



MY NAME IS LOLA

by Lola Rozsa,
as told to and written by Susie Sparks

ISBN 978-1-55238-735-1

THIS BOOK IS AN OPEN ACCESS E-BOOK. It is an electronic version of a book that can be purchased in physical form through any bookseller or on-line retailer, or from our distributors. Please support this open access publication by requesting that your university purchase a print copy of this book, or by purchasing a copy yourself. If you have any questions, please contact us at ucpress@ucalgary.ca

Cover Art: The artwork on the cover of this book is not open access and falls under traditional copyright provisions; it cannot be reproduced in any way without written permission of the artists and their agents. The cover can be displayed as a complete cover image for the purposes of publicizing this work, but the artwork cannot be extracted from the context of the cover of this specific work without breaching the artist's copyright.

COPYRIGHT NOTICE: This open-access work is published under a Creative Commons licence.

This means that you are free to copy, distribute, display or perform the work as long as you clearly attribute the work to its authors and publisher, that you do not use this work for any commercial gain in any form, and that you in no way alter, transform, or build on the work outside of its use in normal academic scholarship without our express permission. If you want to reuse or distribute the work, you must inform its new audience of the licence terms of this work. For more information, see details of the Creative Commons licence at: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>

UNDER THE CREATIVE COMMONS LICENCE YOU **MAY**:

- read and store this document free of charge;
- distribute it for personal use free of charge;
- print sections of the work for personal use;
- read or perform parts of the work in a context where no financial transactions take place.

UNDER THE CREATIVE COMMONS LICENCE YOU **MAY NOT**:

- gain financially from the work in any way;
- sell the work or seek monies in relation to the distribution of the work;
- use the work in any commercial activity of any kind;
- profit a third party indirectly via use or distribution of the work;
- distribute in or through a commercial body (with the exception of academic usage within educational institutions such as schools and universities);
- reproduce, distribute, or store the cover image outside of its function as a cover of this work;
- alter or build on the work outside of normal academic scholarship.

Giving Back

I suppose as much as any of us can set the stage exactly as we'd like, none of us can predict how the players will interpret the script. However, as the twelve of us gathered around our table for the first time, I was blissfully content. Impossible as it may have seemed thirty-six years prior when I drove away from my family to start our married life, I felt that I at last had come full circle. Life was playing out as it should.

In the oil patch, every indication was that we were in an economy that would give our now-adult children opportunities to build their careers and perhaps to realize dreams far beyond any of our expectations. Ted and Reed landed in Calgary at exactly the right moment; it was perfect timing. However, the roller coaster reality of the province's boom and bust cycles was something neither of them had experienced before.

When we arrived in Calgary in 1949, we jumped on at the crest of that ride, and ten years later we rode it down to its crash over the rocky cliffs of the '60s. But compared to what was happening to the oil industry in the mid-'70s, the post-Leduc boom seemed hardly more than a bump. I think Ted and I both knew we were in for a wild ride. Fortunately, we were old enough and experienced enough to hang on and make it through. I'm afraid the younger generation, who hadn't had that experience, came out of it with considerable bruising.

By the 1970s, Alberta was taking on a far more sophisticated and worldly demeanour. It would no longer be Central Canada's country cousin. In 1971, Peter Lougheed wrested control of the provincial legislature from the Social Credit party, which had been in power since Premier William Aberhart's voodoo economic theories fooled Alberta farmers into thinking he knew how to end the Depression. However, even though Aberhart's disciple, Ernest Manning, had been a hands-off friend to the growing oil industry, he was hardly equal to representing such a volatile issue as oil on a national, let alone a world, stage. And, make no mistake. *Everyone* knew that Alberta was sitting on an almost unlimited supply of what the world needed now more than ever before.

Peter Lougheed personified the *new* Alberta. His grandfather, Senator James Lougheed, was one of the province's very first movers and shakers back in 1883 when it was still technically part of the Northwest Territories. But Peter belonged to *our* generation; he had lived through the Depression and watched his own father lose the considerable fortune the family had amassed during his grandfather's stewardship. It wouldn't happen under his watch. Those close to him saw him tick off the steps it would take to place him in a position where he could call the plays.

In high school, he lobbied for a students' union and became its first president. At the University of Alberta, he was awarded both a bachelor's and a law degree while serving as president of the students' union, and writing for the student newspaper. At the same time, he played football for the university's Golden Bears as well as professionally for the Edmonton Eskimos, and then he retired from sports so he could go to Boston for an MBA from the Harvard Business School.

