

A Man of Many Colours

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Jack is a colourful guy. And like all smart, engaged and compassionate people, his many colours all manage to complement each other and play off each other. In this piece, I use phrases in the present tense that speak about Jack's continuing presence.

I first met Jack in the early 1990s when we were active on the founding Board of Directors of the White Ribbon Campaign, the campaign to end men's violence against women that came into being partly because of the horrific assassinations at the École Polytechnique in December 1989.

Those early days of the White Ribbon Campaign were simultaneously very focused and very scattered. The minutes of the meetings and the various other strategic documents record attempts to build a viable "cross-country outreach," to ensure that we were "consolidating organizational structures," to enlist the support of "all politicians" to endorse the campaign "and to put this support into practice in terms of the policies they adopt," and of course to "appease" our creditors. They also document our expanding efforts and intents as we found our footing – from our first forays into telemarketing, on to our mailer that went out to "250,000" people toward the end of 1992, and further toward our objective "to help stimulate reflection, discussion, and analysis leading to personal and collective action among men to take responsibility for ending men's violence."

Jack was deeply interested in all aspects of the campaign and those early documents record his hands-on involvement. He worked on spreading the word of the campaign and on bringing in new members, but also on the more mundane tasks. "Jack has been working diligently to develop a plan on corporate and union fundraising" says a financial report from February 1992. In the Action Minutes from our December 1992 Executive Committee meeting Jack is noted as working through the details of our finances by reporting on our "invoices and cheques to compare with accounting figures."

A few of us involved in the campaign also played squash pretty regularly in those days, and I can say without equivocation that Jack did not like to lose. Though often sleep-deprived, and sometimes with wonky knees and a sore back, Jack was relentless on the court. He had always been an active athlete. He also had tenacious concentration, as well as a need to not be bested. (I have to add, and I do so parenthetically and somewhat

pathetically, that over the course of our many games I do not recall ever beating him.)

Around that time, Jack and I prepared a proposal for then-President of University of Toronto, Robert Prichard, on the idea of “creating Toronto as a full-fledged ‘City of Ideas’.” We sent a four-page overview of the idea to Prichard in July 1993 and although the idea never came to fruition, it clearly articulates Jack’s overriding concerns. Jack always wanted to ensure that Toronto lived up to its potential. In the proposal, we spoke about how the University of Toronto and other universities should remain a “key focal point” of this imagined city, “and all of the attendant artistic, economic, political and intellectual ideas that such institutions generate.” We spoke about bringing together “outposts of communication and connection” and of encouraging a “celebration of a multiplicity of connections between the University – in all its manifestations – and the City that bears its name.” And we spoke about “pride among the citizens” and the “ideas, solutions, challenges and opportunities” that such a City of Ideas would entail.

As usual with Jack, these were big, colourful ideas – and he was both willing and able to work on them directly.

A few years later I would see him running around the track at the U of T athletic complex with Olivia and I knew he was thinking about the upcoming political leadership position he was about to run for. I imagined him preparing his body, mind and spirit for the upcoming challenges he was to face, as he steadfastly kept to his running and exercise regime.

In 2008, I ran into Jack at a local coffee shop on Roncesvalles Avenue near High Park in the west end of Toronto. By this time, he was fully occupied as the leader of the NDP and the related meetings at which he connected ideas and people together. During our brief exchange, I told him about a new environmental website that I was starting for children, called Arbopals. The idea of the site was that as kids played online, real trees would be planted in twenty-one countries around the world. It took Jack about three seconds to show his support, and he immediately suggested I contact his friend Tim Flannery in Australia, author of *The Weather Makers* and arguably one of the world’s top scientists and environmentalists, to enlist his support. Jack was right – I used his name as the connecting force, and Tim was immediately interested, becoming a supporter and endorser of this idea to bring together technology, kids and international tree-planting.

Like everyone else who ever got to spend time with him up close, I was deeply saddened, core-saddened, to hear of his final sickness and death.

In the days after his death, I took my teenaged daughter to the impromptu memorial at Toronto City Hall, and we wandered among the thousands of people and thousands of messages chalked onto the concrete. Through my own tears, I added a phrase from Shakespeare onto one of the surfaces: "Now cracks a noble heart. Good night, sweet prince, and flights of angels sing thee to thy rest!"

I think of Jack as a man of many colours, and like the cosmorama of colours that make up the rainbow (and that also make up people and interests and affections), he was able to weave many of them together. At any one moment, he could be thinking about his young son Mike and how Mike loved to mimic Jimi Hendrix on the guitar, and the academic and intellectual needs of his students, and doing what he could to help end men's violence against women, about his concern for the environment, nurturing friendships, keeping physically active, imagining how new ideas can make our lives better, and helping to improve public policy through people and the governmental organizations we have set up. All of those colours do, after all, complement each other.

Every once in a while, I wander through the electronic address book on my iPhone and delete the people that I am no longer in touch with. A few months ago, I came upon Jack's name and contact information. In that rush of memories – Jack's bristling energy and fertile ideas and core compassions – I could not bring myself to delete his information. He remains.