



SIEBENQUELL

»The Death of a Story-teller«



SOURCE: ERIK RIECHERS 2017

I do not know if you have subscribed to a podcast. Since coming to Germany nearly 12 years ago, I have subscribed to the podcast of »Vinyl Café Stories from CBC Radio«. Every week I was sent another episode with a tale from the grand Canadian storyteller, Stuart McLean. His twenty year, ongoing saga about Dave and Morley, their marriage, their foibles, their eccentricities and their common humanity with the rest of Canadians, was a national pastime. We watched and laughed and cried with this fictional family, who moved as awkwardly and as gracefully through life as all the rest of us. Stuart McLean eased my homesickness and kept me woven into the land and people from which I came. On December 30, 2016 I received the last podcast. Since then, there has been a lingering silence. When I returned home for a winter visit to my homeland on February 15, 2017, I had to wait for several hours in the Calgary airport for my connecting flight to Edmonton. It was there, on the television screen, that I saw the news: Stuart McLean had died at age 68 after a battle with melanoma.

Jess Milton, who served as the show's executive producer for 12 years, said of her friend, »I think the reason he was so good at telling our stories as Canadians is that he was a tremendously good listener. I want to say he was

a mirror and he reflected us back to ourselves. But he was more than that; he was a conduit. He allowed our stories as Canadians to just pass right through him and in doing so, he really connected us – to our country, to each other and to ourselves.«

While walking through the streets of Canmore, I saw a makeshift tribute to Stuart McLean on the wall of an old saloon. I stopped to take a picture of it and great sadness welled up within me. It is a sadness that lingers. Every week the silenced, empty podcast reawakens it in me. Every day I am inundated with news reports about people who scream, rant and rave, fling outrageous insults at each other and shout down any and all who disagree with them. Where are the good listeners now? Every day, I have been deluged with news broadcasts about people who will reflect any and every horrible attitude that a human heart can harbour, in order to make politics out of indignation. Where are the storytellers who act like a mirror and reflect us back to ourselves? Every day I have been forced to watch the rise of the politics of hatred and division, and those who would brutally use the basest instincts of human nature to garner power. Where are the storytellers who will really connect us to our country, to each other and to ourselves?

My podcast subscription to the »Vinyl Café Stories from CBC Radio« remains on my iPad. No new stories appear now. That place sits empty on the iPad, and it remains empty in my heart. I cannot bring myself to cancel the subscription nor can I delete it from the machine. I mourn the loss of my countryman. I mourn the death of a great storyteller. And I wonder to myself, when we will see such a weaver of tales again. Even more, I wonder when we will be willing to listen to them again.

Erik Riechers SAC

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