Peter was a young man who knew where he was going and how to get there. He came back to Alberta to lay the foundation for a political career beginning with a management position in Fred Mannix's construction business, then moved along to establish a law practice in Edmonton and finally, in the mid-'60s, he got political.

In scarcely more than five years, he was the leader of the Progressive Conservative party and elected premier of the province.

Under Premier Manning's administration, the oil companies had been left alone to explore and develop to their hearts' content, and Alberta prospered from royalties collected from their profits. However, with the arrival of OPEC onto the world's stage in 1969, the price of oil skyrocketed and Peter Lougheed recognized what this windfall could do for the province. It was shaping up to be the mother of all booms. Like the rest of his generation, he was weary of being buffeted about by the stormy climate of the oil industry, so he upped the royalties on oil and gas and established the Heritage Trust Fund to sock away the profits for a rainy day and to encourage a little economic diversification. Understandably, Alberta oilmen grumbled as they watched their profits being diverted into the provincial coffers.

Calgary, of course, was at the eye of that storm. And to make matters worse, this was all taking place during the disco era, arguably the tackiest decade of the twentieth century. Four thousand people a month flooded into the province during the boom, and the vacancy rate for both apartments and office space plummeted to zero. The real estate market went crazy. Oil prices made millionaires of people who stumbled into the economy of the '70s with only limited business experience and even less judgment. Everyone seemed to be speculating in real estate or experimenting in oil ventures. Sadly though, as the Texans like to say, many of them were all hat and no cattle. There were stories about four-martini lunches at the Petroleum Club, and cocaine replaced marijuana as the drug of choice among a smattering of young people who couldn't think of anywhere else to spend their money. Apparently, Las Vegas casinos were sending planes to Calgary to collect the high rollers, and building cranes sprouted like weeds throughout downtown Calgary knocking down '50s-era office towers to replace them with '70s-era office towers. Another story – perhaps apocryphal – reported an ongoing underground Monopoly game that required a buy-in of a

million and a half dollars because the players used real currency to buy and sell *real* houses and hotels sitting on Calgary's Park Places and Boardwalks. The decade's favourite expression was, "He who dies with the most toys wins."

However, when Prime Minister Trudeau marched into the maelstrom with the hand of the *federal* government outstretched, it was the last straw. From that point forward, the relationship between Alberta and the national government spiralled out of control, a hurricane wreaking havoc as it swept over those of us caught up in it.

By the time Mr. Trudeau's National Energy Program brought it all to an end in the early '80s, the damage suffered by the young families who had been swept up in that short-lived culture of excess was a terrible thing to see. Unemployment in Alberta rose to 10 per cent. For the first time ever, more people were leaving the province than arriving to settle, and Alberta led the nation in housing foreclosures, bankruptcies, divorces, and suicides. Those of us who survived that decade reeled into the '80s older and much wiser about the stewardship of our lifetimes' rewards.

However, Ted had decided in 1979 that, since his family was well and truly launched, and he was at an age where a little more time on the golf course wouldn't be out of line, he would sell Basset Oil to Dallas Hawkins' company, Oakwood Petroleum. Considering the timing of the sale, it turned out to be a prescient decision, so we were left in a position where we could thank all our neighbours, friends, and business associates who'd offered their friendship and support over the years. Ted owned a farm just south of town so we decided we'd throw a yell-yahoo!-and-have-a-boot-scootin'-good-time Stampede party. Young Ted took on the project, and it turned out to be such a barn burner that we knew we'd have to make it an annual event, so the next year we included practically everyone in the phone book plus all their visiting relatives – along with all of the kissin' kin imported from points south. I decided Ted and I needed matching cowboy shirts with matching, embroidered Texas roses, and from that point forward the whole production just got bigger.

Ruth Ann was a seasoned veteran of the Stampede Board's Caravan Committee, so she definitely knew how to marshal the forces for a major feeding frenzy and entertainment spectacular and, within a very few years, the Rozsa Roundup took on a life of its own.

But we also decided we could offer our appreciation to Calgary in a more substantial way. Both of us were still very much involved with the Philharmonic, and by the mid-'80s, Ruth Ann had followed in our footsteps and was active in the annual Gala and Dream Auction that was sponsored by the Women's League. Unfortunately, Reed had discovered he wasn't cut out for life in the oil industry, and he was unhappy living in Calgary, so he prevailed upon Ruth Ann to take the family back to California in '81. It was short-lived, however, and they were divorced a year later, so Ruth Ann and the children came back home in '82. It was, of course, a terrible blow – one that was unthinkable from my perspective – but so many young marriages didn't survive the '70s. I was grateful that the children were back in the arms of their Rozsa family though, and I know both Karen and Howie felt well-loved and secure in our support.

