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# PETER GZOWSKI: A CANADIAN EVERYMAN

## *Introduction*

The deaths of few public figures in Canada have evoked the sense of loss as did that of author and broadcaster Peter Gzowski on January 24, 2002. Of the many tributes paid to him, former premier of New Brunswick Frank McKenna's sums up well the public's response: "I don't know if we will ever see another Canadian who was so much a focus of love and affection for people all across the country." In a career spanning almost 50 years, Gzowski achieved a unique rapport with his audience; and when he died testimonials poured in from across Canada from both ordinary and prominent Canadians. At some time and on some level, he seemed to have touched the lives of enormous numbers of Canadians.

Throughout his career, Peter Gzowski worked in both print and broadcast journalism, but it was his work in radio that had the greatest impact. Two CBC national radio programs—*This Country in the Morning* and *Morningside*—made him the most popular radio host in Canadian history, with a huge audience of regular listeners who identified with him as one does with a friend. Gzowski also inspired national pride. For many, he was a person who represented all that was best and brightest in this country. His programs drew Canadians together and helped them understand one another. By his own admission, he loved all things Canadian, and he was a tireless promoter of Canadian talent in the arts and literature. His manner clearly implied that he respected his audience. Author Alice Munro commented, "I think his listeners felt that he trusted them . . . to take an adult interest in their country, to wish to be informed and entertained without condescension. And their response showed how

their lives were opened and their days warmed by such easy courtesy, such comfortable respect." Gzowski listened to his listeners. He conscientiously read the correspondence he received from them; he knew who they were and what they expected from him. It has been said that he asked the questions they wanted to ask. And in a style unlike that of much rapid-fire radio, he waited patiently for the answers.

Gzowski shared the interests of average Canadians, and gave them new ones. He always gave the impression of being interested in everything; each interview he conducted seemed to go to the core of the matter, finding something important and enlightening. He communicated to his listeners a sense that there are fascinating people in all parts of Canada who have real and stimulating stories to tell. By projecting an image of an ordinary or typical person, Gzowski put his listeners at ease. He was, however, considered by many to be a brilliant interviewer who brought out the best in his guests. He could unobtrusively lead his nervous subjects into a comfort zone, then release them to assume their own course. His casual, folksy style relaxed listeners and guests alike.

*Morningside* has been off the air since 1997, but Gzowski continued to write for newspapers and magazines, and 16 books in all. His efforts on behalf of literacy were embraced by the Canadian public. His good friend, broadcaster Stuart McLean, identified the essence of Peter Gzowski's contributions to Canada: "He went on a quest to uncover the best of the country and he invited us to come along with him, and because he believed that such a thing was possible, we did too."

# PETER GZOWSKI: A CANADIAN EVERYMAN

## ➤ **A Complex Simplicity**

Peter Gzowski was noted for combining a fine intellect with a disarming manner, which put both his radio guests and his audience at ease. He seemed interested in every topic, and had a knack for making even the most complex matters clear to the average listener. He has been praised for bringing Canadians together and a better collective understanding of this nation and of ourselves.

### **A Good Listener**

When you are in conversation with someone, how can you tell that the person you are talking to is really listening to you, and is focusing on you as well as on what you are saying? When this occurs, how does it make you feel? How does it affect the conversation itself?

### **A Character Study**

Before viewing this *News in Review* report the class will be divided into five groups and each group will be assigned one of the questions below. As you watch the video make notes, then discuss answers to your question with the other members of your group. Finally, choose a spokesperson who will then summarize your reactions for the class as a whole.

1. Gzowski gave as his motto “The listeners were smarter than I was.” How does he describe his attempts to live up to this motto? How do other commentators confirm or contradict this description?
2. What were the skills and attributes that made Gzowski an exceptional interviewer?
3. What were the topics, interests, and causes that especially interested Gzowski?
4. In addition to the approach suggested by his motto, what made Gzowski’s listeners such loyal fans? How did he show his awareness of and appreciation for them?
5. How do commentators in this video describe the importance of his life and work for Canada and Canadians?

### **Identification**

During a second viewing, think about the words “A Canadian Everyman.” The word *everyman* refers to a person who represents that which is ordinary or typical in human beings. After the second viewing discuss as a class the aspects of Peter Gzowski’s life and work that support this description of him.

