



## MY NAME IS LOLA

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

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## The Rozsa Foundation

As the twentieth century closed, Ted and I felt the great circle of life spinning us in its axis. Ruth Ann's husband had passed away in 1998 only a few weeks after being diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. But scarcely a year later Karen and Jim, her daughter and son-in-law who live in Calgary, presented us with our first great-grandchild. Little Tristan was truly a light in our lives and, when his sister Emma joined the family three years later, they would be very frequent and very welcome visitors as our own lives slowed down with advancing age. Ted would soon be eighty-five, and he was reluctantly winding up Rozsa Petroleum, so he was facing his retirement years believing that there was still much to be done if his health would permit.

On the first day of the new century, though, we looked back over the sixty years of our marriage and counted our blessings. I could hardly believe I was the same person who fifty years previously had so desperately resisted Ted's vision for our future in Calgary. It was as though my anxiety about staying in the safe and secure fold of my family blinded me to the infinite variety of choices we might make. I so vividly remember him saying, "C'mon. It's only a year, and it'll be an adventure we'll tell our grandchildren about!" Now, of course, I know how much smaller my life would have been had I married that cotton farmer back in north Texas. It was Ted's foresight and entrepreneurial genius that gave our family opportunities far, far beyond what I had ever imagined possible.

But, at the dawn of the twenty-first century, we were eager to see how our grandchildren would build their own lives. Young Ted's older children had struggled through their parents' break-up, but by this time all three were living in the States and were launching their careers. And, the year following Tristan's birth, Ted's first grandchild, Evan, was born in Texas, where his eldest son, Scott, and his family had located. With seven grandchildren and now two great-grandsons and a great-granddaughter, we felt we had most ably followed the biblical instruction to go forth and multiply. However, now that we were in the autumn of our own years, both of us wanted to leave something they could build upon – something that would not only enrich their own lives but also the lives of others. It was a discussion that would take almost two years, two years filled with a lot of soul-searching, because in September of 2001 we awoke one morning to the tragedy of 9/11.

For the first time since 1812, the United States was attacked on its own soil – not for reasons of territorial expansion or any declaration of war – but seemingly only to kill defenceless American civilians and to call attention to alleged American and Israeli crimes against Palestine. The fact that the attack was launched by terrorist thugs outside of any state-supported sponsorship made it so incomprehensible to most of us that the real body count of almost three thousand was utterly dwarfed by the hundreds of millions of Americans that would ultimately be victimized by it far into the future. It would take more than ten years to finally track down the madman who had financed the attack, and we are still recovering from senseless wars in Iraq and Afghanistan that have brought the United States to the brink of financial ruin. Conspiracy theories continue to ricochet around the Internet, we automatically remove our shoes going through airport security, and far too many American political candidates have discovered that the best way to whip up support is to inflame ignorant religious prejudices. A lot of this posturing has nothing to do with anything except political gamesmanship. It's

certainly not statesmanship. Worse, the lingering fear of ‘the other’ continues to cripple Americans’ understanding of the Islamic world.

Living here in Calgary, I think we have had an enormous advantage through this tragic time. Our diversity has woven us such a rich tapestry of visual arts, music, theatre and dance, and our great-grandchildren are growing up with schoolmates from every nationality, race, and faith. For them, there is no ‘other’ to fear. The children who share their classrooms, compete with them on their sports teams, and play with them in their school bands are their friends, no matter whether they wear toques, baseball caps, yarmulkes, turbans or hijabs.

The great-grandchildren see beyond the differences to the commonalities. To them, music is just music; people are just people. Not that I know anything about iPads and iPods and iPhones, but I do understand that every generation has its own ways to communicate. And I also know that the children of this generation are so connected to one another that the world has become a much more familiar place. I have complete confidence that the children who will inherit the complex international issues we adults haven’t figured out will be able to cross the barriers we’ve erected over the years simply because they don’t perceive those barriers. They know that our similarities are far more important than our differences, whether those differences are racial or cultural or national. We’re all ordinary people and we have to count on one another more than ever before.

