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Brian Campbell was a dedicated librarian and a lifelong social activist. He believed in working together for the common good. He embodied the principles of the Cooperative Movement - dedication to equality, equity, democracy, social responsibility, education, self-reliance, openness, sharing, and caring for others. Being a librarian helped make him a better advocate for those without a voice, and his activism made him a better librarian.

Brian had vision. He wanted to make the world a better place for everyone. He was not driven by the chance for advancement in his career, he cared much more about advancing the public interest. He was never one to rest easy, or to consider his work done, and yet his impact on libraries is profound. He made a huge difference.

I first encountered Brian's reputation when I was a new librarian working for Dynix, a computer company that specialized in library systems. He had negotiated an epically strong contract for VPL which enabled his library to drive the development of the software for many years. Libraries owe him a lot for the advancement of library software.

After I moved to Vancouver, Brian took the time to get to know me and provide assistance to me in my new role. He also invited me to join a committee he was then starting, the BCLA Information Policy Committee. I had no idea what Information Policy meant - who did, back in 1991? - but I was thrilled to have the opportunity to get involved in the provincial library association, something that hadn't been available to me in Ontario.

And boy did I learn a lot from Brian! I learned about technology impacts on libraries and how that relates to the public good. I learned about intellectual freedom, access issues, equity issues, privacy issues, and the social mandate of libraries. I was introduced to thought-leaders such as Herbert Schiller, David Noble, Jesse Hirsh, Vincent Mosco and Henry Mintzberg.

I learned how to coordinate conferences, write letters of appeal, create posters, stuff envelopes, coordinate meetings, pull people together for a common purpose, and to push myself beyond what I thought I was capable of.

I was drawn to his passion, his ethics and worldview. I was captivated by his vision for libraries, the democratic role they play in societies and the essential importance of protecting safe neutral public spaces.

Brian saw libraries as a vehicle for a bigger vision of improving society. He entered the profession with purpose and vision, and stayed true to his goals through a distinguished career lasting close to three decades.

For many of those years he was Director of Systems and Planning for the Vancouver Public Library, and was a leader in implementing library systems and public computing, in working with vendors and developing and implementing software in public libraries. Brian also became a leader in working with the vendor user groups and standards organizations.

Brian always thought that the failure of a shared library computer system across the whole Lower Mainland was a huge missed opportunity.

If Brian hadn't retired in 2006, if he had kept working at the Vancouver Public Library, he would have led the development of open source software for library systems. He would have championed a shared Integrated Library System using that open source software. And he would have been the biggest supporter and driver of the BC Libraries Cooperative.

In a 2009 interview for the B.C. library history book, Brian talked about the difficulties of introducing computers in libraries. Staff members were concerned about potential impact on their health and their jobs. Brian addressed those concerns through conversation and education. He also had to convince management that they would not save money by replacing people with computers.

As he predicted, new computer systems increased the use of libraries. Jobs shifted and changed, and staffing levels increased to meet the demand. He was proud of the fact that there was no reduction in staffing as a result of computerization. That libraries became busier than ever.

Over time, he pushed for digital content, and predicted that wifi - and its increased demand for power outlets - would become more important.

Brian treated Intellectual Freedom work as an integral part of his professional responsibilities as a librarian. He was a fearless and tireless champion for librarianship's entwined core values of intellectual freedom and equality of access to information. He demonstrated genuine leadership in a wide range of activities, projects and committees, and teaching and mentoring others – all with the aim of ensuring these basic values for libraries and librarianship would endure and strengthen.

Brian devoted much of his career to ensuring that marginalized people had access to libraries and information. He was concerned that access to information would increasingly demand access to technology and so he was the primary builder of the Vancouver Community Network, originally called the Vancouver FreeNet. He initiated the BCLA Information Policy Committee because of his concern for the risk that technology would erode the public's right to information. And he

spearheaded the national Working Together Project, which helped connect vulnerable people with library services.

In the 1990s, thanks largely to Brian's vision and efforts, the BC Library Association lobbied libraries and government to introduce free public access internet stations and training into public libraries. BC was the first jurisdiction to provide free access to the Internet in all public libraries. No single effort resulted in such a broad increase in access to information for the general public.

Brian was no stranger to public policy debates. He bravely took on challenges like the proposed amendments to the Criminal Code and the Customs Tariff regarding pornography; shaping BC's Freedom of Information & Privacy Act; fighting the campaign against the Multi-Lateral Agreement on Investments and the WTO General Agreement on Trade and Services; and co-founding the Seriously Free Speech Committee, a group dedicated to the belief that "free speech is fundamental to other democratic rights and that political criticism is the bedrock of free speech".

Brian was instrumental in affecting change across a broad range of public policy issues. He was the "conscience of librarianship" in B.C. and other parts of Canada. That is not hyperbole. Brian Campbell really was librarianship's social conscience.

Brian was a force of nature, driven by passion, vision and intellect, fuelled by a vision for a better world, and guided by his values. And he had a unique ability to build a community of people to work on his activist efforts.

He motivated people through a powerful combination of support, encouragement and "focused feedback". Feedback that was brutally honest, astonishingly accurate, and yet strangely motivating.

And it's fair to say he was demanding of himself and others. Sometimes it was hard to keep up with Brian! He set high standards and expectations for himself, and seemed surprised when others didn't meet his worth ethic.

The reason he could be so effective in motivating people to do more than they thought they could was that he had a genuine belief in your abilities, a genuine caring in you as a person. And he always generously acknowledged the work of others. He had an amazing ability to hold high expectations and provide support at the same time.

A big part of Brian's legacy is his impact on hundreds of individuals, directly and indirectly. Brian helped shaped me, the person I am, the librarian I am. He inspired, he guided, and he taught me. He influenced the public policy decisions I've made, the type of leadership I practice. And as a ripple effect of that, he has influenced the folks I have worked with throughout my career.

His intellect and intensity could be intimidating. And yet, what many colleagues didn't know, is the importance of family to Brian. He was so proud of his kids and grandkids, and always interested in the families of others.

Brian was my son's first babysitter, when Ben was only a few hours old. When I started a new job, Brian took a day off work to look after my sick child so I wouldn't have to miss my first day. Brian was always interested in hearing the stories and developments of my kids, and he would provide support, offer advice and pitch in wherever needed. He was important to my family and we will all miss him.

Brian's legacy is significant. He was never afraid of getting under people's skin, of standing up for what he believed in - even if others didn't want to hear it. Brian could always be counted on to speak out and advocate for the library's role. He championed the ideals and the understanding of intellectual freedom, information policy issues and the democratic role that libraries play in community and in protecting the public interest.

Brian was a strong, courageous and trusted leader, activist and mentor over a lifetime of service. He has influenced generations of library staff and trustees. Many of us owe Brian a debt of gratitude.

Brian's commitment, accomplishments and legacy are unmatched. He was a truly deserving recipient of the BCLA Helen Gordon Stewart Award for exceptional contributions to library service in B.C. No one else comes this close to matching Helen's missionary fervour, and profound and lasting impact on libraries in BC and beyond.

Brian was committed to changing the world, one cause at a time, one person at a time. His passion was inspiring. It was an honour and a privilege to have known Brian.

I am grateful to have counted him as my cherished friend and mentor.

And I miss him, every day.