### **Follow-up Discussion**

What is the significance of the phrase “A *Canadian* Everyman” Is it possible to be ordinary and extraordinary at the same time?

# PETER GZOWSKI: A CANADIAN EVERYMAN

## ➤ *A Not-so-ordinary Life and Times*

As you read the following biographical information about Peter Gzowski, note details about his life that you find surprising or particularly interesting. Share your reactions with the class.

**July 13, 1934** Peter Gzowski is born in Toronto, Ontario.

**1940-1954** He is educated in Galt, Ontario, and at Ridley College in St. Catharines. As a scholarship student at the University of Toronto, he edits the undergraduate newspaper *The Varsity*. He leaves university without graduating.

**1954** He is hired in his first journalism job as a reporter for *The Timmins Daily Press*.

**1957** He becomes city editor of the *Moose Jaw Times-Herald*.

**1958** After a brief period as managing editor of the *Chatham Daily News*, he leaves to join the staff of *Maclean's* magazine.

**1962** He becomes the youngest-ever managing editor of *Maclean's*.

**1964-1969** He is entertainment editor of *The Toronto Star*, then editor of the paper's week-end magazine, *Star Weekly*.

**1971-1974** He hosts the CBC national radio program *This Country in the Morning*.

**1976-1978** He hosts CBC television's *90 Minutes Live*. The program is not a success.

**1982-1997** He hosts the CBC national radio program *Morningside*, which becomes the most listened-to radio program in Canada.

**1986** He commits himself to raising \$1-million in his lifetime to benefit literacy programs, and founds the Peter Gzowski Invitational Golf Tournament for Literacy. By 2002, these tournaments raise over \$6-million.

**1992** Gzowski donates his papers to the Trent University Archives.

**1995** He receives the Governor-General's Award for Lifetime Achievement in Broadcasting.

**1999** He is appointed eighth Chancellor of Trent University. He is also invested as a Companion in the Order of Canada.

**January 24, 2002** Peter Gzowski dies in a Toronto hospital of complications related to chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. In the last year of his life, he has been working on a new book, his 17th, about Canada's North.

# PETER GZOWSKI: A CANADIAN EVERYMAN

## ► *Common Factors*

Two of the biggest issues that have always faced Canada have been the search for a national identity and regionalism. Consider these thoughts and issues as you read the following information.

“He cared deeply about Canada, and through him, we listened to voices from every corner of our vast land. As we say goodbye to this respected Canadian, we thank him for bringing us closer together.” — Governor-General Adrienne Clarkson

“No one ever asked more Canadians, in more parts of Canada, more questions about more aspects of life in Canada, than Peter did.” — Harry Bruce, *The Globe and Mail*

Following Peter Gzowski’s death, those expressing their appreciation for his work commented on the love that Gzowski demonstrated for his country, and on his efforts to help Canadians understand their own land. Alex Frame, Vice-president of CBC Radio, describes Gzowski’s work as defining “an era, not just for CBC radio, but for the country,” and of creating among Canadians a “sense of a country worth evaluating, worth appreciating.”

Especially with *Morningside*, Gzowski brought English-speaking Canadians together in a new understanding of what being Canadian was all about. Writing in *The National Post*, Robert Fulford described Gzowski’s entire career as “revealing Canada to itself.” As a result, “he was the ultimate pan-Canadian figure of his time, at home in Yellowknife or St. John’s or Calgary.”

Many critics feel that his influence was especially strong in small-town Canada. For many, he removed the sense of isolation they felt from the rest of the country. Women who were stay-at-home moms were among his most loyal listeners; but he was also a constant companion to business travellers and others seeking the familiar in all parts of Canada. For many new immigrants he was a source of information on a variety of Canadian topics.

He was interested not only in those stories that had a major impact on the entire country, but also in those that were part of everyday life. He could devote hours of programming to such matters as listeners phoning in to report the first signs of spring in their province or territory, or to locating the country’s finest recipe for chili sauce. He interviewed hockey players as well as politicians, popular singers as well as famous writers.