It was against the pervasive coverage of the 9/11 tragedy in the first years of the new century that Ted and I discussed how we might offer the family a way to stay involved in the arts initiatives that had brought us such joy throughout the years. Undoubtedly, all the news coverage caused a bubbling up of the realization that no matter what differences might divide us, the arts bring people together – all kinds of people from all cultures.

We had happily worked among so many who devoted their lives to the arts, and discovered that the not-for-profit world is largely peopled by those who have enormous passion for their particular

causes. They work tirelessly to advance those initiatives in creative and engaging ways. Most exist on shoestring budgets, ploughing 90 per cent of their limited funding dollars back into running their programs rather than squandering them on additional staff that might lighten their workload. Ted would likely say that the corporate world is justly humbled by the non-profits' commitment to make life better, brighter, and more accessible to all of us. And *I'm* pretty sure that the boards of most publicly traded companies would love to find employees as wholeheartedly dedicated to increasing their share price as non-profit employees and their volunteers are to fulfilling their philanthropic missions. But I think both of us realized along the way, that as talented and committed as they are, almost all of them could profit by using the basic tools of business to help them run their day-to-day operations. Ted saw that rewriting the bylaws to comply with grant donors' requirements would open the door to new Alberta Performing Arts Stabilization Fund (APASF) funding, and he suggested that a good way for the CPO to stimulate earned revenue would be to simply have the Calgary Opera hire the orchestra as needed. To kick start it, he contributed the funds to the opera to do just that, confident that it would be a practice that would be sustainable.

We had both started as volunteers helping to organize galas and used book sales and talent shows to raise funding dollars. And eventually we both took our turns as directors on the boards of different arts organizations, so we were certainly aware of the strengths and talents of their leadership. However, as capable as they were, many had no business background at all. No human resources training, only basic bookkeeping at best, little understanding of governance principles and, as the technology became more and more sophisticated, most had very little familiarity with software programs that could lighten their load or the funds to invest in the hardware to run them.

When the time came that we could make a more substantial contribution to some of those organizations, Ted decided to build

a foundation that could administer his endowment fund more efficiently. We hadn't given much serious thought as to how those funds might be distributed after the grandchildren had all been educated and we had completed the Rozsa Centres in Calgary and in Houghton, Michigan. Then coincidentally, Ted received the news that he was to be honoured in 2002 with the Edmund C. Bovey Award. We had no way of knowing it then, but this award was to pave the way for extending Ted's legacy to the community and our family's continuing support of the arts.

However, our most immediate plans were to go to Houghton for the opening ceremony of the Rozsa Center at Michigan Tech. Ted, even after his brain surgery, was still experiencing a lot of fatigue. He decided that, rather than play less-than-stellar golf, his career on the links was over. He still liked to go to the Country Club to join his golfing buddies for brunch on Saturday mornings so he could have his favourite Mulligatawny soup, and he'd invariably ask the waiter to "tell the chef to dig deep to get at all the goodies." Those weekend brunches kept him abreast of the oil patch news and very current with what was happening in the economy.

Ted was very much involved with building the second Rozsa Centre, but, in 2000, just as we were getting ready to go to Houghton to cut the ribbon for the opening, I was annoyed enough by what I assumed was a little sty on my eye that I made an appointment with my doctor to have it removed. When he came back to talk with me following the biopsy, I admit it was the only time in my life that I was genuinely frightened. I'm sure that anyone who hears the word malignant for the first time reacts in the same way. I froze. I could see that he was talking to me, but all I could think of was getting out of there. I don't think I heard another word he said. I simply didn't have time to deal with cancer.

I needed to go to Houghton with Ted because his hearing was failing so quickly and I didn't want him to miss a word of the celebration that was being planned in his honour. In hindsight, though, I think I did the right thing because that time away also gave me

a chance to process the medical options in my own mind and to prepare myself to deal with the radiation treatments. It gave me time to realize that my fear of losing my sight was far, far greater than my fear of death. I had always been a voracious reader and, despite having progressive macular degeneration, I had thus far retained enough sight to read the newspaper every day along with large-print books.