The string of guest conductors at the Calgary Philharmonic continued throughout the '70s to the mid-'80s, and the board was more committed than ever to finding a resident music director. When they heard rumours that Mario Bernardi might consider stepping away from the National Arts Centre Orchestra, provided the financial incentive was available of course, four of the CPO directors took Ted out to lunch.

Would he consider paying Mario Bernardi's salary and endowing a Maestro's Chair to ensure its sustainability? It would require a cheque with six zeros.

Ted always joked about that day. He said, "Beware of four lawyers who offer to take you to lunch. You'll be outnumbered and there are enough of them to pin down all four limbs until you give in." In 1984, Maestro Bernardi became the Music Director of the CPO and held that position until 1992. In 1985, the orchestra moved into the Jack Singer Concert Hall in the Performing Arts Centre

and, during Mario's tenure, the Calgary orchestra was considered to be among the top two or three in Canada. Ted was delighted that he could help bring this kind of talent to Calgary, and, in return, the CPO gave *him* countless hours of superb music.

Following each of the concerts, the board took turns entertaining Mario and the visiting soloists at our homes and we got to know one another very well. We often invited the kids in the orchestra to come out to skate on the lake and join us for weekend afternoon drinks and nibbles, and Hy and Jenny Belzberg offered their home for many of the receptions following the concerts. The Belzbergs were so generous toward the Philharmonic and we adored them both. Jenny came up through the ranks of community volunteers much as I did, so we had many experiences in common, but I think I most admired her for her whole-hearted support of the small initiatives she championed as they gained a foothold in Calgary's non-profit sector. Many of those organizations were arts-related, but others were in support of the development of new community leaders. She saw that the face of voluntarism was changing. Younger men and women had full-time careers, but less time to offer to the organizations that could profit by their help. Jenny gave her support and mentorship to their leadership development, knowing that the next generation would soon be called upon to take our places in Calgary's community board rooms.

Ted gave an additional seven figure cheque to the Philharmonic a year after his first to bump up the endowment fund, and throughout the following years he continued to help as needed, especially where music was involved. He gave to the Honens International Piano Competition and the Calgary Opera, but he was also very generous to the Foothills Hospital, the Banff School of Fine Arts, the Centre for Performing Arts, Theatre Calgary, the Glenbow Museum (where he was a director of the board for a time), and Grace Presbyterian Church. Very few of those donations were made public until finally someone convinced him that his philanthropy might provide a model for others to get involved.

In the early '80s, we finally figured out we could escape the worst of the cold weather by taking our golf clubs to Hawaii for a few weeks in the winter, so while we were there I talked him into buying a place in Maui, which we were able to share with friends and family. But Ted's retirement didn't last long, I'm afraid. By the time we got back from a two-week vacation after he sold Basset, he was back at work putting together another company he called Rozsa Petroleum.

I could see it wasn't going to be easy to get him to slow down; his idea of a vacation was to take his golf clubs to a new golf course. It didn't much matter where it was. We had tried a few sightseeing trips that anyone else would have loved, but I'm afraid all that interesting culture and beautiful scenery was wasted on Ted. Luckily, though, I had raised adventurous children who loved to travel so I had the chance to visit Ruth Ann in some of the exotic places she went with Pan Am and where they were stationed with the Air Force. And once Mary Lil was bit by the adventure bug during her trip across the Arctic, she was first in line for a chance to go along the following two summers. They further whetted her appetite for more remote excursions, and it wasn't long before she started asking me to join her.

One time, Mary Lil won a trip for two to Australia, so she asked me to come along. The prize, evidently, was limited to the flight alone, so she would have to take care of the food and shelter part. It didn't faze her at all. She would be perfectly happy in a youth hostel, so, of course, assumed that I would be too. We went to Papua New Guinea and travelled in dug-out canoes and hiked up into the highlands where white women had never been before. While we were observing a dowry being negotiated before a wedding, I realized Mary Lil and I were the only women wearing tops, except for one tiny, toothless old woman who had an American flag tie wrapped around her neck, fashionably draped in her cleavage.

The next time she invited me to join her, she was biking across Europe and suggested we meet in Milan to celebrate American

Thanksgiving in Italy. She booked us into the Hilton and promised to meet me at the train station near the hotel. You can imagine how thrilled I was! No more youth hostels, no more dug-out canoes. I had visions of sightseeing through the high-fashion capital of the world and seeing every Leonardo da Vinci painting I'd ever read about. At last, I thought, Mary Lil has finally discovered the good life.

