheese curds and lumpy gravy, got its name. One school of thought claims the name derives from the word putain, or prostitute, because like the Italian putanesca sauce, poutine is easy and quick to prepare between customers. Another says it's a French rendering of the English word "pudding." Yet another cites one Colonel Poutine who was in charge of provisions during the Siege of Quebec, when there was nothing left in the larder except potatoes, cheese and chicken stock.

## Politburo

Constitutional wars have given us an entire vocabulary and Montrealers give themselves away by the way they use words such as separatist, sovereignist, partitionist, corridorist, enclaviste, allophone, cultural communities, autonomy, independence and indépendantiste. By the way, are you an anglophone, francophone, allophone, italophone, hispanophone ...

## Mangled French/English

This happens when our knowledge of the other language isn't quite as good as we think it is. In Frenglish in Quebec English Newspapers, linguistics professor Margery Fee identified "false friends," French words that look

## SERIES CALENDAR

Saturday, April 13: History of Montreal

TODAY: THE MOUNTAIN AND THE RIVER; THE TALK OF THE TOWN

Wednesday, April 17: What is a Montrealer?

Friday, April 19: The economy

Saturday, April 20: Poverty and life on the margins

Sunday, April 21: Lessons from Boston

Wednesday, April 24: The brain trust

Friday, April 26: Culture

Saturday, April 27: Our leaders

Sunday, April 28: A livable city

Wednesday, May 1: City versus suburbs

Thursday, May 2: Language

Friday, May 3: Implications of independence

Saturday, May 4: Where do we go from here?

Sunday, May 5: Our readers' Montreal

the same but have a different meaning when used in English — affirmations for claims, circulation for traffic, installations for buildings, conventions for customs, intervention for objection and photographic documentation for documentary photographs.

## Everyday traductions

Translation can work wonders. Only through its crazy alchemy can a "sports fan" turn into a "ventilateur de sports," or the Canadian Bar Association be transformed into the Association Canadienne des Taverniers. Then there was the case of the politician who started his broadcast with "Good-night" thinking it meant "Bon soir" when he meant to say "Good evening," i.e., "bon soir." Check out any translated item — a grocery flier, package label, instruction sheet — and you'll find gems, dull old words turned into nuggets.

## Excuse my French

Even the toughest swear words get lost in translation. Add an é and the F-word is French for anything that's not quite right. It doesn't carry quite the same baggage as it does for squareheads. Meanwhile, anglophones have trouble unleashing much pent-up anger with tabernacle and calice, although you may hear the occasional tabernouche.

## Gender benders

When the Baltimore Stallions decided to move the football franchise to Montreal this winter, a language expert at Le Devoir used etymological sexism to explain why the team should not be called the Alouettes.

Beyond the obvious problems with a folkloric term evoking lumberjacks in tuques and ceintures fléchées, columnist Pierre Beaudry pointed out that the word alouette is feminine. Who'll volunteer to tell all those beefy linebackers and lumberjacks?

## Concordia salus

Montreal's motto means "harmony in agreement." Live and let live might be more accurate. The Société St. Jean Baptiste, the last bastion of linguistic correctness, brandishes a huge banner appealing for the protection of Bill 101. But it obviously hasn't had much impact on its neighbors on Sherbrooke St. The house next door warns passers-by to "Beware of Dog," only in English, while the travel agency on the other side is called Easy Ride Covoiturage.



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## PRINT REVIEWS

**The Official St. Leonard Dictionary, by  
John Trivisonno**

This is a must-have for any native Montrealer. No doubt, if you're from here, you've heard people talking like this, or still talk like this yourself. And no doubt, you've never seen such a way with words put onto paper, nor realized how fucking hilarious that looks. I can only do it justice by printing excerpts:

*a conversation*

GINO: Vito, why donjoo believe me when I tell you that you dunno what you're talking about?

VITO: Ma whatta you mean? Me I know what's happening in life. It's you who's busting my stones all da time. Me, I don't tink so dat you're telling da trut.

GINO: But...

VITO: No, dat's it. I already heard erylting I wanna hear.

GINO: I'm *telling* you...

VITO: But do you have a hard head or what?

GINO: Oh, make me talk!

VITO: Forget it, me I'm fucking off. You, you can do watchoo want, you...

GINO: Ma dis guy has guts, but.

*dictionary excerpts:*

no more good: broken, used, worn out. *These shoes are no more good, they have no gription.*

chicken pops: chicken pox. *My daughter has all red dots. I hope it's not chicken pops.*

The definitions in this dictionary are accompanied by fine anecdotes & studies of St. Leonard & the folks who keep its language alive. But of course, it ain't just St. Leonard. When I went to elementary school in Ville St. Laurent, I was a minority 'cause I only spoke English and French- the rest also spoke either Italian, Greek, Arabic, Hindu, Portuguese, Spanish, Vietnamese & who knows what else. One thing we all had in common, though, was... the *talk*, which I only ever noticed as such when I moved to Ontario and everyone said I had an accent (of course, to me it sounded like they all had an American accent.) When we spoke English, it was like dis, OK? (Pis'l francais c'ta toujours comme çuh.)

The language as presented here is hardly complete without the facial expressions, untranscribable sounds, and hands constantly shooting up in all kindsa ways. Still, only when I saw it here in print did I remember how I felt repulsed the first time I saw the word "Sandwich" written out. I imagined sand between some bread, and thought "Ugh! That sounds like one crunchy sangwich."