So, on the way home from Houghton, I girded myself for the surgery and to be fitted for the mask that would pinpoint the targeted tumour site for the twenty follow-up radiation treatments. But in all honesty, the worst of the ordeal was only the fatigue caused by the radiation. The very happy outcome was that the doctor was able to remove the tumour in its entirety and that I'm still able, with the aid of a magnifying glass, to read my newspaper from cover to cover and keep up with my boys on the Calgary Flames. However, I must say that it didn't slow down the relentless pace of ageing, which, as they rightly say, ain't for sissies. But it does help to have a sense of humour.

One night, barely a year later, I got out of bed to go to the bathroom and fell. When I realized I couldn't get up, I was pretty sure I had broken my hip, so I called to Ted to help. However, since he was almost deaf I simply couldn't wake him, so I slithered over to the nearest corner of the bedroom where he had left his golf clubs. I pushed over the golf bag, grabbed the putter, and started banging on the wall to attract his attention. If I could have slithered any further toward the bed, maybe I'd have made a better club selection, but, let's face it, my options were somewhat constrained. If I hadn't been in quite so much pain, I'm sure I would have been laughing out loud because it was such a totally absurd scene.

And making matters even more ridiculous, as I lay there on the floor I worried about the fact that I was about to receive the YWCA's Woman of Distinction Award. I was overjoyed to have been selected and was so looking forward to the ceremony, but I wondered what they'd think if they could see me writhing about on the carpet flailing the putter at everything I could reach. Distinctly ludicrous maybe, but definitely not distinguished.

However once I got Ted's attention and we made it to the hospital, I was almost relieved when they agreed with my diagnosis. I had known lots of people who'd had hip replacements and they'd seemed to bounce back pretty quickly, so at that point my only concern was postponing a few dates in my calendar. It was only mid-April after all; the Women of Distinction event wasn't until mid-June. I'd be up-and-at-'em in plenty of time. However, when I surmised as much to the surgeon, he frowned and asked, "And how old are you now?" If I could have hrumphed, I would have. I was barely eighty. Okay, so I was eighty-one. But I had shaken off cancer, and frankly I didn't have a lot of time to waste on being immobile. I was busy; we were *all* busy!

Ruth Ann and her family lived a considerable distance out of town, and Karen had two-year-old Tristan to look after. Young Ted and his new family were still in Texas, and Mary Lil, who had been a very active member of two major civic committees, had just announced her candidacy for City Council in the municipal election of 2001. I was incredibly proud of her for stepping up and offering her service and would have given anything to see her elected. But, after Patrick decided to return to Mexico, Mary Lil was a single mother. She was raising Mary Cristina on her own and the challenge of scheduling her own calendar around her nine-year-old's was too much for her nannie, and occasionally they required the help of the whole family. Believe me, my hip surgery couldn't have come at a more inconvenient time.

And then it got worse.

What started out to be a pretty routine recovery ended up taking more than a month in the hospital, and while I was there Ted had to be admitted for a couple of days as well. I asked Mary Lil to withdraw from the election. We needed her help. To this day, I regret those circumstances. She would have been a very effective City Councillor, and I hope that one day she will consider public service again.



Thankfully, with the family's help, by the middle of June I had recovered enough to attend the Women of Distinction Awards. As early as 1979, the women of the YWCA had wanted to recognize women in Calgary for their professional achievements as well as for their dedication and contributions to the community. Each year thereafter, ten women were selected, and those who shared the podium with me in 2001 were from business, the professions, the sciences, the voluntary sector, education, health and wellness, and social services, all of them very accomplished in their work and so deserving of recognition. Over the years, the prestige of the award had grown and corporate Calgary had stepped up to help sponsor the annual event, so their sponsorships, combined with ticket sales to the ceremony, raised significant funds to support the Y's programs directed at family violence prevention.

