

Memories of Pierre Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada

By Liona Boyd

(written in 2004 for a magazine)

Pierre Trudeau loved philosophy, the literature of the classics, the lakes and rivers of the Canadian wilderness, the challenges of politics, the transcendency of classical music... and of course he loved women.

I was one of the women Pierre loved, and for eight years I loved him in return. Ours was not "un amour fou" that inspired the poetic outpourings of some of my other romances, but it was like the man himself-- rational, gentle, and interspersed with moments of risk and humour. How could I not be infatuated by his attention and affection? - I, the daughter of immigrant parents who had chosen the itinerant, gypsy life of a concert artist, and he the brilliant idealist, the dashing leader of our adopted country...he with three children to raise after a failed marriage, and me the young romantic, fresh from living in Mexico and Paris -both of us pursuing grandiose dreams fueled by unswerving ambition. For years we were a perfect match, with no strings attached except those of my Spanish guitar that serenaded him in the chill of winter on fireside nights at Sussex Drive, and soothed his soul on those languid days we shared every summer at the lake. We gave each other solace, necessary escape from our two frenzied worlds, and we gave each other playful times filled with laughter . "Lioná je t'aime ma belle princesse" he would whisper as I lay in his arms.

My relationship with Pierre Trudeau appealed to my adventurous spirit and love of intrigue- secret staircases, occasional disguises, code words, silent RCMP officers transporting me to clandestine rendez-vous, exotic encounters in New York, breaking protocol at the G7 Summit Conference...a romance novel complete with candlelight evenings, sensuous escapades and political intrigue. When the years dimmed our passions and I decided to end our romance we had several heart to heart conversations about our future. Pierre asked me if I would come to live with him and the boys in his Pine Avenue house in Montreal and consider giving him a daughter. He was convinced I could produce "une petite fille", and that his staff could look after her while I maintained my concert schedule. But I knew then that we were both incapable of being completely "in love" with each other and that my destiny was tugging me West. I was thrilled when he eventually called me to share the news that at long last he had a daughter.

While writing my autobiography "In My Own Key, My life in Love and Music" , with some reservations I asked Pierre's permission to recount some of the details of our relationship. He paused for a moment reflecting on my request "Pourquoi pas ma cherie" he answered accompanied by his characteristic French shoulder shrug... "I'm proud that you chose me as your lover. Reading it will bring back "toutes les belles memoires."

I visited Pierre several times at his home in Montreal and strolled arm in arm with him along Avenue Rene Levesque where he maintained a law office. In 1995 he paid a visit to my husband and me in the City of Angels.

Our ecstatic Sri Lankan houseman prepared lunch at our home and I played him his favourite Gymnopédie#1 by Eric Satie for the last time.

During my 1997 concert at L'Eglise de Notre Dame in Montreal Pierre came alone to sit in the front row. My friends said he had a slight smile and distant look in his eyes as he watched my fingers making their music. I'm sure he was remembering the countless times I had played my guitar for world leaders at his initiative, or dedicated pieces to him from the stage of the National Arts Center in Ottawa, and also reminiscing about our romance that was now a nostalgic friendship. He and my husband and I had a post-concert dinner with friends in Montreal, and as we hugged each other goodnight I somehow knew that even though we would keep in touch by phone I would not ever feel his arms again.

I spoke to Pierre after his youngest son Misha's tragic accident. His spirit had been broken and his voice could not help but reveal the anguish. That winter and another summer passed as we slowly faded from each other's lives. Pierre died in September of the year 2000 at the age of eighty. Out of consideration to Margaret Trudeau I decided not to attend his funeral and thus watched the proceedings from my television screen thousands of miles away. My eyes welled up with tears as so many memories came flooding back. Trudeau was a great man, not without his human flaws- which in many ways endeared him to us all- a unique visionary who changed both my life and that of my country. The tremendous outpouring of love from around the world was a magnificent tribute to this man of extraordinary ideals and inner strength.

For two years on the anniversary of Pierre's passing I returned to Toronto to participate in a series of special events staged by the Latin-American Cultural Centre of Canada. All the activities are dedicated to Pierre Trudeau, their beloved father of multi-culturalism. This is the dreamchild of David Palmer and the many recent immigrants from Latin America for whom Pierre has become their hero. I know Pierre would have savoured every moment of the concerts staged in his honour. A single red rose was handed to every woman in the audience upon entering the theatre. But I have several very special red roses, pressed into one of my childhood books.... mine were worn by Pierre in his buttonhole and given to me with a kiss.

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