



FAREWELL ADDRESS OF THE HON. HILARY M. WESTON "STORIES AND REFLECTIONS: MY FIVE YEARS AS LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR"

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Thank you, for that warm introduction. I hope I can live up to it in my stories and reflections here today. Ladies and gentlemen, it's hard to believe how quickly those four years have passed since I was last at this podium. I was still a neophyte to speech making in those days, and I well remember standing here, feeling nothing but fear and trepidation. Now, some six hundred formal speeches later, I'm here once again, and feeling – well, nothing but fear and trepidation.

It reminds me of what the eleven-year-old Boy Scout said during a visit I made to Chatham a couple of years ago. His job was to hoist the Canadian flag. It went up the flagpole in a little ball, but, no matter how hard he tugged and yanked, it simply refused to flutter open. "I think," the boy whispered in my ear, "I think it's feeling a bit nervous."

What he never suspected was that I was feeling a bit nervous, too. Nervousness, I've learned, is not something that most people expect of the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario. Here, for example, is how Robertson Davies described an imaginary Lieutenant Governor in his novel, *Murder and Walking Spirits*:

"As he was the patron of many ambitious and deserving ventures," Davies wrote, "it was not expected that he should show much knowledge of what was happening, but that he should shed the light of his countenance upon [this party]. He did so with a fine demonstration of vice-regal goodwill, greeting people he hardly knew, or did not know at all, with the warmth appropriate to his office."

Like all good satire, this struck me as three parts caricature, one part truth. It presumes, of course, that His Honour is a man – and I'll bet that Robertson Davies didn't think it necessary to describe this man any more fully. He could count on his readers to fill in the blanks and picture a distinguished-looking gentleman who was white, Anglo-Saxon, and Protestant – even though Pauline McGibbon had already been appointed the first female Lieutenant Governor in Canada's history in 1974, and Lincoln Alexander was serving so ably in the post at the time this novel was being written.

Things have evolved quickly since then. Today seven of Canada's ten Lieutenant Governors are women, as is of course, the current Governor General – as is indeed, our gracious sovereign, Elizabeth II, who will be marking the 50th anniversary of her accession to the throne in a couple of months. And we look forward to her visit to Ontario and other provinces next fall. Though I myself was only the second woman to be appointed Lieutenant Governor of Ontario since John Graves Simcoe arrived in 1792, I would be surprised – no, I would be horrified – if it took another couple of hundred years to get up to three.

Less well known is the fact that I was also the first and only Irish Catholic – and one relatively fresh off the boat, to boot – to have been offered this honour since Confederation. For those who might wonder why it took so long, given the enormous contributions that the Irish Catholic community has made to the province, I would reply: be patient, 130 years is but a prelude to a great nation's history. After all, the Roman Catholic Church itself has been in existence for 2000 years and has yet to get an Irish Pope – or dare I say it, a woman.

I also think that it should be a great comfort to us all that no one paid the slightest attention to either the religion or place of my birth. No more than 50 years ago, remember, the Orange and the Green from Ireland were doing battle in the cities and small towns of this province. That demonstrates once again how much progress Ontario has made to turn itself into a deeply tolerant, genuinely pluralistic society.

Imagine how thrilled I was to be asked to make an official visit last summer to Dublin, my old hometown, in order to promote the business and arts of Ontario. Imagine, moreover, how delighted I was to be received by the President of Ireland, who also happens to be a woman. And imagine my feelings the next morning when I picked up the *Irish Times* – Ireland's so-called "quality broadsheet" – to find a large photograph of my husband and myself with President Mary McAleese, and read the caption: "The President, Mrs. McAleese, with Mr. Galen Weston, Governor General of Ontario, and his wife Hilary."

This is, perhaps, an opportune moment for me to digress and give public thanks to my husband for his constant support over the past five years. He never failed to offer me his upbeat encouragement and good counsel whenever I needed them, but nor did he ever presume that my job was somehow his. In fact, because of his own responsibilities, Galen couldn't always be at my side – let alone, as many people joked, trailing three paces behind me.

The time has passed when we can expect to get "two for the price of one" from those in public positions. As women finally get their fair share of elected or appointed offices, of course, no one expects the husbands to sacrifice their careers in order to stand in receiving lines or arrange flowers. But that should also be true for women. We all have to come to terms with this changed reality, and it's an integral issue in the revitalization of our public institutions.

