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## MY NAME IS LOLA

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

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## Bricks and Mortar

By the time the '90s dawned, both of Ruth Ann's children were grown and she and her husband, Doug Rayner, were happily living on a country acreage west of town where they could keep their horses. Mary Lil came back from Mexico to introduce us to Patrick Henri Daniel Meunier-Coquet and announce that they were getting married, and a few years later they moved to Calgary. Patrick became the Mexican Consul General, their daughter Mary Cristina was born in 1992 and, once again, the dinner table was being re-assembled. However, young Ted left Rozsa Petroleum at that time to go back to Texas to work with Landmark and then Halliburton and, in 1994, he and his third wife presented us with Charles, our youngest grandchild. Ted's three older children were all busy in university or launching their careers, so the players around the table were in constant motion, and frankly I'd given up trying to be the dramaturge. But I guess it was Karen, Ruth Ann's daughter, who finally opened my eyes to the fact that the times they were a'changin'.

Karen had been dating Jim Rice for about a year and of course he had been instantly enveloped in the Rozsa clan because he was truly a wonderful young man who obviously adored our granddaughter. He was a soldier with the Canadian Army at that time, and he came with her to all the family dinners and was introduced to all the visiting kin and none of us thought for a moment they wouldn't one day be married. I say all this up front because I most certainly can't

excuse my behaviour when Karen and I met one afternoon at the shopping centre.

I had been over at Ted's office and dropped in at the shopping centre on my way home, where I unexpectedly – and delightedly – ran into Karen. She was holding a couple of magazines and we chatted about her day and, naturally, I asked her about Jim. She said he was just fine but that he was going to be stationed in Cyprus for a tour of duty. She said she was looking for a new apartment, and then showed me the Renter's Guide she had been holding. I took a long hard look at her and suddenly realized she wasn't telling me the whole story. "An apartment for you? Or for you and Jim?"

"For the two of us."

I still cringe when I remember my reaction. Without even thinking, I grabbed that Renter's Guide out of her hand and smacked her across the face with it. I had suddenly been transported back to those tiny judgmental congregations where I had been raised, where every out-of-bounds action had an equal and opposite response designed to keep the individual in line and the community intact.

I could tell from the look on her face that Karen was devastated by what I had done, and I was immediately and abjectly sorry. And then, following a very long pause, I was completely shamed by her calm and reasoned explanation. "Mammaw, I was on my way to Granddaddy's office to tell him that Jim and I are moving in together. I wanted to tell him first because I knew that neither of you would approve. I planned to come out to your house this afternoon to tell you, too. Jim and I are both adults, we love each other and one day we will be married. There's no reason for him to keep an apartment since he will be away on tours of duty much of the time, so we're renting this apartment together."

Five years later, Jim and Karen were indeed married, and are now the parents of two wonderful children. They're still living happily ever after, but I've never forgiven myself for the way I treated her that day. However, I'm grateful to say that Karen tosses it off with, "Oh Mammaw, don't worry about it. With all your other

grandchildren coming along and very likely getting ready to do the same thing, I just took one for the team.”

Ted wanted to ensure that the grandchildren had access to university so he had set up an educational trust that would cover their tuitions and living costs. He had no desire to influence their career choices. His only objective was to provide them with the tools to get them there, so he designed the trust to pay their fees along with a monthly living allowance for ten years, giving them ample time and resources for graduate school if any of them should decide to take advantage of that opportunity, too. Of course, back in the '80s, neither of us anticipated the arrival of our second set of grandchildren, so I've been reshuffling the deck to include Mary Cristina and Charles in Ted's plan.

Howie, Ruth Ann's eldest, was the first to fly the nest. He majored in sports physiology at the University of British Columbia, where he also took up sky-diving. And I don't mean he just tried it on a dare. He took it up *big* time. Before we could even mount a decent argument against it, he was competing locally, then internationally, and then he became an instructor, even talking his mother into risking a dive with him. He did assure us, however, that sky-diving wasn't his life's calling. After graduation, he and his Swedish girlfriend, Hella, lived in Florida for a time deciding whether or not they were good enough to join the golf tour. But shortly after they married in 1995, he decided he would rather become an emergency medic, and now he lives his dream life as a ski patrol medic in the winter and a tour guide in Sweden in the summer.

Ted had fought so hard for his own education and truly believed that his scholarship had provided the key that opened all the doors to the success he had achieved. It had given direction to his ravenous appetite for learning that endured throughout his life, and I suspect his thinking was that an education in their chosen fields would unlock the same kinds of opportunities for the grandchildren as well as for the other young people we were able to help through university.