It was an unexpected honour for me to be selected in the Arts and Culture category, and I was delighted to be able to attend, even though I was still wheelchair bound after my hip surgery. Following a reception at the Palliser, Ruth Ann and Ted and I went over to the Jack Singer Hall where 1,300 people had assembled to show their appreciation for those marvellous women. In her opening address, the chair of the Y's board said that for almost a hundred years, the YWCA had worked to build strength in the community through building strength in women. "Today," she said, "we can all see the capacity of the human spirit, the human ability to strive and make great gains.... We can see that one person can make a difference. The young women who are here today as guests are being introduced to ten extraordinary women – women who have made that difference." Ted wheeled me up to the podium to receive my award and, as thrilled as I was, I must say that Ted was even prouder. I treasure that beautiful moment to this day.

Then, in an embarrassment of riches, later that month I was also awarded an Honorary Doctor of Laws from the University of Calgary. I'm sure the university wanted us both to know how much the Rozsa Centre meant to the students who finally had a world-class

music facility, but in all honesty we were grateful for the opportunity to reciprocate. Sixty years prior, when we started buying season tickets to the mostly amateur Calgary Symphony performances, the board realized how much their music meant to both of us, and they invited us to get involved in a more meaningful way. That opened doors neither of us could have expected. For me, it meant that the love of music nurtured by my parents, siblings, and church would continue to grow. For Ted, that open door led to a life-long passion for classical music. When we were ultimately able to contribute to the music faculty at the university, we were only passing along our appreciation for the gifts we had received. Our offering back to the community could never match the value of those rewards or the priceless gifts of friendship we have been offered across Calgary and the opportunities we have been afforded through their generosity.

The great circle of life was still spinning us in its axis, but when it was time for Ted to receive the Bovey Award, we were both finally up and around.

The Bovey Award is unique in Canada. It honours individuals from the business community for outstanding support of the arts by presenting them with a cheque for \$20,000 to be distributed to the arts organizations of their choice. At the presentation ceremony, which was held at U of C's faculty club, Ted announced that he would match the award funds and challenge other businesses to contribute in order to create a new foundation that would support best business practices in performing arts companies. Instead of just making a donation to one arts company, our intention was to enable the Rozsa Foundation to recognize top arts managers in Alberta and provide their organizations with mentoring and financial support for their continuing administrative development. Very quickly, other businesses rose to his challenge and pledged matching funds. This idea, which was enthusiastically supported by the City of Calgary, the Calgary Centre for Non-Profit Management, the Alberta Performing Arts Stabilization Fund, and the Calgary Professional Arts Alliance, gained traction almost immediately. The presentation

of the first annual Rozsa Award for Excellence in Arts Management was scheduled for May, 2003.

Ted decoupled the foundation from his company and source of funds, and asked Mary Lil to take over its management. Her first step was to conduct an environmental scan of current support of the arts in Calgary, and with that information we were able to focus on our mission and subsequently on our investment policy. Mary Lil determined that the work of many very successful arts managers was going unnoticed. But, on the other hand, the administrative weakness in others was giving the community a poor public perception of the arts. To make matters even more difficult, there had been severe budget cuts during the early '90s, which had resulted in the elimination of most middle management positions in arts organizations, and the demographics showed that senior managers were reaching retirement age with no apparent successors available to step into those roles. Those who remained typically had no specific arts management training since only one educational institution in the province offered anything related to arts management. Most were learning on the job from those ill-equipped to teach them the skills that were needed.

We had three broad strategic priorities. First, we wanted to help build administrative capacity in arts organizations by increasing management expertise, organizational stability, and stronger more diverse boards and by giving them access to up-to-date research and business models. Second, we hoped to offer funds that would encourage engaging and varied artistic experiences that educate the public and build loyal audiences. And finally, we wanted to positively influence public opinion and support for the arts.

So why offer an award for arts management? Why wouldn't we simply offer a business scholarship to someone entering the field of arts management? In all honesty, we believed it was important to hit the ground running. The timing, we felt, was critical. There needed to be a way to call attention to best practices as well as to offer financial and educational incentives to the organization that

would encourage them to continue their business development. We needed another elevator speech: “The partners in the awards program believe that the arts are an integral and necessary component of a healthy community. All arts organizations must be effectively managed to achieve and maintain financial sustainability so they can serve their community well. When outstanding arts managers of today are recognized, the field becomes more attractive for future leaders, and a standard of excellence is established.”

