

HY SOLOMON AWARD THURSDAY
PUBLIC POLICY FORM
APRIL 7, 2016

TORONTO

IT IS TRULY AN HONOUR TO BE HERE TONIGHT....

IN FRONT OF A CROWD LIKE THIS ...

RECEIVING AN AWARD LIKE THIS.

IN MY BUSINESS, HY SOLOMON WAS ONE OF THE GREATS.

I WAS LUCKY ENOUGH TO HAVE WORKED IN THE OTTAWA PRESS GALLERY
IN THE LATE SEVENTIES AND EARLY EIGHTIES AT THE SAME TIME HY WAS
THERE.

WE DIDN'T KNOW EACH OTHER WELL – I WAS YOUNG AND JUST STARTING OUT AS A POLITICAL REPORTER.

BUT LIKE SO MANY OTHERS OF MY GENERATION I WAS IN AWE OF HIM.

HE HAD EDITORIAL INTEGRITY...

DEFIANT INDEPENDENCE.

HE WAS ONE OF THOSE RARE REPORTERS WHO COULD NOT BE SPUN.

IF THERE EVER WAS A TRULY 'MUST READ' ON THE HILL - IT WAS HY SOLOMAN.

SO AN AWARD NAMED IN HIS HONOUR IS AN AWARD ANY JOURNALIST WOULD CHERISH.

I AM HUMBLLED BY IT.

I CAN ONLY DREAM OF LIVING UP TO HY'S ACHIEVEMENTS BUT LUCKILY I HAVE A LONG CAREER AHEAD OF ME TO TRY.

(YOU SHOULD HAVE SEEN THE LOOK ON SOME OF YOUR FACES...)

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IT IS THE JOB OF THE JOURNALIST TO BE CURIOUS, TO ASK QUESTIONS, TO BE STORYTELLERS, AND NEWS-BREAKERS.

I'M LUCKY TO WORK AT AN ORGANIZATION AND ALONGSIDE GREAT JOURNALISTS WHO DO THAT ALL THE TIME.

WE GRAPPLE EVERY DAY WITH THE SAME BIG QUESTIONS:

WHAT'S NEWS?

WHAT'S IMPORTANT?

WHAT MATTERS?

IS IT THE STORIES THAT ARE BEING TALKED ABOUT AT THE PROVERBIAL WATER COOLER?

OR IS IT ABOUT STORIES THAT ARE MUCH HARDER TO TELL.

STORIES THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

THAT MAKE CANADIANS AWARE OF THEIR COUNTRY AND THE WORLD.

STORIES THAT MAKE THEM THINK.

WELL, THOSE STORIES OFTEN HAVE TO DO WITH PUBLIC POLICY.

“PUBLIC POLICY” IS ONE OF THOSE PHRASES THAT YOU FEEL SHOULD PERHAPS BE BANNED FROM NEWSCASTS ALONG WITH QUANTITATIVE EASING, AND PROROGATION ...YOU KNOW, BEFORE THAT LAST ONE BECAME SEXY..

PUBLIC POLICY IS IMPORTANT .. IT IS NEWS.

LET ME GIVE YOU A RECENT EXAMPLE.

LAST WEEK I SAT DOWN WITH DEFENCE LAWYER MARIE HENEIN.

SHE WAS, TO USE HER WORDS, SITTING ACROSS FROM ME ‘RELUCTANTLY’. BUT SHE WAS THERE.

WHY DID SHE AGREE TO DO THE INTERVIEW?

BECAUSE SHE WAS DISTURBED BY THE MISCONCEPTIONS AND MISINFORMATION BEING INCREASINGLY SPREAD ABOUT OUR LEGAL SYSTEM.

THE WAY OUR COURTS OPERATE.

THE WAY ALLEGATIONS ARE TESTED AND JUDGEMENTS ARE REACHED.

IN OTHER WORDS THE VERY BASICS OF OUR LEGAL SYSTEM.

SHE COULDN'T BELIEVE HOW MANY PEOPLE JUST DIDN'T UNDERSTAND THOSE "BASICS".

MISCONCEPTIONS OFTEN PERPETUATED BY THE MEDIA ... IN HER VIEW CAUGHT UP IN THE FRENZY OF REPORTING ONE OF THE HIGHEST PROFILE CASES OF THE PAST FEW YEARS.

FOR THE MOST PART THE INTERVIEW WAS ABOUT PUBLIC POLICY.

IT WAS OLD FASHIONED JOURNALISM.

FIND SOMEONE AT THE HEART OF A STORY AND TALK TO THEM.

ED GREENSPON, OUR NEW LEADER HERE AT THE PPF, SENT ME AN EMAIL LAST WEEK AND HE DESCRIBED THE INTERVIEW IN A PHRASE ...

