



## Sherbrooke Street memories

### Description

## Leisure is still intertwined with business in Westmount's main commercial artery

By **Marylin Smith Carsley**

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When I first moved to Westmount, I instantly fell in love with Sherbrooke Street. It was quaint, scenic, and peaceful, with welcoming shopkeepers who were sincerely interested in you as an individual and not solely as a consumer.

In life, nothing remains exactly the same, and the Sherbrooke Street atmosphere has partially upheld that idea. But with all the changes, the basic community sincerity endures.

I would stroll through the glorious seasons on sidewalks stretching from Grey to Grosvenor, visiting the eclectic shops on both sides of the street. It was not this exceptional fashion area or a true gourmet haven as it has evolved into today. It was sociable and pleasant and a shining jewel in the heart of a district that is both residential and commercial. It was that place for Westmounters to run errands comfortably within the confines of their own community.



The Sherbrooke Street I first laid eyes on did not resemble today's Sherbrooke Street. Approximately 30 years ago, situated in what is now Starbucks territory, corner Sherbrooke and Claremont, there existed a warm and welcoming Van Houte coffee shop. It was our favourite lunch spot and I frequented that place with my children each Saturday. It was at that time when smokers dominated the designated rear of the restaurant and no one minded because smoking was legal.

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We would have lunch, followed by shopping, and we never tired of this routine. That was our small memory initiating Sherbrooke into our lives, and we loved it! To this day we continue to visit this area on a weekly basis even with the ongoing transformations. Establishments have taken leave and newer ones have stepped in, but that sociable Westmount spirit has never been compromised and that continues to make this street exceptional.



For us, that whole personal Sherbrooke experience, one of the many bonus features of living in Westmount, actually originated with a stroller, two kids and a Saturday plan. We saw all the new tenants and all the enhancements. Many of the current stores did not exist except for a smaller Westmount Stationary, located across the street from their present location and a smaller version of National, the specialized grocery store. We knew every new business, and we were able to greet storeowners by name. Before the Metro grocery store took its place on Sherbrooke and Victoria, there was Steinberg's, a landmark supermarket in Quebec.

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I vividly recall that day when the Steinberg's sign was lowered. It was the culmination of an era, but Metro has replaced that business niche and it is almost impossible to recall the time before. Dairy Queen made a huge and very anticipated entry and has become a hangout for people of all ages. In the summer, people congregate and socialize while indulging in their favourite treat. The local pharmacies, Cumberland and Kanes, vanished and were replaced with Jean Coutu and Pharmaprix. Restaurants have come and gone and many have created long-term and lasting impressions such as Le Claremont which recently closed.



And what true Westmounter doesn't recall Murray's? You could order their home-baked muffins, homemade vegetable soup, and served the best coffee. McDonald's replaced this location with a public outcry at the time. There was also the wonderfully exotic Bead Emporium on Victoria where bead treasures from all over the world could be found. Fortunately, Folklore still exists with its array of jewellery, some clothing and treasures from the owners' travels.

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So what was—and still is—the distinct thrill of this area, now also known as Victoria Village? I believe that it is that small-town community feeling. Obviously, with time, changes continue to occur on Sherbrooke Street, but that friendly sentiment continues. Restaurants have become more eclectic when entering the competitive Sherbrooke market.

Bakeries and food specialty shops cater to all and you can pick up a nutritious lunch at Fougagerie or National. Home furnishings and gifts are exceptional at Ben & Tournesol. Shoe selection is never an issue with Scarpa and Chou Chou. I still recall the day Scarpa moved in and I have to admit, I was one of their first customers and I continue to be absolutely loyal to their service and merchandise.



Sherbrooke is a plethora of diversity in relation to its food and material offerings. You can usually find whatever you need and dine leisurely at its many restaurants. It is a true promenade among shops and nature.

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In life, nothing remains exactly the same, and the Sherbrooke Street atmosphere has partially upheld that idea. But with all the changes, the basic community sincerity endures. Leisure is intertwined with business in an always conforming street that has it all: quality combined with a huge helping of friendliness.

*Images: Andrew Burlone*

See also [Walking the Westmount Walk](#), and [Exploring Westmount Lanes](#).

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*Marylin Smith Carsley is a Westmount writer whose work has appeared in several publications.*

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