*(louis)*

(The Official St. Leonard Dictionary is available from chapter 11 productions

# Ebonics argument parallels French vs. joul debate

Last December, the school board of Oakland, Calif., officially announced Ebonics to be the "primary language" of African-Americans, and prescribed its teachers to add it in some form to their current language-skills curriculum.

As we began examining last week, Oakland's decision opened up a long-fermenting socio-linguistic can of worms in the U.S., the pungent whiff of which is familiar to anyone involved in the continuing French vs. joul debate in Quebec.

Gilles Bibeau, a semi-retired professor of linguistics and language education at Université de Montréal, was actively involved in that debate. In the early '70s, Bibeau wrote an article in response to a La Presse editorial that condemned joul, which at that time had begun receiving literary recognition by people like Michel Tremblay and Réjean Ducharme. In his famous rebuttal, that wound up on the front page of La Presse, Bibeau defended joul's linguistic merits, as well as its importance to Quebec culture.

"I like to compare a linguist to a botanist," said Bibeau. "A botanist studies and categorizes plants, and does not pass judgment on whether one flower is more beautiful or worthy than another."

"Similarly, from a linguist's point of view, so-called dialects like joul or Black English are languages in their own right, with their own expressions, syntax, and grammar. Some racists in the '60s compared Black English to the barking of ani-

mals, saying it wasn't governed by proper rules, which is ridiculous. For people to communicate, even colloquially, there have to be rules."

Bibeau, like many linguists, strongly believes in children being educated first in their mother tongue - whatever it may be - in order to facilitate their acquisition of more standardized language skills. This is part of Oakland's logic for encouraging Ebonics in its classrooms. Who witnessed what happened when educators here began experimenting with teaching joul knows the potential disaster of that logic.

I attended a small, private girls' school where the correct written and oral expression of standard or international French was drilled into us from day one. In high school, I remember that every so often a new girl would come in, transferred from one of the big local polyvalentes. Their work was often little more than clumsy attempts to write in joul; when they received a poor grade, they would petulantly contest that their last teacher had encouraged them to write in everyday language.

Call me elitist, but I think it's one thing for



NATASHA GAUTHIER  
AU QUÉBEC

Michel Tremblay, who obviously masters the most complex, elegant levels of French expression, to write in joul, and quite another thing to be teaching it to young students who have a poor or no grasp of basic language skills. Similarly, while Ebonics may improve the self-esteem of inner-city black kids, it may also condemn them to a lifetime of expressing themselves like Mushmouth, that babbling character in Bill Cosby's old "Fat Albert" cartoons.

One of the arguments raised by the many opponents of Ebonics in the U.S. - including such high-profile black-rights advocates as Reverend Jesse Jackson - is that if students encouraged to use the inflections and vocabulary of Ebonics aspire to a life outside East Harlem or Watts, they will find themselves at a distinct disadvantage. Kids from the Deep South often try to lose their accents if they attend an East Coast college; young people from rural Quebec or Montreal's working-class neighborhoods often find a need to modify their speech if they are to be taken seriously in certain professions.

Why should America's blacks risk ghettoizing

themselves through Ebonics?

John Trivisonno knows something about the limitations a regional accent or dialect can impose on a person. Now in charge of English-language public relations for l'Opéra de Montréal, Trivisonno has published a comical little book titled *The Pocket Dictionary of St. Léonard English*. Trivisonno grew up in the predominantly Italian neighborhood in north-end Montreal, and is intimate with the many quirks of its speech - including its particularly rich and descriptive collection of expletives.

"I always say I'm a cross between a Wasp and a Wop," laughs Trivisonno. "Because my family is Protestant, I was bused to a school in another neighborhood, so I never quite spoke like the other kids. But I know that in the Jérôme Leroyer school board, there was no difference between the way the teachers and the students spoke, because they all came from the same working-class, Italian background."

Based on his own experience, Trivisonno doesn't think Ebonics as a mother tongue is a good idea. "It's one thing to cultivate pride in your neighborhood and your roots, but I wouldn't have wanted to learn St. Léonardese instead of standard English," he said.

"Maybe Ebonics should be taught in a social studies or a history class instead. The rest of the world has to be able to understand you, too."

<http://www.expozine.ca/en/>

## INAUGURAL EXPOZINE ALTERNATIVE PRESS AWARDS!

The awards gala was held on March 22, 2006 at the Mainline Theatre.

### About The Awards

After four years of promoting Montreal's small press community, Expozine decided to recognize the best it has to offer with the Expozine Alternative Press Awards.

The nominees reflected the wide diversity of printed matter represented last November, when each of the more than 200 Expozine participants were asked to submit their best creation for consideration. An extensive shortlist was selected. Following are the English finalists:

### BOOKS

Something for Michael 003 (girl on girl) by Shannon Gerard

The Hero Book by Scott Waters

Asthmatica by Jon Paul Fiorentino

The Official St Leonard Dictionary by John Trivisonno

Making Stuff and Doing Things by Kyle Bravo (Microcosm Publishing)

The YPF Yearbook (Young People's Foundation)

Garbage Head by Christopher Willard (Vehicule Press)

### COMICS

ojingogo by Matthew Forsythe

horror perditii by Amanda Crawford

Untitled Service Industry Comic by T. Edward Bak

Revolver by Salgood Sam

Big Questions #7

Anders Nilsen (Drawn & Quarterly)

### ZINES

four minutes to midnight

Carousel

Leg Moustache Advisor

Tarhonya by Stephen Guy

LASH by Shawn Kuruneru

G-Eunuch Digest (The Cowboy Issue)

Lifelike by Chris Binkowski