As promised, she was there as I arrived, although suspiciously burdened with a very large backpack. "Why didn't you just leave that at the hotel?" I asked in my most reasonable voice, knowing full well I really didn't want to hear the answer. But before I could stop myself, Mary Lil brightly answered, "Oh I just slept here in the train station last night. No sense paying for a hotel room when I've got a perfectly good sleeping bag."

Okay, I thought, I won't make that mistake again. If I don't want to hear the answer, I have to learn not to ask the question. No matter, the Hilton was just a block or so away so we could both shower and change our clothes and, by the time we were ushered into our lovely room overlooking the fabulous Milan cityscape, I was ready to drop. She could see that I was exhausted by the long overnight flight and very sweetly asked, "Mom, would you like a cup of tea?"

Thank heaven for room service. "Yes, that would be perfect. Thank you. I'll just jump into the shower first." I stepped out of the bathroom a few minutes later wrapped in a fluffy white robe – courtesy of the Hilton – and found Mary Lil surrounded by the entire contents of her pack and bicycle panniers, squatted over her camping stove boiling water for our tea. I was wise enough to just shut up and be grateful.

Mary Lil, between adventures, finished her undergraduate degree at Trinity and took an Education degree at the University of Calgary, where she would eventually receive an Honorary Doctor of Laws. During one hiatus though, she worked briefly at the Rozsa Petroleum office and wandered across the hall to introduce herself to a fellow who was at that time buying and selling diamonds. He was

the quintessential '70s-era entrepreneur, always open to exploring new deals. Gary and Mary Lil became great friends and scuba diving partners, and eventually she invested in some land in Mexico that he had introduced her to. She built a condo development on the property and, since there was a ratty little golf course nearby, she decided she'd introduce her friends to it by hosting a golf tournament. And who better to organize it than her very own mother, a veteran of many tournaments. I can't say it would have passed muster by the PGA, but we had commemorative tee-shirts made and I can guarantee we all had more fun than any tournament before or since.

Back home in Calgary, though, it was generally tough sledding after the economic meltdown of the early '80s. Those who survived the National Energy Program had to batten the hatches and prepare for rough weather yet again. Those who didn't, either through financial mismanagement or personal recklessness, watched their businesses dissolve and their marriages fail. The only bright note on the horizon was that we had been awarded the winter Olympics for 1988, so almost everyone we knew was involved in those preparations in some way or another.

Politically though, Albertans licked their wounds and muttered about separating from the Dark Side. Peter Lougheed, although he had fought the good fight against Central Canada's claim on Alberta's resources and ultimately ensured that Alberta would never retreat to its former protectionist position, resigned his position as premier. Albertans remained steadfastly loyal to the Conservative Party. But the most astounding political change during the '80s was Calgary's civic election of 1980 when Ralph Klein was elected mayor.

I think even Ralph was stunned when he won that election. He was a high school drop-out, a TV reporter whose favourite beat was the seedy St. Louis Hotel pub, where he could multi-task his interviews with the more colourful populous. He was Alberta's version of a good ol' boy and, in a city that takes a certain pride in its reputation as the most highly educated in the country, he was not expected to be a viable candidate.

It was a landslide victory. I never could find anyone who actually admitted to voting for him, but obviously plenty of people did. Those that did were proud to; they *loved* him! Ralph played to their animosity against the “eastern creeps and bums” who had caused all their financial misery, and I was lucky enough to have an insider’s ear on all the civic gossip about the mayor’s excesses because the most famous ‘alderbroad’ on City Council and I shared a hairdresser.

Sue Higgins was truly a character, and the press loved her because she never minced words with anyone – including me. So, as we sat under our side-by-side hair dryers every week, she’d give me the lowdown on uptown Calgary. She was hilarious and we became good buddies throughout her long tenure on City Council, and I rooted for her all the way when she launched her campaign to unseat Mayor Ralph. She lost that one but was handily re-elected to Council and she continued her fight for fiscal restraint for many years. It was because of Sue that I had an opportunity to serve on a civic committee to renovate City Hall, and I came away from that experience with huge respect for so many ordinary Calgarians who volunteer their time on behalf of the community. As I’ve gotten older, I’ve found I have less and less patience with people who gripe about civic issues yet refuse to step up and take action when action needs taking. I’m likely to interrupt their litany of complaints with, “And what are *you* doing about that?”