I wish I could say that all his soul-searching about providing a legacy of education was arising in the golden glow of retirement from Rozsa Petroleum, but Ted was still going strong at seventy-five. He had been awarded the Canadian Society of Exploration Geophysicists gold medal in recognition of his outstanding contributions to the petroleum industry in 1987, and three years later he received an Honorary Doctorate of Engineering from Michigan Tech, his alma mater, as well as an Honorary Doctorate of Laws from the University of Calgary. In 1991, he was made an Officer of the Order of Canada, his proudest moment, and then in 1994 the Rotary Club of Calgary gave him their Integrity Award.

He had absolutely no inclination to rest on his laurels, but he *was* getting more and more impatient about having to wait for tee times during the few vacations I coerced him into taking. He finally declared that he'd just as soon give up the place in Maui if he had to spend eight hours on a plane to get there and another forty-eight hours just to get on a golf course. But always at the back of his mind was the idea that those of us who had been so richly rewarded for our life's work had a responsibility to pay those rewards forward to the generations coming along. The challenge was in finding the best way to do that. And as he played less golf, he got more and more interested in finding ways to maximize that impact. As these things often do, everything fell into place with a phone call.

Jim Palmer, the senior partner at the law firm that handled Ted's business, was one of the CPO directors who had helped to negotiate the Maestro's Endowment Fund and, by this time, he was Chancellor of the University of Calgary as well. Once again, he called and invited Ted to lunch. This time, I was asked to join them. Jim said he wanted us to meet Murray Fraser, who was the newly appointed president and vice-chancellor of the university. Ted would tell you that he was hardly so naïve as to think there wasn't an ulterior motive involved, but, since I would be along as a buffer, he figured it would probably turn out to be a social visit. So after a lovely lunch at

the faculty club, we were invited on a field trip accompanied by two very interesting guides.

By this time, the university had matured, and it boasted excellent professional schools of law, business, medicine and engineering, thanks to the enormous generosity of community philanthropists, many of them successful professionals who were graduates of those faculties. But because the university had grown so quickly, the undergraduate programs, particularly those of the fine arts, were the poor stepchildren of the very powerful graduate schools. This didn't surprise either of us because we had spent a lifetime raising funds to support the Calgary Philharmonic, and we commiserated endlessly with others who had championed theatre or dance or the visual arts so we knew how they all struggled to stay afloat even at the best of times.

We all had our one-minute elevator speeches honed to crystal clarity about why the arts are important to humankind, but I think the best one I ever heard came from one of the young fellows who rescued the CalgaryStampeders football team during the financial crisis of the '80s. He was launching a season ticket sale to support the team, and when a TV reporter asked him why Calgarians should spend their hard-earned money on football tickets – especially during the tough times – he said, “Because a healthy community is built by people. All kinds of people who come together to celebrate, to get involved in the excitement of competitive sports, or make music together, or express themselves artistically. All these things tell us who we are as human beings and bring us together despite our differences. Hell, I'm pretty certain I'll *never* want to go to see a ballet, but I know for sure I don't want to live in a city *without* a ballet company. We need *all* of these things because that diversity is what makes Calgary a great city and attracts other people to build their businesses here. Bottom line? It's having all those choices that makes Calgary a great place to live and raise our families.”

Our guides on our U of C field trip had heard all the elevator speeches too, but both Murray Fraser and John Roberts, dean of the

Faculty of Fine Arts, wanted us to know how they were hoping to support the development of that faculty. As we wandered through the building, I could hear the music of the horns and violins and cellos coming at us from different directions and assumed we were getting close to the studios, but finally I had to ask, “Where are the students practicing?” Dean Roberts said, “Follow me,” and led us down the hall to the stairwell door, opened it and motioned me inside. From my spot on the landing I could see up one flight of stairs and down another. A student sat on each landing, perched atop his backpack, his instrument poised, pausing only for a brief look at the intruders.

When I stepped back into the hallway and the music started again, I said, “Are your studios full? Is that why they’re practising in the stairwell?” It was John’s answer that opened the door to what would eventually become the Rozsa Centre for the Performing Arts, both at the University of Calgary and, three years later, at Michigan Tech.

Through a much longer conversation that afternoon and many more of the same over the subsequent months, we started thinking about how we could ensure that those students could have a music facility at hand that would actually prepare them for a performance career. Without one, it seemed to me that all their music education would be pointless. It would be as if we expected our medical students to walk into an operating theatre to meet their first surgical patients having had lots of textbook learning but no hands-on hospital experience.

