

“Lived Lived”

Reverends Lynn Harrison and Shawn Newton
First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto
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Stuart McLean

I suspect I'm not the only person
to run late for something very important,
because I just couldn't tear myself away
from hearing Stuart McLean tell a story.

His way with words—
his ability to lift up the most human element in a character,
to find the extraordinary in the mundane,
to play with the intonation of his unique voice,
to poke fun with good humour yet never belittle—
made him the iconic storyteller of our times.

And he was, without exaggeration, a Canadian institution.

Indeed, as a newcomer to Canada eleven years ago,
I quickly learned that one of the best ways to learn
the story of this country was through McLean's telling of it
on the CBC's *The Vinyl Café*.

It's not so much the particular details
of any given story that have stayed with me.

Instead, it is, it was, McLean's ability to craft a narrative
that told a larger story of who the people of this country can be,
at their best.

And so I, like so many, have lingered
at home or in the car, after it's been turned off,
to hear the end of the story.

A story of human goodness.
Of the kindness of strangers.
A story of our hopes and aspirations.

With this storied storyteller now silent,
the tales he told are now passed to us,
and with them the charge to live into the best we can be.

Bill Lishman

“In nature there are no straight lines.”

So said Bill Lishman, a man whose life could not be summed up in any simple, linear description.

Best known as “Father Goose” the man who taught Canada geese to migrate using an ultralight airplane,

Lishman was also a sculptor and inventor who built his family’s underground house near Lake Scugog as well as many beloved works of art,

...including the series of sculptures celebrating human movement outside the new Bridgepoint Hospital.

For Lishman, life was one interconnected creative whole...offering seemingly endless opportunities for exploration.

Not surprisingly, he was also a passionate environmental activist...who advocated not only for the Oak Ridges Moraine and the land near his home, but other parts of the world such as Nicaragua and the Arctic.

He was, in his words “unencumbered by formal education,” and in the words of a friend, he thought not only outside the box but “over the box, under the box, [and] through the box.”

Bill Lishman died at home on December 30th, ten days after being diagnosed with leukaemia, with his family including his wife of 50 years at his side.

In gratitude and admiration, we remember a creative spirit who soared.

Tom Harpur

His parents moved from Northern Ireland to Toronto the year before he was born.

Upon their arrival, they were fundamentalist Christians. But in time, the family returned to its roots in the Church of England.

In time, after a career as a police officer, his father became an Anglican priest at the age of 55.

And the son, Tom Harpur, followed him into the priesthood, by an academic path that took him to the study of Classics, first at UofT and then Oxford, where he was a Rhodes Scholar.

He returned from the UK to become a professor of New Testament at UofT's Wycliffe College, and was ordained a priest in 1956.

After teaching a generation of future priests, he left the university and began a second career as the religion editor for *The Toronto Star*, writing over 1000 columns for the paper over the next 40 years.

He also wrote eighteen books.

The most famous and most controversial of these was *The Pagan Christ*, the book in which he suggested Jesus was to be understood as an allegory rather than a literal figure of history.

It was a book that most people either loved or hated.

While stirring controversy wasn't his goal,
it certainly was the result.

The Canadian best-selling non-fiction book of 2004,
The Pagan Christ wasn't meant as an attack on Christianity,
but, he hoped, an invitation to a richer more spiritual experience of the Christian
faith.

In his later years, Harpur deepened his love of nature
and marveled at the insights he gained from modern physics.

The priest had ultimately found a church
beyond the confines of his tradition,
where he placed wonder on its altar
and invited others to come and behold what he could see.

Monty Hall

"Will it be door number one, door number two, or door number three?"

I don't know about you, but at some level I think I see those three doors in front
of me whenever I'm faced with a decision.

And sub-consciously I still hear the voice of Monty Hall...the host of "Let's Make a
Deal" who died in September at age 96.

He was born and raised in Winnipeg, and had hoped to become a doctor.

But he was not admitted to medical school because at the time there were secret
quotas restricting the number of Jews admitted.

After moving to Toronto and working for both CHUM and CFRB he moved to
the U.S. where new doors opened up to him that led to television stardom.

We remember Monty Hall today...
as we ponder the mystery and complexity of life decisions...
and the many doors that close and open for us, throughout our lives.

Marian Cleeves Diamond

She would carry it across the university campus in a floral hat box, then lift it up in the lecture hall with great reverence and awe:

The human brain.

