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Rebel with a Clause



Rebel with a Clause

A salute to the Funster

By ALEX G. TSAKUMIS

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With the arrival of the snappish early evening air, the rattle of new lunch boxes being ferried home by earnest parents and the almost daily bombardment of (annoying) Olympic countdowns, you probably missed the closing of an institution.

For 35 years, S. Lampman & Co. called Kerrisdale its home.

Nestled next to the greatest bakery on the West Side of Vancouver, Moore's, and helmed by ever-present and popular haberdasher Stephen Lampman, his eponymous store sold its last socks, shirts and ties Monday afternoon: Retirement for a 64-year-old storied clothier who looks at least 10 years younger.

His store was a coterie of some of the most interesting, eccentric, learned, community-minded and generally terrific people you could meet.

And at its centre, like the mad conductor, aflame in colour and candor, with his infamous black velvet skull and cross bone stamped shoes from London (one of only two pairs in the city - I have the other), was the man all of us referred to as 'The Original Funster' or 'The Hipster', in various, synchronous roles: Psychiatrist, entertainer, philanthropist, friend, brother.

As hundreds gathered to toast the end of an era (there were several toasts that lasted all day), one fellow pulled me aside to tell a story.

"When I was broke some years ago, Stephen propped me up without having to give me a dime. I used to come in here and put clothes on account so that I could still look presentable, not even knowing if I was going to get hired in a bad economy. He'd pour me a drink or two and then we'd talk. He'd still sell away with customers and come right back to me. I don't know how I could ever repay him. It was like coming home every week. Every week, no matter how bad his day was, he was there for me ... to encourage me. It made going home to my kids that much easier. And I'm not alone," he said.

No, he wasn't. Some years ago, when I first started writing in this space, Lampman would wax endlessly about how the world has lost its bearings and how we, as a society, treat the less fortunate horribly.

Much of the perspective you have read in my column has often been fuelled by the emotionally driven, and plainly delivered soapbox of 'The Funster' himself.

The man in the fedora and sunglasses, who never stopped giving his whole life; to say nothing of his random acts of kindness to hundreds of his followers over the years.

Every Friday and then when I switched to Thursdays, Lampman was 24 hours' biggest fan. He'd collect a copy from the orange box, and tell the staff and customers, "Look, this is one of my best pals, he's right on the money."

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When my wife and I almost lost the youngest of our three children some years back, Lampman was a deep source of encouragement.

He'd call, often. "I just wanna know that your daughter is alright, that's why I'm calling. How's your wife holding up? Call me back please."

The man's heart was, and, remains, the size of the moon.

Music mogul and CKNW commentator Bruce Allen, and I were lamenting that with Lampman gone to his cottage up the coast: Who will sit as our cobblestone counsellor?

"Where the hell are we gonna go on a Friday afternoon to hoist a few and listen to this guy? It's the end of an era. There are no damn places like this left in the city."

So to Stephen Lampman, who hates attention and will surely cringe at the notoriety he has now received by appearing in the column he has endlessly promoted, a most heartfelt thank you, on behalf of those you loved, listened to and cared about.

agtsakumis@shaw.ca

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