Once we all agreed that the music faculty desperately needed performance theatres as well as studio space for their music students, both John Roberts and Murray Fraser jumped to the challenge with infectious enthusiasm. The first order of business was to find matching funds, so of course they looked to the provincial government for assistance, reasoning that the new premier, a home-grown Calgarian by the name of Ralph Klein, would be eager to contribute on the province’s behalf to the University of Calgary. Not so. We would



have to make this happen using only private funds. Fortunately there were many other Calgarians who stepped up to help including Clarisse Evans, Martha and Harry Cohen, and Hy and Jenny Belzberg along with the Sophie Eckhardt-Gramatté Foundation and companies like Husky Oil, CIBC, and Scotia Bank.

Reflecting back on this process, I realized that many of the family contributors to civic projects we had been involved with over the years included relatively recent immigrants to Calgary, and I wondered why that was. Was it because many of us had grown up through financially difficult times, or was it simply that we had been raised with the expectation that we would contribute how and when and where we could? Harry Cohen was one of six sons of a very poor immigrant family in Winnipeg – so poor they had neither a furnace nor a bathtub. Martha, Harry’s wife, was an only child who grew up during the Depression knowing that the only way her parents could keep their home was through the help of their relatives who pulled together to survive those hard times. Her parents adopted two girls orphaned in the Nazi concentration camps, and Martha forever after devoted her life to helping young people, both through her career in social work and in her passion for the arts. Both Harry and Martha gave of their time in addition to their treasure and, besides their contribution toward the Rozsa Centre, the beautiful Martha Cohen Theatre in the Centre for the Performing Arts was among their many, many gifts to Calgarians.

As the funding for the Rozsa Centre fell into place, we started looking for an architect and were thrilled when Fred Valentine was chosen to design the building. We had always admired the beautiful Nova Building in downtown Calgary that Fred had designed, and understood his passion for building in the context of the locality and its history. What we hadn’t realized, though, was that Fred had also designed the perfect little composer’s studio at the Banff School of Fine Arts. It was nestled nearby the school in the woods of Tunnel Mountain overlooking one of the most spectacular views in the Rockies. Music historians have said that Mozart only wrote down

the notes that appeared as if by magic in his head – wrote them down without corrections or changes as they appeared to him. Seeing that little gem of a studio, you can imagine how the luxury of time in the peace and quiet of that sun-flooded space might inspire even greater works of genius in some yet-undiscovered twenty-first-century composer.

Fred had also contributed to the design of the 1988 Olympic Games structures and the TransAlta building, so we knew that each one of his creations was unique and perfectly designed for both its function and its place. The first thing he told us was that he envisioned a big barn-like building to reflect the prairie landscape all around us, and his initial drawings showed us how he could combine that vision with the functionality of a performance hall surrounded by ‘stables’ on each side. The stables would house practice studios for the students along with additional small meeting rooms. Even the corridors were designed to bow out to accommodate mini-rehearsals as the musicians awaited their turns on stage. With conference halls, reception spaces, theatres for recitals, lectures, and performances, we were confident this would be an arts centre that would never sit empty between concerts.

When the sod was turned, our only lingering concern was whether we could have perfect acoustics in the big concert hall because it truly was barn-like just as Fred had envisioned. We needn’t have worried, however, because Fred chose the Danish acoustical engineer Niels Jordan who designed the Glenn Gould Studio in the Toronto CBC building. As construction progressed, Niels came to ‘tune’ the building. It was quite a media event and, as I remember, he came several times over the subsequent months to fine-tune it until, at its opening in March of 1997, it was declared the best performance space in the country. The acoustics are so perfect a microphone really isn’t necessary for a speaker standing on the stage. In fact, the building is so sensitive you can hear the sound of the bow on the violin strings before you can hear the note played, and sound engineers have to wrestle with that issue when recordings are being made!

The grand hall was named in honour of Sophie Eckhardt-Gramatté, a prolific Canadian composer. I wish I had known her; she must have been a fabulous character. She was born in Moscow in 1899 to an aristocratic Russian mother and a reportedly 'mysterious' father. Her mother had been a pupil of both Anton and Nicholas Rubenstein and in her youth she taught piano and French to the children of Leo Tolstoy. Sophie was born after the collapse of her parents' marriage, and rumour had it that she was actually the daughter of her mother's lover, Xavier Friedman, who also happened to be her piano student.