Dr. Marian Cleeves Diamond, who died in July at age 90, was the scientist who discovered neuroplasticity:

...the fact that the human brain can continue to develop, at any stage of life.

At first, many in the scientific community dismissed the idea—but Dr. Diamond was right.

In experiments with rats, she proved that companionship and enjoyable activities nourish the brain and change its anatomy for the better.

And that's good news for us, gathered here this morning!

She studied the brain for more than 60 years...even studied the brain of Albert Einstein...and described her career as “pure joy.”

According to Dr. Diamond's research, five things are essential for the brain's well-being: diet, exercise, challenge, “newness” or novelty...

...and love.

Ben Barres

It was only last week that the world lost Ben Barres.

Barres was a neuroscientist and professor at Stanford.

He did ground-breaking work to understand and treat Parkinson's.

But perhaps his most important contribution was as an ardent and outspoken advocate for greater opportunities for women in the sciences.

In 2006, Dr. Barres wrote an article published in the journal *Nature* that challenged a group of prominent scholars who argued that women were not advancing in the sciences because of "innate differences in their aptitude."

In response he wrote: "I am suspicious when those who are at an advantage proclaim that a disadvantaged group of people is innately less able."

"Historically, claims that disadvantaged groups are innately inferior have been based on junk science and intolerance."

What made his voice so compelling in this argument is that Dr. Barres had experienced such discrimination first-hand.

Dr. Barres was transgender, having transitioned from female to male in 1997, when he was in his 40s and already well-established in his career.

Dr. Barres cited various studies that spoke to the obstacles women faced in the sciences.

But he drew primarily on his own experience,

reflecting on the ways he had been dismissed professionally when he lived as a woman, but how that had changed when he began to live as a man.

“By far,” he wrote, “the main difference that I have noticed is that people who don’t know I am transgender treat me with much more respect: I can even complete a whole sentence without being interrupted by a man.”

We give thanks for the life of Dr. Barres, who died on December 29th, at the age of 66.

And we give thanks for his unique voice— a voice he used in service to the world by advocating for people of all genders.

Louise Hay

She was called at one time “The Queen of the New Age,” and her simple and optimistic affirmations led many to take a positive attitude toward their health, which many believe contributed to their recovery.

Louise Hay had been raped at age five; become pregnant as a teenager and gave the baby up for adoption...

...but went on to become one of the most successful female publishers ever, starting with the book “You Can Heal Your Life” which has sold more than 50 million copies.

Not unlike others who preached “the power of positive thinking,” Louise Hay affirmed the connection between the mind, body and spirit.

She had many critics, who feared that her philosophy might lead people to blame themselves for their illness.

But her guidance to send ourselves loving messages, in times of both health and illness, continues to be a comfort and an inspiration to many.

Louise Hay was 90 years old.

Mary Tyler Moore

Is it possible to "turn the world on, with a smile?" Or take a "nothing day" and "suddenly make it all seem worthwhile?"

Well, we all hope so, don't we?

And when an actor like Mary Tyler Moore brings a character to life who mirrors our own foibles and dreams...we're deeply grateful.

I have to confess, there are days when I've led worship services (not here, fortunately)...

When it's been just a few minutes before starting time and nobody has shown up yet...

And I think to myself "What if nobody comes to my party?"

I suddenly realize: that's Mary Richards speaking!

And maybe all of us such a voice at times...in those panicky moments before the people do, of course, show up.

Later in her career, when she portrayed Beth Jarrett in "Ordinary People," Mary Tyler Moore also showed us that difficult people are also worthy of compassion.

That they have an inherent worth, beauty and dignity...even when they are hard to like.

As each of us tries to remember that we **can** make it after all...
and that love **is** all around...

...today we celebrate the life and career of Mary Tyler Moore.

Leslie Feinberg

Leslie Feinberg is on our list this year in error,
given that she actually died three years ago.

But, seeing as this is our first time to do such a service,
and seeing that hers was a life so powerfully lived,
we still honour her today.

Leslie Feinberg was a revolutionary figure
in our contemporary understanding of gender.

Her books *Stone Butch Blues* and *Transgender Warriors*
laid the groundwork in the field of gender studies
providing much of the terminology we use today,
and they brought greater awareness
of gender and particularly transgender issues
to a much wider audience.

She was also a member of the Workers World Party
and the managing editor of the *Workers World* newspaper.