For the demands and duties of public life are indeed great. Since my installation, I'm told, I have attended or hosted close to 1500 events, visited 87 communities in Ontario, and greeted over 35,000 guests at over 500 gatherings at Queen's Park.

The variety of these "many ambitious and deserving ventures," as Robertson Davies called them, was even more astonishing than their number. My very first event was an Easter Seal winter festival in Gravenhurst; later that evening I celebrated Chinese New Year in Toronto. One day I watched the Gold Medal Game of the Women's World Hockey Championships. Another day, I toured NORAD facilities at CFB North Bay. And on another, I presided at the opening of the Native Pre-Law Programme at the University of Sudbury.

At times, the contrasts were truly beyond imagination. On the eve of the new Millennium, for example, I had a poignant meeting with the volunteers and residents at a Red Cross shelter – following which I took off the raincoat that had concealed my gown and headed straight for a magnificent opera gala at Roy Thomson Hall.

More recently, in September of this year, I led three minutes of silence on the National Day of Mourning for the victims of the terrorist attacks on Washington and New York. And then, just a few days later, when innocent Canadian Muslims were being subjected to harassment and insult, I addressed thousands of Shia men and women gathered under a huge tent in their robes and head coverings at the dedication ceremonies for their new Islamic Cultural Centre in Thornhill.

Some events were wonderfully happy, especially the receptions and award ceremonies that recognized the achievements of Ontarians. Some were renowned, but many more were people whose work had gone unheralded. Other events were unbearably sad. I'm thinking, particularly, of the funerals I attended for those police officers who had been killed in the line of duty, and the Sunday service at which I offered my condolences to the people of Walkerton following their town's water tragedy.

What amazed me was not just the number and variety of people I've met, but the intimacies that many of them have shared about their lives. At one reception at Queen's Park, I remember, a woman kept saying to me, "I'm so happy to be here, I'm so happy to be here." But it turned out that her happiness had nothing to do with the occasion itself. "You see," she confided in me, "my daughter-in-law has invited me."

Two things struck me. One was how often, and in how many unexpected ways, the office of Lieutenant Governor serves as a kind of bridge – a peace bridge, if you will. In this case, it inadvertently became a bridge between a mother and her daughter-in-law, who had been caught in some family drama. In other cases, I have seen it bring together politicians who

couldn't abide each other, factions who wouldn't be seen in the same room with one another, or communities that rarely get an opportunity to meet together.

I was also struck by why this woman had confided such an intimate fact to me, a total stranger, whom she was encountering for the first time at a public event. And the explanation brings us to the part in Robertson Davies's tongue-in-cheek sketch that touches on the truth. There really is, in my experience, a "warmth appropriate to the office".

For practical purposes, the Lieutenant Governor is, as representative of The Queen, the "head of state" within each province. Though we are appointed by Ottawa, we are no longer its agent nor some sort of local assistant to the Governor General. Rather, we are the legal personifications of jurisdictions, such as education and health, in which the provinces are autonomous and sovereign.

But the better I got to know the job, the more I came to believe that it may be less "head" of state than "heart" of government. Who else plays the role that the Lieutenant Governors do – non-political yet intensely involved with the affairs of politics, non-bureaucratic yet truly public servants, representative of The Queen but equally of the people?

That's why so many people feel free to confide in us. That's why it's the Lieutenant Governors who are usually asked to lead the province in celebration and in mourning. And that's why, I firmly believe, the monarchy is as intricate a part of Canada's national identity as our multiculturalism or our Mounties. It's a key component of our parliamentary system. It's a fundamental manifestation of our historical evolution. And it's a unique expression of our difference from our friends and cousins, the Americans.

Everywhere I went in the province, I found, swirling beneath the tough decisions of policy making, undercurrents of great emotion. These past five years have been years of dramatic change, of course. We have gone from the painful realities of deficit cutting to the giddy prosperity of the dot-com economy and back again to the brink of recession. We have lived through the Common Sense Revolution here in Ontario, the adjustments to Free Trade up and down and across the continent, and now the war against terrorism around the world.

I found Ontarians happy or hurting, proud or angry, gung-ho or anxious. And they often wanted me to know exactly how they felt, because they saw me – or, more precisely, the office I hold – as totally non-partisan, benign, and empathetic.