For some reason, Sophie was sent as an infant to be raised by foster parents at an English commune modelled on Leo Tolstoy's principles of communism, but at the age of five she and her mother moved to Paris, where she began learning to play both piano and violin and started creating short musical pieces. At nine, she enrolled at the Paris Conservatoire de Musique, where she studied with Gabriel Fauré, and by eleven was giving her first concerts in Paris, Geneva, and Berlin. Unquestionably, she was a prodigy, but apparently Sophie was a difficult child to manage because what she really wanted to do was to compose, not perform. Making matters even more difficult, she and her mother had to eke out a living during the early years of the First World War in Berlin, where Sophie was reduced to playing in cafes and beer gardens to earn their rent money.

Eventually, she was discovered by the great violinist Joseph Joachim, who arranged for her to study with the Polish violinist Bronislaw Hubermann, and the teenaged Sophie began to circulate among the circle of influential European musicians and artists. She met and married the visual artist Walter Gramatté in 1920, who became her lifelong soul mate despite his early death and her subsequent marriage to Dr. Ferdinand Eckhardt, an art historian. Eckhardt encouraged her to give up her performance career altogether and to dedicate her life to composing. Unfortunately, though, they moved to Vienna in 1939 and were trapped there for the duration of World War II, so her compositions were ignored by the Nazi government,

and it wasn't until 1950 that she won the Austrian State Prize for Composition.

In 1953, Sophie and Ferdinand moved to Winnipeg when he was appointed Director of the Winnipeg Art Gallery, and she became a very successful teacher and composer, writing more than 175 compositions including two symphonies, eight concertos, including a triple concerto for trumpet, clarinet, bassoon, strings and timpani, three string quartets and numerous other works for violin and piano. Sophie died in 1974. In her memory, a National Music Competition for the Performance of Canadian Music was founded and is held annually at Brandon University. I think she would have been pleased to know that the Canadian pianists Anton Kuerti and Marc-André Hamelin were invited to play the opening concerts in the magnificent hall named in her honour.

We had such fun working with Murray Fraser throughout the design and construction of the building. He arranged for the whole family to don hard hats and steel-toed boots to tramp through the building site to imagine the finishing touches, and when it came time to dedicate the centre, Murray presented me with a sign that flashed 'Lola's Place' in day-glow neon. Sadly though, three months before the Rozsa Centre opened in 1997, Murray Fraser died suddenly, and we didn't have the opportunity to properly thank him for his tireless commitment to this wonderful project. It could never have been realized without his exceptional talent for bringing people together around our shared vision for a world-class music facility at the university, and both Ted and I mourned his loss as we attended the first concert dedicated to this fine man.

Unfortunately, though, Ted's hearing had begun to fail, and he was never really able to enjoy music again. We had sold the place in Maui and had been talked into buying a condominium in Palm Springs on the promise he could get there in a couple of hours and would have his choice of dozens of golf courses to play at his leisure. It was perfect for Ted because, as much as he loved to play golf, he also loved his work, and California was accessible at a moment's

notice when space opened up in his appointment calendar. We had many happy vacations there and were able to share the condominium with friends and family but, one afternoon as we were playing golf, Ted fell. I hadn't seen what had happened, and he insisted he'd just tripped over something. But I was concerned enough to take him into the local hospital. They checked him over and recommended that we go home right away for a thorough workup.

I knew Ted was dangerously dismissive of his own aches and pains. At one point, he'd been playing golf in Calgary and miss-hit a few shots he knew he shouldn't have, so at the end of eighteen he walked off the course and went directly to the hospital to be checked over. Sure enough he was right. He had had a heart attack.

So just as soon as we landed back in Calgary, we went into the Foothills Hospital and Terry Myles, a wonderful neurosurgeon who had treated Ted earlier for his hearing loss, determined that, despite the fact neither of us could recall any injury, Ted had had a bleed on his brain. That was what had caused his dizziness and his fall on the golf course. Terry operated on him successfully and stopped the bleed, but the hearing loss was progressive. The kids used to say, "Dad couldn't hear but he loved music, he couldn't maintain his balance but he loved to play golf. It's a good thing he wasn't a runner – he'd probably lose his feet!"

I know that losing his hearing was very difficult for Ted. Music had been such a big part of his life and just as he was able to contribute toward building the Rozsa Centres both at the University of Calgary and at Michigan Tech, he lost his ability to enjoy the performances of the generation of students who had received his gifts. But there's an old adage about philanthropy: "You must plant trees in whose shade you will never sit." I hope he knows how very many trees have blossomed because of his generosity, and how many more young students are sitting in their shade enjoying the fruits of his labour. I know in my heart that one day they, too, will have an opportunity to repay his kindness and will open doors for the generation that will follow them.