She described herself as “an anti-racist white,
working-class, secular Jewish, transgender,
lesbian, female, revolutionary communist.”

We remember her for the ways she advanced radical inclusion,
by inviting people to open their minds and their hearts.

Maryam Mirzakhani

When she was 17, she became the first female student in Iran to win the
International Mathematical Olympiad.

It would be among the first of many honours the mathematician Maryam Mirzakhani would receive before her death at age 40 last year.

In 2014, a year after she was diagnosed with breast cancer, she won the Fields Medal, the highest award in mathematics, becoming the only woman and the only Iranian to do so.

She believed in taking math slowly...
taking “the time and effort to see the beauty of math”...

And her young daughter described her mother’s work as “painting”...

Because in order to solve problems, Maryam would draw doodles on a page and write equations around the drawings.

When she died, many newspapers broke taboo, publishing photographs in which she wore no head covering.

As well, her death has prompted calls to change legislation that currently denies citizenship to children of Iranian mothers who married foreigners.

Maryam Mirzakhani will continue to be inspiration,
especially to the female students at the faculty of mathematics where she studied...
which now bears her name.

Derek Walcott

Derek Walcott, born in 1930, on the island of St. Lucia,
would go on to win the Nobel Prize in Literature.

“He was a mixed-race poet living on a British-ruled island
whose people spoke French-based Creole or English.”

He published his first poem at the age of 14 in a local newspaper.

Soon thereafter, with a loan from his mother,
he began to publish his poems in pamphlets
while still in high school.

Though his education was thoroughly Anglocentric,
he wrote of the world he knew on the island.

Since the best way to honour a poet is with a poem,
I offer you his poem, "Love after Love."

The time will come
when, with elation
you will greet yourself arriving
at your own door, in your own mirror
and each will smile at the other's welcome,

and say, sit here. Eat.
You will love again the stranger who was your self.
Give wine. Give bread. Give back your heart
to itself, to the stranger who has loved you

all your life, whom you ignored
for another, who knows you by heart.
Take down the love letters from the bookshelf,

the photographs, the desperate notes,
peel your own image from the mirror.
Sit. Feast on your life.

Robert Pirsig

It was a 17-day, father-and-son, road trip from Minneapolis to San Francisco.

The book took six years to write, and was initially rejected by 122 publishers...

But “Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance” would make Robert Pirsig a best-selling author, and provide an entertaining introduction to both Eastern and Western philosophy for millions of readers, following its publication in 1974.

Compared to Kerouac and Thoreau, among others, Pirsig sought an answer to the question “what is ‘quality?’”...

...and inspired many to reflect deeply on the meaning of life.

Pirsig himself had been diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia and clinical depression while in his thirties...and had been treated with electroshock therapy.

His first marriage ended in divorce, and his son Chris, who accompanied him on the motorcycle journey, was fatally stabbed in a mugging at age 22, outside the San Francisco Zen Centre.

Today we remember Robert Pirsig...and the lifelong quest to find the source of meaning and quality in life...

...despite the many challenging obstacles we encounter along the road.

Richard Wagamese

Richard Wagemese was born in 1955, in the Ojibway Wabaseemoong Independent Nations in northwestern Ontario.

In his recent book *Embers: One Ojibway's Meditations*, Wagemese speaks of what it means to recover.

He said,

“It is to be reborn.

We arrive here covered in spiritual qualities like innocence, humility, trust, acceptance, and love.

But things happen and those qualities get removed from us.

Those qualities get churched off, spanked off,
schooled off and beaten off.

Sometimes we rinse them off ourselves
with drugs and booze and poor choices.”

Wagamese knew this story first-hand.

He and his siblings were neglected and abandoned
by the adults in their early life
who were unable to care for them.

They were part of the Sixties Scoop,
that saw many Indigenous children
placed in foster homes with white parents
rather than left in the care of their own communities.

Wagamese spent the balance of his growing-up years
in St. Catherine’s, always feeling a foreigner
to the culture around him.

Abused in foster care,
he tried to reconnect with his own culture.

But the road back was rough.

After years of struggling with alcohol and drugs,
and several stays in prison, Wagamese met an elder
who gave him the name Buffalo Cloud
and told him that his role was to tell stories.

And that’s exactly what he did.

He started writing for the *Calgary Herald*
as the native affairs columnist.

And in 1991 won a National Newspaper Award,
the first Indigenous person to do so.

