

THANKS FOR THE JOYFUL TELEGRAM MEMORIES

Ray David George Guy

1939 – 2013



**By David C. Day, Q.C.
(Colleague of Ray Guy at The Evening Telegram, 1963-1967)**

Before Ray David George Guy (1939-2013)—celebrated social and political commentator, book author, and playwright—left his childhood home in Arnold’s Cove (eight kilometers from his birthplace, Come By Chance), he chose journalism as his adulthood vocation. Significantly motivated he was, in his career decision and department, by the Government of Newfoundland’s domestic resettlement programs (which, from 1954 to 1975, relocated almost 30,000 persons from some 300 villages). He was, he said, acutely troubled by grief the programs caused his fellow rural Newfoundlanders. And he was, he articulated, deeply dismayed by the programs’ egregious impact on Newfoundland’s culture.

He employed humour as a weapon to express his dissent from the provincial government’s decisions to create and implement the programs. In particular, he ridiculed its

architect, Premier Smallwood, for the programs—and much else the Premier advocated. His principal vehicle for heaping scorn on the Premier was a daily (weekday) column in The Telegram (then, The Evening Telegram) from about 1963 to 1974.

During part of this period (about 1963 to 1972), his writing served as opposition—sometimes the only substantial challenge—to Smallwood’s provincial government administrations. And, for the remainder of this period (1972 to 1974), he wrote irreverently about Smallwood’s successor, Premier Frank D. Moores (whose electoral success was, in no small part, a product of Guy’s columns).

Ray Guy’s acerbic writer’s ingenuity was materially influenced by American humourist, S.J. Perelman. Like Perelman, he was adept at piercing “through to the heart of pretense and conceit”. Years later, Guy yearned for a particular Perelman anthology (his magazine contributions, especially, to The New Yorker) which I found in Foyle’s Bookshop, London, and sent to him.

Guy occupied a desk at the back of The Telegram’s newsroom, when located in the Parland Building, 271-275 Duckworth Street. Typically, he commenced each matchless weekday column about 1:30 PM. Using an Underwood, later a Remington, manual typewriter, he would continue to be engrossed, in crafting a column, at 6 PM (when most editors and staff writers vacated for the day)—often, until much later.

He brooded and troubled over each word, each sentence. His painstaking choice of language was as precise as a surgeon’s wielded scalpel in an operating theatre. He teased each paragraph, slowly and cleverly, from his droll mental hard drive.

Often, he consulted, on this or that turn of phrase, with newsroom colleagues: Mary Deanne Shears, the women's editor (later, managing editor of *The Toronto Star*), and Mary Deanne's understudy, Jane Williams; news reporters Don Morris, Ron Crocker (later, a C.B.C. regional director and author), Joseph 'Joe' Walsh, John Fraser, Gary Callahan, George Barrett, and Frank Holden (now a playwright); sports department writers Bob Badcock, Pee Wee Crane and Ron Rossiter; editing desk staff Bob Ennis (later, of *The Montreal Gazette*), Maurice Finn, and Tommy Power, and Canadian Press correspondent David Butler.

Because he regarded Premier Smallwood as fancying himself a Messiah, Guy seized on every opportunity to capitalize pronouns, within sentences, referring to the Premier. Invariably, the editing desk detected and lower-cased them.

Torpid summer afternoons in The Telegram newsroom were memorable for Guy's arrival, barefoot, ferrying ten pound watermelons; which he distributed to colleagues, deploying a lobster knife secreted in his desk.

Assigned, one summer morning, to report on Carolyn Hayward, a bullfighter in Spain—who was rumoured to be disembarking a vessel in St. John's Harbour for a visit to her native St. John's—I approached Guy, seeking advice on interviewing her. He offered to accompany me. Together, we walked both sides of the waterfront, and boarded each moored vessel, in search of our quarry. Hours later, we identified a woman leaving a ship.

We hailed her and learned her given name was “Carolyn”. Our 4.25 by 5.5 inch newsprint pads in hand, we commenced questioning. Clear from her responses, the woman was not a bull fighter. Rather, she gained her wages from retailing physical intimacy. We made the recounting of her harsh life the subject of a feature story we left on the editing desk about 2:30 AM. Later that morning, we were escorted one floor up to The Telegram’s executive offices to be chastised by then-management.