I want to re-emphasize that point. It's not the holder of the office who is significant, but the office itself. The worse thing that any Lieutenant Governor can do is to identify personally with the honours and respect that are accorded the office. This is no place for self-aggrandizement or private hobbyhorses. In fact, despite its historic roots and symbolic importance, this is a fragile institution, constantly threatened by misunderstanding, outdatedness, or mockery.

But preserving it does not mean pickling it. On the contrary, the best way to maintain the authority and dignity of the office is to keep it responsive and relevant.

When I took on this post, some of you may recall, I decided to concentrate my efforts on three main areas: youth, voluntarism, and women's issues. They were the subject of most of my speeches. They were the purpose of hundreds of my events. And they were the focus of most of my initiatives.

I did not just respond to the invitations I received, I also had to seek out the people and places on the so-called margins of our society. And if nobody was going to invite me to visit women's shelters, hospices for the elderly and dying, back alleys where the squeegee kids hung out, or the makeshift communities of homeless people under the Gardiner Expressway, then it was up to me to ask if I could drop in, informally, without any pomp and circumstance. And that's what I did, because I wanted to hear their issues and understand their needs.

The women's shelters, I found, need battered women to know that such safe houses are available to them, they need battered women to know that there is nothing shameful about seeking help in them and they need the arduous work of their volunteers and directors to be shown some recognition by the government, the media, and the general public.

Few people have the time or access to respond to those kinds of needs. But the Lieutenant Governor does, because the Lieutenant Governor belongs not just to those at the centre of things, but to everybody. The Lieutenant Governor belongs to the homeless kids at Eva's Phoenix, to the Yonge Street Mission, to Big Brothers and Sisters. And the Lieutenant Governor belongs to the Dorothy Ley Hospice, whose patients and volunteers inspired me to make the hospice movement a major priority.

"What a thankless job you've got," someone said to me just the other day. I couldn't have disagreed more. I have been thanked every hour of every day, more than I ever felt I deserved. "Thank you for coming. Thank you for being here. Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to see what we're doing." But seeing what Ontarians were doing was my busy schedule. Their energy became my energy, as well as my inspiration. I'll miss it greatly.

Do I have any regrets? None. Any doubts? Only the normal ones. I often worry whether I've done the best I could with the extraordinary opportunity I was given. And I sometimes wonder whether I've made much difference in my efforts to celebrate youth, volunteers, and women. And I can't help but note that today, as it was five years ago, youth unemployment (though lower) remains unacceptably high, voluntarism is on the wane, and women still hit a "glass ceiling" in too many important areas.

In the end, however, it's impossible for anyone to see what I've seen in this province without becoming a fan – if not a fanatic – of all things Ontarian. That's only partly because the office requires you to spend most of your days speaking to Ontarians about Ontario, and on behalf of Ontario. But it's mostly because of the beauty of our landscape, the dynamism of our citizens, and our excellence in the fields of business, culture, technology, science, academics, medicine, sports – and even wine.

There's a subtle danger in that, however. I saw, as I had never seen before, how easy it is to fall into the sort of narrow provincialism that constantly threatens to insulate us into our own regions and break up the nation. We must, therefore, always be on guard not to let our pride and interest in being Ontarians overwhelm the pride and interest we have in being Canadian. Speaking for myself, next year I will be celebrating 30 years since I came to Canada, and nothing I possess is more precious to me than my Canadian citizenship.

But we must never let our national pride and interest overwhelm our identification with our fellow human beings in the rest of the world. The globalization of commerce and communications has made us all partners in each other's well being. If some of the planet is suffering massive poverty, none of us can feel smug in our prosperity. If some of the planet is at war, none of us can expect to remain forever at peace.

Just a few days ago, some representatives of Ontario's voluntary organizations presented me with a clock – a symbol, they explained, of all the time that volunteers give to their communities. It could also be, I couldn't help but think, a signal that my own time was up. And so it is – not just because your president is looking at his watch, but because the Prime Minister has another Lieutenant Governor of Ontario waiting in the wings.

I do more than wish my successor well. I wish that that fortunate person will be as blessed as I have been by all the people I've met, all the places I've been, and all the activities I've seen. I wasn't just informed by them. I was *transformed* by them. I thank the Government of Canada and the people of Ontario for giving me this extraordinary experience. I thank my husband Galen, my children, and my wonderful staff at Queen's Park for the support they've given me over the past five years. And I thank each and every one of you for inviting me here today.