In time, he turned his attention to writing novels,
and is best known for *Indian Horse*,
which was adapted into a film,
and premiered just last fall
at the Toronto International Film Festival.

We honour Wagamese for the stories he lived to tell,
stories that will endure in our understanding
of what it means to work toward reconciliation
with the Indigenous peoples of this land.

David Cassidy

*(Sing: "I think I love you, so what am I so afraid of, I'm afraid that I'm not sure of, a love there
is no cure for... I think I love you, isn't that what life is made of...though it worries me to say I
never felt this way...)*

Believe me...the day your teen idol dies marks a turning point in one's life.

You may feel like a starry-eyed teenager some days...but when someone like David
Cassidy dies (as he did in November at age 67) you know that you're really grown-
up.

I myself didn't have a crush on Keith Partridge...
I had a crush on the entire Partridge Family!

I fell in love with their songs, bought all of their albums,
and was devastated when the show was cancelled.

(Just ask my mom!)

It was an early love affair, and we never forget those.

As we mourn David Cassidy, we honour and grieve the love-struck teenagers we all once were...

And we celebrate the mature and passionate adults we are still becoming.

We remember...we cherish...the memories of our first romantic experiences.

The longings, the thrills, the heartbreaks.

With joy for the memory of David Cassidy,
and all teen idols, we sing...

I think I love you, I think I love you, I think I love you...

Roy Halliday

There's something that seems immortal about major league sports figures.

They are so fit...so strong...so skillful at whatever game they play.

In our culture, they seem almost like gods,
and they're treated as such, with astronomical salaries and the hero-worship of millions.

Sports heroes seem on top of the world...

They seem to have everything...

So it seems almost inconceivable that they could die tragically, by accident and at a young age...

As did former Blue Jays pitcher Roy Halliday, at the age of 40, while piloting his own plane, off the coast of Florida in November.

His unexpected death was a reminder of the fragility of life...

The moment by moment gift of existence that can end at any moment...
No matter how fortunate or successful we have been.

With appreciation of the elegant beauty of the game of baseball...
And the joy and fulfillment that can come from playing sports at any level...

We remember Roy Halliday.

June Rowlands

Not far from here, at the corner of Davisville Road
and Mt. Pleasant, is the park named
for the 60th Mayor of Toronto, June Rowlands,
the first woman to hold the position.

Before beating Jack Layton with 58% of the vote,
she had been a city councillor,
served as the first woman
to head the Toronto Transit Commission
and the Metropolitan Toronto Police Commission.

As mayor she fought for affordable housing,
and worked to protect the city's ravines and historical buildings.

She was, by her example and by her efforts,
an advocate and inspiration for women in politics.

Most impressive to me
is that she accomplished all that she did,
while also being the mother of five children, including twins!

We remember June Rowlands for the trails she blazed
and the city she helped to build.

Bill Marshall

It was different, and ultimately successful,
because unlike other film festivals around the world,
it welcomed ordinary people—not just industry insiders.

And the Toronto International Film Festival included movies from around the
world—mirroring the diverse population of the city it served.

Bill Marshall co-founded TIFF in 1976 with his partner
Henk Van Der Kolk and Dusty Cohl.

In its first run, it drew only about 5,000 audience members.

Now, of course, it is one of the largest film festivals in the world...playing a major
role in expanding the Canadian film industry.

Bill Marshall died of a heart attack on New Year's Day last year. He was 77.

Pam McConnell

When Pam McConnell died in July, at the age of 71,
our city lost a great city councillor
and a tireless advocate for social justice.

On the day she died,
after the shocking news was shared
by Mayor Tory in Council Chambers,
everyone stood in silence to honour her.

As the silence ended and the room cleared,
there was a t-shirt pulled over the back of her chair,
which simply read: "End Poverty."

Believing that poverty was everybody's business,

McConnell laboured through her long career
for the rights and well-being of everyone in this city.

One sign of a life well-lived
is to have gained the respect of one's opponents.

As vice-chair of the Toronto Police Services Board,
she served under Toronto lawyer Alan Heisey, who was chair.

He said, a few years ago,
that despite being at opposite ends of the political spectrum,
he was a big fan of hers.

“Some people make politics a career,
[but], for her I think it was a vocation.”

The word vocation comes from the Latin root meaning “to call.”

We remember Pam McConnell today
for the ways she lived into her life's calling
to be of service to others.