

JIM TRAVERS

Martha Hall Findlay

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We, all of us, the whole country, suffered a huge loss with the recent passing of Jim Travers.

He kept politicians honest. He certainly pointed out, in his extraordinary way, when they weren't. He never let us get away with anything, regardless of party or stripe—and he did it so very well. He wanted politicians to be better, and to do better. He did what he did because he wanted to make the country better.

Jim Travers left us both a legacy and a challenge. Those lucky enough to have known him personally learned much from him—he was as an extraordinary person, a friend, passionate about his family, his country and the world. He led by example—he “flew straight”. For his much larger audience, he was a tremendously talented writer who wrote, so eloquently, so insightfully, so wonderfully biting, about what makes this country what it is. He wrote and spoke about the political events and actions that have made us who we are, and those which threaten what we have taken for granted. In the time leading to his death, he was most concerned about the erosion of our democracy—the deterioration of our governing principles, the lack of respect for Parliament and due process, the disappearance of true participation by the people. Indeed, the [piece for which he won the National Newspaper Award](#) was an eloquently damning indictment of what has been happening in Canada. He was non-partisan in his criticism, noting that this erosion has evolved over successive governments, but he was clearly concerned that things were getting much worse. He warned us, repeatedly, of the consequences should we allow this

erosion to continue. He exhorted us to regain some of that lost democratic ground.

The challenge that he has left for us, is to continue that fight. We, politicians and members of the media, but even more importantly, Canadians at large, have a responsibility to speak up for our democracy. We must speak out—and we must be able to do so freely. It is up to us, all of us, to ensure that transparency and accountability be more than just words, and that Parliament be responsible to the people, not the other way around. Jim spoke out to great effect using his voice as an immensely respected journalist. He is, I'm sure, watching and hoping that his legacy continues.

My first experience of Jim had nothing to do with politics, and nothing to do with Jim as a journalist, but rather through stories from my big brother Doug of their exploits as boys during summers in Georgian Bay. I have a great quote from my grandmother's diary from that time: "That little Jimmy Travers is getting Dougie into trouble again!!" Of course each time I'd tease him about it, Jim professed complete innocence—that it was my brother who was the bad influence. And then he'd laugh that big laugh.

Jim also knew my mum, and spoke often of his memories of her from those childhood days. Smart guy that he was, he thought she was fabulous. In his note to me when she recently passed away, he called her an 'extraordinary woman...loving, kind, intelligent and curious'. As a little kid, he was so impressed by how she, unlike all the other mums on the Bay, spent the summers either in bare feet or flip flops. He thought she was pretty cool. He was one of the first people I called with the news when she died. Mum thought he was great, too, and as my sister has said, they can now talk politics together all they want.

Because of that family connection, when I first contemplated getting into politics, Jim was one of the first people I asked for advice. Again, before

deciding to run for the leadership of the Liberal Party in 2006, I asked Jim what he thought. To be fair, he never, ever gave advice in the sense of suggesting what I should or shouldn't do. That would have been wrong, given our respective jobs. But in his inimitable way, he provided a sounding board full of context, experience and warmth—laced, always, with a frightful joke.

He was one of very small group of family and close friends I asked to come to my swearing in as an MP. He knew how much it had taken for me to reach that point, and he knew how much it meant to me that he was there. Soon thereafter, we got into the habit of an early breakfast every week or so at West Block. We just yakked—about the issues of the day, the humour and tragedy, the sadness and happiness, the despair but ultimately the hope that life relentlessly offers up. We talked a lot about our families, comparing notes on kids. He was so, so proud of Ben and Patrick. He would go on about their accomplishments and what great people they'd become--as only a hugely proud dad can. And he always made me laugh, even on the bad days—regardless of whether the laughter was at the joke itself, or just at how bad it was.

Politicians are supposed to never trust people in the media. Sure, we can have friends, colleagues, sparring partners—but never real friends, in the way of someone that you can trust completely. Their job, their need to be objective would too easily be compromised otherwise. Indeed, in the political world, being able to trust anyone is pretty rare. But I trusted Jim completely. I hope he felt the same. We both knew, indeed talked about, that at some point I would do something stupid, or make a big mistake, and he'd have to write about it. That was OK, because we both also knew that if I did something really stupid, I'd deserve it.

Jim, being human, it's only a matter of time before that happens, and I'm so sorry that you won't now have that chance. I would trade having you trash me

in a column any day of the week if we could just have you back. You always flew straight. I can only keep trying.

The country has suffered a huge loss. For me personally, I just lost that rarest of gifts, a friend who, as someone else described it so perfectly, made me feel safe. But now he's gone.

Jim Travers' life was a gift to so many, and to this country. His death leaves a big, unfillable hole in our hearts.

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Martha Hall Findlay
Member of Parliament / Députée
Willowdale

Critic for International Trade
Porte-parole pour le Commerce international

HallFindlay.M@parl.gc.ca
Ottawa: 613-992-4964
Willowdale: 416-223-2858