" IT WAS A TRIUMPHANT MOMENT FOR CLASSIC JOURNALISM OVER THE BLAH, BLAH OF LOOSE OPINION DISGUISED AS JOURNALISM."

I'LL TAKE THAT.

OTHERS WROTE THAT IT WAS PUBLIC DISCOURSE AT IT'S VERY HIGHEST.

WHY? BECAUSE IT REMINDED ALL WHO NEEDED CLARIFICATION, OF WHOM THERE APPARENTLY ARE MANY, OF WHAT OUR COURTS ARE THERE FOR

AND WHAT PRESUMPTION OF INNOCENCE REALLY MEANS ... HAS TO MEAN.

THAT IT IS THE VERY CORE FOUNDATION OF OUR JUSTICE SYSTEM IS THE KEY POINT THAT WAS OFTEN LOST IN ALL THE NOISE AROUND THE CASE THAT MS HENEIN HAD JUST WON .

OUR SYSTEM IS ROOTED IN THE NOTION THAT GUILT HAS TO BE PROVEN AND IT'S A DEFENCE LAWYER'S JOB TO TEST THAT PROOF IN PART BY PUTTING THE CREDIBILITY OF THE WITNESSES UNDER THE MICROSCOPE.

AND LETS BE HONEST HERE - THERE ARE PLENTY OF INNOCENT PEOPLE IN JAIL – THEIR LIVES RUINED -- BECAUSE THEY DIDN'T HAVE A GOOD LAWYER.

JUST AS THERE ARE GUILTY PEOPLE WHO HAVE GONE FREE BECAUSE THE BURDEN OF PROOF WASN'T MET.

SPENDING TWENTY MINUTES ONE NIGHT DISCUSSING AND DEBATING THE VALUE OF THOSE BASICS SEEMS WORTHY TO ME.

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WE CANNOT LOSE SIGHT OF OUR ROLE AS JOURNALISTS.

WE CANNOT LOSE SIGHT OF WHAT MATTERS.

FACTS MATTER.

CONTEXT MATTERS.

NOW MORE THAN EVER.

WE'RE FACING A THREAT TO JOURNALISM.

THE PRESSURE TO BE FASTER,

THE PRESSURE TO BE FIRST,

THE 24-HOUR NEWS CYCLE –

NONE OF THAT IS NEW –

BUT ADD THE CRISIS IN PRINT,

CLICK BAIT JOURNALISM,

AND THE FACT THAT ANYONE WITH A SMART PHONE AND A TWITTER ACCOUNT CAN THINK THEY HAVE THE SCOOP OF THE CENTURY AND YOU GET A DANGEROUS COMBINATION.

IT MAKES OUR JOB BOTH HARDER, WHILE AT THE SAME TIME, MORE IMPORTANT.

TO BE ABLE TO CUT THROUGH THE NOISE IN THE SOCIAL MEDIA AGE.

AN AGE WHERE COMMUNICATIONS OFFICERS AND PR PROS OFTEN OUTSTRIP THE NUMBER OF JOURNALISTS AND ALMOST CERTAINLY HAVE BIGGER BUDGETS.

AN AGE WHERE POLITICAL SPIN HAS BECOME EVEN MORE SOPHISTICATED.

AND WHERE TIME AND MONEY ARE CONSTANTLY SHRINKING.

WE NEED TO PUSH THROUGH THAT NOISE, IGNORE THE DESIRE TO BE FIRST TO INSTEAD FOCUS ON THE DESIRE TO BE RIGHT.

IGNORE THE DESIRE TO CAPTURE EYEBALLS TO INSTEAD FOCUS ON THE DESIRE TO CHALLENGE MINDS.

I KNOW THAT'S NOT EASY. BUT IT'S NEVER BEEN EASY.

JOURNALISM CAN AT TIMES BE THANKLESS, LONELY, AND FRUSTRATING.

IT OFTEN LEADS TO MORE QUESTIONS, AND LESS ANSWERS.

SOMETIMES IT LEADS TO NOTHING.

BUT SOMETIMES - THE PAY-OFF CAN BE HUGE.

AND SOMETIMES THAT HUGE PAY-OFF, AS PAINSTAKING AS THAT PROCESS MAY HAVE BEEN TO GET THERE, IS A STORY ABOUT PUBLIC POLICY.

PUBLIC POLICY MATTERS.

WHAT YOU ALL DO IN THIS ROOM MATTERS.

IT IS IMPORTANT.

CANADIANS NEED TO KNOW.

WE NEED TO TELL THEM.

HY SOLOMON TOLD THEM. AND ALL THESE YEARS LATER WE DON'T FORGET THAT.

AND FOR YOU TO RECOGNIZE ME TONIGHT AS SOMEONE WHO HAS IN EVEN THE MOST MINOR WAY, HAD AN IMPACT, IS TRULY A GREAT HONOUR.

THANK YOU.