But he also covered the big stories, and to great effect. One example is the famous *Morningside* Red River Rally of 1997, when Gzowski raised millions of dollars for Manitoba flood relief by bringing together performers and participants on-air from across Canada. He was also there to reassure and comfort in times of national political crisis. Herman Godden of *The London Free Press*, wrote of his (Godden’s) depression on the day following the Quebec referendum of 1995, when national unity seemed almost destroyed, and of how Gzowski’s interviews with national and regional leaders, especially New Brunswick premier Frank

McKenna, helped him to understand how frightened the majority of Canadians were, and how the will had to be found to carry on as a nation.

Writing in *The Globe and Mail* Ian Brown described this fascination with all things Canadian as the central factor in Gzowski's career. "For 50 years—as a writer, editor and, most famously, the host of *This Country in the Morning* and *Morningside*—Peter Gzowski addressed every major and minor event that crossed the mental screen of Canadians. He explored and explained those events more thoroughly than anyone in any other medium. Gzowski didn't just take part in what came to be called the National Conversation: He invented it." Broadcaster Stuart McLean points out that Gzowski's approach was almost inevitable, "nurtured by national institutions—*Maclean's* and the CBC, whose job it is to define the nation and reflect the country to its people." The result, says broadcaster Rex Murphy, is that "Peter Gzowski was a goad to Canadians' complacency about their country, and a genuine, necessary and intelligent booster of this country's virtues." Clearly, Gzowski himself understood the role he played in Canadian life as a radio personality. Discussing *Morningside* with Jerry Gladman of *The London Free Press*, he began modestly: "It really wasn't that big a deal. It's just a bloody radio program, a place where people can have their voices heard. Where the famous and powerful were challenged in a civilized way." Then he continued: "What I think was highly important was we kept people in touch. There's not very much of that any more, you know, not many national media places."

Gzowski's role was internationally recognized. *The New York Times* wrote that "in a country forever in search of its own voice, Mr. Gzowski is a stand-in for Canada, as curious as he is courteous, interested in hockey heroes and indigenous customs and all the forgotten chapters of a national history and culture that he constantly challenges his listeners to cherish and defend."

## **Follow-up Discussion**

What was exceptional about Peter Gzowski's life, abilities, and career? What was his impact on ordinary life in Canada?

# PETER GZOWSKI: A CANADIAN EVERYMAN

## *Style and Substance*

Any employer will tell you that communications skills are valued highly in the workplace. For journalists and radio hosts, of course, they are essential. Communication skills involve the ability to use language effectively, but they also involve the ability to communicate—often in non-verbal ways—sentiments such as trust, confidence, respect, and empathy. Highly effective communicators also have a distinct personal style. The messages they send and receive, even in the most ordinary circumstances, stimulate their interlocutors and communicate some importance, relevance, or significance in the topic under discussion. Their messages are rarely superficial, vague, or shallow. They are people of substance.

Why was Peter Gzowski so successful as a communicator? Consider this question as you read the following information.

“He was intellectual without being aloof, he was folksy without being corny and he had a great knack of being able to mix those two in order to make anybody feel comfortable.” — Steven Page, *Barenaked Ladies*

Peter Gzowski’s success as host of *Morningside* meant that more than 1.5-million people, or between eight and 10 per cent of the Canadian English-language radio audience, listened to him every morning. It was an unusual combination of style, substance, and intelligence that resulted in this popularity.

Commentators always mentioned Gzowski’s “aw shucks” manner. He conveyed a small-town familiarity that put both audience and interviewees at their ease. Roy MacGregor called this Gzowski’s “rural slyness,” and said it made him “the ultimate Canadian: decent, open, listening, polite—but still capable of taking the stuffing out of someone or something when necessary.”

Audience and interview subjects both praised Gzowski as a listener and storyteller. Dalton Camp, a regular political panellist on *Morningside*, remarked: “He was one of those rare and gifted people—a good listener. That was his real talent. He always waited for the answer.” Sensitive listening was combined with storytelling ability. *Morningside* producer Katherine Macklem said: “He truly listened on [his listeners’] behalf and used the incredible depth of his intelligence and the breadth of his knowledge to make stories come alive.”