Within a month, we were back in the executive suite—to explain why we had devoted a full night to drafting an unassigned story entitled, “St. John’s After Dark.” My personal papers include drafts of this imaginative, occasionally fanciful, account of nocturnal St. John’s. Guy was proud of the lead sentence (here published—at long last—for the first time): “Twinkling lights, in a variety of hues, festoon the slate grey shores of the ancient, sheltered harbour at St. John’s, like a necklace of precious and semi-precious trinkets. Beneath them, the city throbs, pulsates, bustles, and—in some precincts—moans.”

Assigned to report an event in Bishop’s Falls, Guy and I missed the late afternoon train from St. John’s. At alarming speeds, he tooled his green coupe to Holyrood station. At first, a police stallion, then a police cycle, and eventually a police car pursued him. Guy eluded all comers. On arrival in Holyrood, he concealed his vehicle in a copse of poplars on private property, and we caught the train as it chugged from the station.

We suited up in blue turtleneck sweaters and berets, and accessoried ourselves with pince-nez spectacles, on arrival in St. Pierre, for another assignment—to report on rumoured

insurrection. Although, as Guy cautioned, we made our inquiries discreetly, we attracted attention of gendarmes. They briefly detained us and relieved us of our notepads.

In 1965, the Province received a gift from the Portuguese Fisheries organization: a statue of navigator Gaspar Corte-Real. Premier Smallwood proclaimed that an elaborate unveiling was in store. Guy discovered the gift, crated and wrapped in tarpaulins, lying beside Confederation Parkway. “The unveiling,” Guy announced, “will be sooner, not later.” He and a junior reporter (who will remain nameless) made a late night visit to the Parkway, unpackaged Gaspar—with aid of tire iron and grapnel—and took a ‘snap’ which appeared next afternoon in *The Telegram*.

Guy was not a fervent adherent of organized religion. But, his conversation was often punctuated with brief liturgies from the Church of England’s Book of Common Prayer. And, during summer lunch hours, at least, twice monthly, he and I accompanied reporter John Fraser (later, Master of Massey College, Toronto) to the Anglican Cathedral in St. John’s. There, we were Fraser’s only audience as he performed hymns, movements, and dirges, on the Cathedral’s Robert Hope-Jones/Casavant organ.

Although impish and ever receptive to join in capers, Ray Guy, by nature, was shy, private and understated. When I paid him a visit in 1975, he was preoccupied, typing and re-typing a short letter on newsprint copy paper. The letter consisted of a single sentence. He planned to deliver the letter to the workplace of Cathy Housser; recently arrived from British Columbia to serve as a C.B.C. producer in St. John’s. He delivered the proposal to the carriage of her typewriter after usual work hours on a Monday evening at CBC, St. John’s. Within six

months, Ray and Cathy were married. They became parents of two daughters, Rachel and Annie.

Guy quoted, with ease, passages written by his ‘mentor’, S. J. Perelman. More than once, he reminded me of Perelman’s sentence that “love is not the dying moan of a distant violin—it is the triumphant twang of a bed spring.” When we reminisced about chasing the ‘bullet’ to Holyrood, he recounted Perelman’s narrative, “The whistle shrilled, and in a moment, I was chugging out of [New York] Grand Central [station] ... I had chugged only a few feet when I realized that I had left without the train, so I had to run back and wait for it to start.”

Asked by a C.B.C. radio interviewer, in 2008, whether he had any regrets, he replied “none”. While Guy was a reporter and columnist at The Telegram, he lived faithful to the creed, life is not a dress rehearsal. In fact, some of his columns were written in the format of theatrical scripts.

Ray Guy’s enduring legacy is a cold type footprint of priceless, published commentary, authored by a rare wordsmith genius; serving to entreat, exasperate, educate, enrich and entertain.

Thanks, Ray—for the memories. Thanks for the indelibly joyful Telegram memories.

(David C. Day, a Telegram reporter from 1963 to 1967, writes from St. John’s. Published in *The Telegram*, St. John’s, NL, 05 June 2013.)