



Sheldon M. Chumir

Sheldon Chumir was, by anyone's standards, an outstanding human being. Born in Calgary on December 3rd, 1940, he excelled at virtually every endeavour he undertook. As a Rhodes scholar, tax lawyer, rock concert promoter, politician, civil libertarian, public interest advocate, hockey player, businessman and many other things, Sheldon worked and played with passionate intensity. His life was characterized by intelligence, humour, hard work, decency, and fairness. As a student, Sheldon achieved excellence in sports, academic pursuits, and student activities. After completing a law degree at the University of Alberta as his class's gold medallist in 1963, Sheldon was awarded a Rhodes scholarship to study at Oxford. When he returned to Canada in 1965 he pursued careers in the law, business and politics.

These accomplishments were impressive, but Sheldon wished to help those whose civil rights had been infringed and so he left his practice as a tax lawyer in 1976 and set up his own firm to defend the rights of the powerless. His commitment to civil liberties was unmatched; typically, he worked *pro bono* for causes that he felt were important. He also taught civil liberties at the University of Calgary Law School.

Sheldon loved to debate issues, recognizing that principled and respectful disagreement was vital to the democratic process. His approach to issues was characterized by careful reflection and independence of mind. His educational and legal experiences turned him into a vigorous supporter of public education, civil rights and individual freedoms. Whatever the issue, Sheldon could always be found acting for the underdog – for the person or group he felt needed his help.

As a politician Sheldon was convinced that voters wanted political leaders to strive for fairness and honesty in all of their dealings. He rejected the notion that politics was a blood sport where only the ruthless could survive. His political instincts helped him to get elected in 1986 – the first Liberal elected in Calgary in over fifteen years – as a Member of Alberta’s Legislative Assembly for the riding of Calgary-Buffalo. He was re-elected in 1989.

In addition to his unique personality, Sheldon also had a unique perspective in that he was familiar with the internal dynamics of both the public and private sectors. He was, therefore, able to conceptualize and to criticize the strengths and weaknesses of both systems.

Sheldon sensed that our society suffers from a crisis of leadership. Both in government and in business, he perceived that people had lost faith in the capacity of established institutions to meet the needs of those they served. The first sign of this loss of faith was the public’s increasing reluctance to spend time reflecting on issues relating to the public good.

When he died at the age of just fifty-one in January of 1992 following a brief illness, there was an enormous outpouring of respect and admiration not only from his many friends, but from people from all walks of life who felt how keenly they would miss his integrity, his dedication to humanitarian causes, his gentle humour and sense of fun, and his genuine warmth toward people from every corner of the community. Following his death, Sheldon was recognized by the Law Society of Alberta and posthumously awarded the Distinguished Service Award for Service to the Community. The inscription on the award reads in part:

Founder of the Alberta Civil Liberties Association, he was a tireless champion in pro bono work for various unpopular causes and wrongs to be set right. His spirit lives on through the Sheldon Chumir Foundation for Ethics in Leadership, created as his last wish as a legacy for Canada.