Ralph continued riding a wave of civic popularity. He was nothing if not a party guy, and the Olympic Games were shaping up to be the biggest party of the century. And by the time that was over, Ralph was poised for a promotion to premier of Alberta.

I’m afraid that for those of us in the oil business, however, the party was *really* over by that time. Unfortunately, those too young or too inexperienced to ride out the storm suffered. In the years since, I still haven’t been able to understand why all those young marriages were victims in that collapse. Ted and I saw ourselves as more than mates and best friends; we were life partners. We had been through repeated boom and bust cycles since the day we left Whitesboro for

Stroud, Oklahoma. There were times when I know I gave serious thought to bolting but, as my friend Mary Ann often said, “I’ve considered murder on more than a few occasions, but never divorce!” Divorce was absolutely unthinkable. I suppose that the Depression years had taught most of us that we needed one another to survive; it was better to face life together than to try to go it alone.

The values my parents had taken from their forbears had been absorbed like the air we breathed in an era where multiple generations lived in close proximity to one another. Those forebears knew that life was precarious. Illness, weather, crop failure, anything could decimate small families. Extended families stepped in to help young couples through childbirth and illness, and to help old people through their final days. We needed one another to survive the hard times, so we shared the bounty of the good times with others, all the while knowing very well our own time of need would inevitably come. We toughed it out and did unto others as we would have others do unto us, not because Nannie and Preacher said so; we did it because that’s what works best for all of us.

I spent many hours on the telephone with my Estes siblings during the ’80s trying to understand all the upheaval of that decade. Actually, if truth be told, we had *always* spent many hours on the phone together, but we had grown up very much involved in each other’s lives and had learned to seek one another’s advice when difficulties arose. In the Preacher’s family, living cheek-by-jowl with the small town congregations, there were definitely no secrets between us, nor from anyone else in town, I’m afraid. I suppose I realized that, as the youngest, I would have the advantage of their experiences or at least the assurance that this too would pass, so the once-a-week calls to each of them was the best therapy going.

But I must say I was more than a little miffed when all *our* children decided they’d have a cousins’ reunion. And that it wouldn’t include their parents. Worse yet, the whole thing was instigated by Ruth Ann and my nephew Eddie Hart, who conspired to gather up all the cousins and whichever second-cousins that could assemble for

a weekend in Dallas. Fourteen of the younger Estes clan attended, and I'm told it was a huge success. Of course it was. Who better to turn to than extended family, those who love you in spite of your shortcomings? Who better to help you process your thinking through difficult times? Extended family will always assure you that eventually the cream will rise and that everything will look better in the morning. Who better to urge you to pick yourself up, brush yourself off and get back at it? We taught them well; I suppose I was just a little jealous about not being invited along to see how those values extended into the next generation.

My guess is that the meltdown of the '80s caught many in our children's generation at that very vulnerable time when they were old enough to profit by the boom, but not yet wise enough to have found a framework of values to replace those they had distanced themselves from during the social crises of the '60s and '70s. Most would learn from those experiences, start again and build successful careers and happy lives.

Others never did find an ethical framework. From that generation came the catastrophic financial frauds of the first decade of the twenty-first century. Their narcissism and greed would ultimately contribute to worldwide economic disaster.

Ten years after the twelve of us first assembled around our dining table, we had gone off script. The players had changed. Some were missing and others had been added. Some of the children had become adults and new babies had been born. Maybe life wasn't playing out as I had once imagined, but then I suppose it never does.



GIVE ME A SONG AND A STAGE.



MARY LIL COACHING TEX FOR THE DOG SHOW.



TEX AND HOWIE GETTING SETTLED FOR THEIR AFTERNOON NAP.



TED AND ME IN OUR MATCHING TEXAS ROSE SHIRTS.



BALLOON-RIDING AT THE ROZSA ROUNDUP.



GOLF IN THE FALL — NO DOUBT MARY LIL'S AT HOME BAKING HER OWN BIRTHDAY CAKE.



MARY LIL'S ARCTIC TRIP.

MY NAME IS LOLA



LIVING OFF THE LAND — AND THE WATER — THROUGHOUT 1,100 MILES ACROSS
THE ARCTIC.



WELCOMING MARIO BERNARDI TO THE CALGARY PHILHARMONIC.

MY NAME IS LOLA



MY GOLF GIRLS CELEBRATING THE ALBERTA GOLF HALL OF FAME AWARD.



OUR ROZSA PETROLEUM FAMILY.

