

Eulogy

**on the Occasion of a Memorial Service
for the late Ambassador Geoffrey Bruce**

At

St. Bart's Church

New Edinburgh

September 23, 2014

I am honoured, Erika, that you have asked me to re-cap the highlights of Geoff's extraordinary career. The clock being as unforgiving as it is, you were able to give me just 8 minutes! So, friends, I ask you to bear in mind that I will be skimming just the heights of Geoff's years of diplomacy and accomplishment. I won't delve into his contributions to his beloved Winthrop College or Queens or Columbia, or his brush with McCarthyism in the

Fifties, or his invitation to Hyde Park by Eleanor Roosevelt, or his friendship with Leontyne Price, or the numerous awards he earned along the way. In preparing this tribute, I have consulted my own memory and the recollections of others who worked with Geoff and respected and admired him.

I first met Geoff when I returned from Ankara on my first posting there, in 1970, and joined the Science Secretariat of the PCO. Geoff was in the process of creating the first ever environmental division in the then External Affairs Department, what came to be known, informally at least, as the Scientific Relations and Environmental Problems (not “Programs”) Division in External Affairs. ECS as I believe we called it then. A year later at Geoff’s invitation I joined the nascent division.

As far as Geoff was concerned the title “Environmental Problems” referred to what we did –we addressed ourselves to problems that were emerging as the global economy grew and integrated. Others, less progressive and charitable than Geoff, thought

“Environmental Problems” referred to what we were—the motley crew of officers Geoff assembled for the division--the late Dorothy Burwash, Gary Vernon, Chris Spencer, Joe Moffatt, Tony Campbell, David Low and yours truly, among others. Looking back, I can see that perhaps both sides had a point.

Geoff's creation and leadership of that division broke new ground for the department. It also set Geoff personally and professionally on a lifelong course of promoting three of his core beliefs—the imperative of protecting the environment, the importance of multilateral cooperation, especially through the United Nations, and the necessity of supporting the poorer, mostly ex-colonial countries as they struggled to develop and to help their peoples to live lives of greater dignity, comfort and meaning. He was convinced of the advisability of integrating all three and the practicability of doing so. He was a leader of his generation in recognizing, in his own words, that bustling economic growth, accelerating population increase and rampant exploitation of

natural resources would ultimately degrade the earth and overwhelm our biosphere.

Many have claimed to be present at the creation of something — Geoff actually was. In 1967, he was present at the creation of the UN's environmental vocation, when the UN General Assembly called for the first world conference on the environment. Five years later, Geoff led the Canadian delegation to that very successful conference -- the epic 1972 Stockholm Environmental Conference. That conference raised consciousness globally as few other conferences have done. It triggered an enormous body of international and national environmental law and practice. Hundreds of multilateral environmental agreements have been concluded since Stockholm!

As Minister in the Canadian Mission to the UN in New York, and subsequently, as the Canadian Representative to the nascent UN

Environmental Program in Nairobi, Geoff helped bring the Stockholm environmental program into being.

In 1983, Geoff was present again at a creation, this time the creation of the World Commission on the Environment and Development, which came to be called the Brundtland Commission, after its chair, Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland of Norway. It was perhaps Geoff's most consequential work. Many have claimed paternity for the success of bringing that Commission into being, but no one had a stronger claim than Geoff and no one worked harder to make it happen. That Commission, which was also backstopped by another Canadian of Geoff's generation, Jim MacNeill, reconciled the previously irreconcilable –economic growth and environmental protection. Henceforward “Sustainable Development” became the standard by which progress was, and is, measured.

Geoff was intrinsically optimistic and idealistic, but at the same time very clear-sighted. He believed in the UN and understood the great good that member states were capable of achieving, when they worked together through the UN family of organizations. He understood as well that the UN had its frailties and its failures, and he did not balk at skewering them, as Reid Morden recalls from their New York days together. And Geoff further understood that those failures were often the fault not of the institutions but of the member countries themselves, especially the permanent five Security Council member countries, who determined what the UN could do—and could not do. He was also a strong believer in Canada's role in the UN, and that Canada could, and should, use the standing that successive Canadian governments had earned to advance Canadian interests and values.

As Reid Morden and Jeremy Kinsman both commented in recalling their New York days with the Bruces, Geoff was civil but he did not shrink from “telling truth to power” (in that now

overworked expression) but in telling that truth he was never strident, never rude but always firm and his arguments were always backed up by facts and solid argument.

Geoff was also a poster boy for diplomacy —respectful of others, curious and observant, articulate and intelligent and filled with purpose and determination. Jeremy Kinsman recalls that Geoff was “the most popular guy in the Delegates’ Lounge. Yemenis, Costa Ricans, Singaporeans, Ghanaians, Yugoslavs, even East Germans...They all LIKED him...”

Geoff also knew where Canada’s bottom lines were and how to stand his ground. He wasn’t “going along to get along” at the UN, an accusation we hear so often these days. He was making the place work, in Canada’s interests and others’ too.

Geoff was convinced, in his own words, “that the profound universal demands for equality and for economic and social justice” would continue to dominate world affairs for generations to come, if the poor of the world were to be lifted from poverty,

disease and illiteracy.” Geoff’s reading of the future, his diplomatic skills, his humanity and his core beliefs—in protecting the environment, in multilateral cooperation, and partnering with the poorer, mostly ex-colonial countries made him the ideal choice to head CIDA’s Policy Branch in 1982 and its Business Cooperation branch a couple of years later. During his tenure at CIDA, the Agency conducted a major review of its environment and development policies and practices, developing standards that guided CIDA policy-making in this crucial intersection of interests and values.

My role today has been to help those of us whose fading memories need jogging of the dimensions of Geoff’s extraordinarily rich and consequential career, but I do want to contribute a very few words on Geoff as I knew him. To me, Geoff was a gentle man, the most elegant I have known, unfailingly courteous and welcoming, a friend with a wry and sometimes rueful sense of humour, an eye for the ironic or the absurd and a

readiness for fun. To his peers he was a joy to work with. To his juniors he was a mentor, as much older brother as boss.

It is appropriate that we should rejoice in Geoff's life and extraordinary career here today, as we are doing. But as Geoff would have been the first to acknowledge, he did not succeed alone. Erika and Geoff were a great team. Erika, you were a full-fledged partner. Whether in New York, Nairobi or Lisbon or Brussels where your and Geoff's roles were reversed, or right here in Ottawa, you always carried out your end of the bargain, and you did it with style and grace, with intelligence and purpose. You exuded professionalism and substance, and in your own right, you were an extraordinary asset for Canada.

Friends, amis, Geoff was a good and constructive man. In the words of his friend, Gordon Whitehead, Geoff "saw the world whole, warts and all", and sought to make it better. "Geoff's life,"

in the words of his friend Victor Goldbloom, “was a commitment to a better country and better world.”

Erika, your loss is profound but I hope you take some comfort from knowing that you do not bear it alone. We are all the poorer for his passing, but we are all the richer for having known him.