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A CELEBRATION OF THE LIFE OF MAURICE F. STRONG

A TRIBUTE BY DÉSORÉE MCGRAW PRESIDENT AND HEAD OF PEARSON COLLEGE

Maurice Strong changed my life.

As a teenager, entering a beautiful but broken world, he was my inspiration. I knew no one like him. He saw a troubled planet plagued by environmental challenges. And he knew that ecological problems could not be solved in isolation from the destructive forces of poverty and economic injustice. Mr. Strong – as he was to me then, and now – was a visionary. He challenged me, and my generation, to take action.

In 1990, I was an intern at the Canadian International Development Agency. He was the founding president – another passage in a life as public servant, entrepreneur, envoy, conservationist, philanthropist, iconoclast.

He named me one of two global Youth Ambassadors to the Rio Earth Summit. What an experience! I took a year off school to promote the summit to audiences of my contemporaries around the world. Mr. Strong – and the Summit he led – shaped me: as a reporter covering global negotiations; as a graduate student at the LSE researching environmental diplomacy, and as a teacher of international development at McGill University.

In Rio, he was a force of nature. A dazzling whirlwind of **ambition, perseverance and urgency**. He succeeded where others had failed: to bring most of the world's governments to the table.

Things never happened fast enough for him. It sometimes made him impatient. And yet, he always made time for me and other young people. He never spared us the truth. "*If this is going to fail,*" he told us during the Summit, "*let it fail BIG.*"

Maurice Strong would not be drawn into feeling that the world was making progress when it was not. The status quo was unacceptable, and to reverse it, he was prepared risk public failure. I thought: that's **courage**.

Mr. Strong and his beloved wife Hanne believed deeply in the power of young people to make a difference – a belief that guides my own work every day. As head of Pearson College, which is all about the next generation, I am proud to note that it was Lester Pearson who recruited Mr. Strong to head the newly-created "Office of External Aid", which was to become CIDA under Pierre Trudeau.

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Later, as a senior advisor on international cooperation in Paul Martin's government, I often went to Mr. Strong for advice. Always the pragmatic idealist, he would typically say, "*Look to make an out-size impact in a few key areas.*"

Above all, I recall he challenged us to be operational optimists in the face of intellectual pessimism. In other words, to find a way to find and create hope in the midst of hopelessness.

Maurice Strong saw a future that was probably invisible to most. It left us breathless and inspired. Now we're on our own. But thanks to you, Mr. Strong, we can envision a just and sustainable future – one which is ours to build. Rest assured, we will.

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