

Leaders reflect on the significance of the Queen's life, death, and legacy



By Nate Smelle

For more than seven decades, Queen Elizabeth II reigned over the British Commonwealth. On the afternoon of Thursday, Sept. 8, she died peacefully at Balmoral Castle in Scotland at the age of 96. Her reign was the second-longest in world history, trailing behind only Louis XIV of France, who reigned for some 72 years and 110 days. Queen Elizabeth II was crowned Head of the Commonwealth and Queen of Canada on June 2, 1953. Since then she made 22 official visits to Canada, with her last visit taking place in 2010. While her son Charles became king immediately after his mother's death, he was officially proclaimed king at a ceremony on Saturday, Sept. 11. Later that day, King Charles III, addressed his subjects for the first time as the Commonwealth's monarch. Expressing his "profound sorrow" and admiration for his mother, he acknowledged how throughout her life, his "darling Mama" was an inspiration and example to him and the entire Royal family. "We owe her the most heartfelt debt any family can owe to their mother; for her love, affection, guidance, understanding and example," he said. "Queen Elizabeth was a life well lived; a promise with destiny kept and she is mourned most deeply in her passing." Pledging to uphold his mother's promise of "lifelong service," King Charles III continued, "In 1947, on her 21st birthday, she pledged in a broadcast from Cape Town to the Commonwealth to devote her life, whether it be short or long, to the service of her peoples. That was more than a promise: it was a profound personal commitment which defined her whole life. She made sacrifices for duty. Her dedication and devotion as Sovereign never wavered, through times of change and progress, through times of joy and celebration, and through times of sadness and loss. In her life of service we saw that abiding love of tradition, together with that fearless embrace of progress, which make us great as Nations. The affection, admiration and respect she inspired became the hallmark of her reign. And, as every member of my family can testify, she combined these qualities with warmth, humour and an unerring ability always to see the best in people." Upon

learning of the death of Queen Elizabeth II, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau issued a statement in which we expressed his gratitude to the Queen for devoting her life to the service of the Commonwealth and its people. Remarking on how for most Canadians the Queen is the only Sovereign they have ever known, he said, Queen Elizabeth II has been a constant presence in the lives of Canadians since her accession to the throne. Acknowledging how the Queen always felt at home in Canada, Trudeau pointed out how she toured Canada from coast to coast to coast and was there for our major, historical milestones. Her Majesty's reign spanned so many decades - a period when we came into our own as a confident, diverse, and forward-looking country. It is her wisdom, compassion, and warmth that we will always remember and cherish. Today, a page has not only been turned, but a chapter in our shared history has drawn to a close. I know Her Majesty's service to Canada and Canadians will forever remain an important part of our country's history. The coming days will be a period of mourning for Canadians, as it will be for all Commonwealth citizens, ending with a national day of mourning when a commemorative service will be held to mark the passing of our Sovereign. Reflecting on the life and legacy of Queen Elizabeth II, Bancroft's Mayor Paul Jenkins said that being of British decent he grew up with the Queen and followed the long history of the Royal Family. Recognizing that not everyone relates to the role of the Monarchy, Jenkins said he believes the Queen has served as a bell-whether of integrity, sense of duty, and dedication that is lacking by many other world leaders. From her service during [the Second World War] as a mechanic (against her father's wishes), to her quiet influence on major world events, she has served as an example of stability in a very chaotic world, Jenkins said. She was also a mother and grandmother who faced family challenges like every one else and showed that she was human and prone to the same shortcomings that we all possess. I think her steady and calming influence will be missed - it is the end of a very long and influential era! Reverend Lynn Watson of St. Paul's United Church in Bancroft also spoke with Bancroft This Week to pay homage to Queen Elizabeth. In honour of the Commonwealth's longest reigning Monarch, Watson said the Church plans to ring the bell 96 times - once for each year of her life - following the state funeral scheduled to take place on Monday, Sept. 19. Sharing her thoughts on the significance of the Queen's life, Watson recalls the moment she learned of her death. I was listening to the radio in my car, and I was listening to something on CBC, and then all of a sudden there was this piece of music, like a gong, and I was like where is my phone? Then there was this voice that said the Queen had died, and I had that moment of Wow! This is huge! And I didn't expect that from myself. I didn't expect I would have that sensitive where we are in this moment in time for the commonwealth is about to completely pivot, and change. Although admittedly not the biggest fan of the Monarchy, Watson appreciates the Queen's incredible life, and devotion to service. Highlighting how the world has fundamentally transformed over the past 70 years, she said Queen Elizabeth II has consistently been there as a voice of stability throughout so many world-changing moments in modern human history. Change happens - it's how we live into that change that makes it good or bad, said Watson. And I'm not talking about tragic change, where someone gets assassinated. I'm talking about the inevitable that happens all around us all the time; and, the human capacity to evolve to those changes with grace. And I think we saw that with the Queen, I really did. I think she brought this sense of grace, and she pivoted too in her own way to the world changing around her. But now you almost have to be a whirling Dervish to pivot to those things. Having celebrated his 90th birthday in 2022, artist Arne Roosman has witnessed nearly all of the same world-altering moments in history as the Queen. While he never had a chance to speak with the Queen, he recalls a close encounter of the Royal kind with Her Majesty, when she was still a Princess. Noting how the equestrian events during the 1952 Olympics were moved to Stockholm, Sweden where he lived at the time, from where the games were being held in Helsinki, Finland, Roosman said he found himself in close proximity to the Queen - then Princess Elizabeth - as they both watched the competition. There she was, only 100 feet away from where I was. It was quite amazing! said Roosman. To me, it was a very personal thing when the Queen died, in a sense, because I actually saw Her Majesty. Stockholm was always full of royalty, because at the same time when I was there in the '50s King Gustaf V, the Swedish King, he died. While he admires Queen Elizabeth II's more peaceful and diplomatic approach to ruling than that of her predecessors, Roosman said he wishes she would broken away more from the patriarchal traditions of the Royal family. By breaking from the dogmas of the Monarchy and making Charles the King out of her own volition, he believes Queen Elizabeth II would have actually done more to empower women than she did by relinquishing power through death. The boys are back in power, declared Roosman. The boys are back, so that means there should be some sort of change occurring. The Monarchy is alive and well, which I don't mind because out of all the systems it is not the worst. It has done terrible things, but humanity is known for doing terrible things. And it's usually the boys who do terrible things? Queen Elizabeth didn't do as much killing as the queens that we had in the past. They were as vicious as some of their male offspring, so I will miss the female touch that the press and history had to favour during the reign of the Queen.