The award would be given after a competitive nomination process was completed, and we were excited by the immediate response of the arts community. That first year, we had to repeat the elevator speech quite a lot, but when our jury made their selection and decided that the first award would go to Bob McPhee, general director and CEO of the Calgary Opera, each piece of our planning fell into place.

Bob began his career as a performing artist, but over the last three decades he’s been involved primarily in marketing, production, and senior management, working in the four disciplines of theatre, dance, orchestra, and opera. When he was president of the Edmonton Concert Hall Foundation, Bob raised \$45 million toward the construction of the Winspear Centre for Music, and in 2003 he produced the incredibly successful world premiere of the John Estacio and John Murrell opera *Filumena*. To other arts organizations, we were able to say *this* is what successful management makes possible. In every way, Bob personified exactly what we hoped would become the model for aspiring arts managers from every discipline.

Three years after he was awarded the Rozsa Foundation’s Award for Excellence, Bob produced Estacio and Murrell’s succeeding opera, *Frobisher*. He continues to win awards for his leadership in the arts, he chaired the board of Opera.ca, and now he sits on the board of OPERA America.

Bob applied some of the prize toward enrolling Sherri Rau, his CFO at the Calgary Opera, in the University of Calgary’s Haskayne School of Management’s Essentials Program. After completing the

program, her response was,: “For someone like me whose education has been focused totally on accounting, the Haskayne Management Essentials Program has been an excellent overview of management strategies in all areas. Some of the courses underscored things we’re good at already, and some have highlighted where we can improve a little bit too.”

We were thrilled by Bob’s and Sherri’s responses to this recognition and announced that the 2004 Rozsa Award competition was ready to receive nominations. The elevator speech was no longer required. The arts community got it and began clamouring for opportunities to nominate their CEOs. And those who recognized their own organizations weren’t eligible for reasons of management inefficiencies took a good hard look at ways they could improve their performance.

As with any new initiative, we were going through our own growing pains and were having to impose a more formal administrative role to build the endowment fund as well as to oversee the competition. At the start, we had thought our family could manage both roles, and Ruth Ann and Ted and I served as directors from the beginning, but we very quickly learned we would need a full-time administrator as well as a small staff, plus additional people to serve on our board of directors. The family met and agreed that Mary Lil would be the foundation’s first administrator, and we looked for board members inside the family as well as from the arts community. Naturally we wanted to keep the grandchildren closely involved; however, some are at that stage of life where they’re so consumed by the demands of child-rearing and establishing their own careers that their contributions to the foundation’s board will have to wait. Fortunately, though, we have recruited bright and creative board members from the community who are incredibly generous with their time and their ideas, and the foundation is thriving.

As the decade rolled along, however, it became clear that both Ted and I would have to retire from a hands-on role with the foundation. Mary Lil was doing a superb job as president of the foundation

and Ruth Ann, along with her daughter, Karen Rice, represented the family on the board. However, Ted and I were having to learn to adapt to the realities of age. At the 2005 awards ceremony, the board presented us with a beautiful glass sculpture, which we gratefully accepted for our efforts, knowing that the foundation was well and truly launched.



HIS ORDER OF CANADA AWARD WAS TED'S PROUDEST MOMENT.



AT MOZART ON THE MOUNTAIN WITH THOUSANDS OF CPO FANS.





BREAKING GROUND FOR THE ROZSA CENTRE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY WITH HY AND JENNY BELZBERG, JIM PALMER, MURRAY FRASER, DEAN ROBERTS, AND ANN MCCAIG.



WHERE MURRAY FRASER FOUND THIS NEON SIGN I CAN'T IMAGINE, BUT I'LL TREASURE IT FOREVER!

MY NAME IS LOLA



INSIDE THE “GREAT BARN” OF THE ROZSA CENTRE’S PERFORMANCE HALL.



THE WHOLE FAMILY CAME TO CELEBRATE TED'S AND MY HONORARY DOCTORATES FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY.





MICHIGAN TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY'S ROZSA CENTER IN HOUGHTON, MICHIGAN. (PHOTO: MICHIGAN TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY PHOTO SERVICES.)