Bonnie Patterson, President of Trent University, summed up Gzowski’s talent in terms of the biggest story he wished to tell: “True to his journalistic roots, he was a storyteller, a listener, a man who helped us understand how our history, culture, politics and landscape made us distinctly Canadian.”

Gzowski was considered by many to be a brilliant interviewer who, according to CBC’s Michael Enright, almost singlehandedly transformed the art of the interview. “Most interviews [before Gzowski] were dignified and respectful, predictable answer following predict-

able question. Peter turned the long-form interview into a fully charged and rounded conversation that had muscle and texture and vitality.” He had an ability to connect one-on-one with individuals, and to put people completely at their ease—combining an obvious interest in his subjects with what Paula Simons of *The Edmonton Journal* calls one of his two great gifts: “Via his firm, but invisible, guidance, even the simplest soul could sound like a poet.”

Simons describes Gzowski’s second gift as “the ability to take the most high-brow or complex topic and make it accessible,” a skill dependent on both the depth of his knowledge and the magnitude of his curiosity. Everything was interesting to Gzowski, and he seemed to know a great deal about almost everything. This knowledge and intelligence was not always apparent, says Harry Bruce, but they were definitely there. “The warmth of his voice, the way it transmitted the sense that he cared deeply about those he interviewed, his readiness to laugh along with either the mighty or just plain folks . . . all these disguised that what lay behind his penetrating questions were the same breadth of knowledge, speed of thought, and keen intelligence that had made him such a fine editor in his green and salad days.”

The Gzowski voice, incidentally, was immediately identifiable to millions of Canadians and very much a part of its owner’s style. Columnist Allan Fotheringham, somewhat facetiously, credited “The Voice” with a great deal of Gzowski’s success: “For some 20 years, every woman in nine provinces between the ages of 35 and 50—with dull absent husbands in dull jobs—was hit in a zone somewhere between the eardrums and the kneecaps by that gravel-based, nicotine-ingrained voice.”

Because Gzowski’s subject was Canada, he travelled throughout the country in search of stories, practising what writer-activist June Callwood calls a “kind of itinerant journalism that’s not common anymore.” He introduced thousands of ordinary Canadians from all parts of Canada to his listeners.

And people let Gzowski know they were listening. He began every day at 6:00 a.m. with his mail, and these letters were extremely important to him because they helped him understand who his listeners were. CBC Radio vice-president Alex Frame says they actually changed him, because he found himself “at the centre of a constant dialogue with the country, and he adopted a more considered and considerate approach to everything. Nothing was ever again so black and white to him.” Impartiality became a part of Gzowski’s style; “I can’t remember ever hearing him take sides,” writes Ian Brown.

The citation for Gzowski’s honorary degree from Trent University, awarded in 1987, stated: “There seems to be no corner of the country outside the reach of his curiosity, and no compatriot who would not want to be among his friends.” The outpouring of affection following Gzowski’s death has overwhelmingly confirmed this assessment.

## Follow-up Discussion and Activity

1. Larry Cornies, the editor of *The London Free Press*, has written: “Gzowski was aware he wasn’t the story—his guests were. . . . Gzowski’s style and substance ran counter to the “cult of personality” that pervades so much of journalism today, in nearly every medium.” He goes on to say that many journalists, from talk-show

hosts to newspaper columnists, “try to build their reputations on manufactured star power rather than insightfulness, depth, and consequence.”

In your opinion, is this a valid criticism of journalism today? For what reasons might a cult of the personality have developed in North American society? Where else, besides journalism, might it be a factor?

2. Working in small groups, express in your own words how and why each of the categories of communications skills listed below plays a key role in effective communication. Then brainstorm one technique for each category that might help people become better communicators.
  - (a) Asking questions
  - (b) Interpreting feedback
  - (c) Presenting information
  - (d) Using non-verbal communication effectively
  - (e) Communicating by telephone
  - (f) Communicating by e-mail
  - (g) Communicating in social situations
  - (h) Communicating in academic writing
  - (i) Understanding cultural practices and etiquette
  - (j) Being open-minded
  - (k) Understanding the reciprocal nature of communication

# PETER GZOWSKI: A CANADIAN EVERYMAN

## ► *Public Radio in Canada*

In many ways public radio—a broadcasting system that is a public service and a non-profit, not commercial, enterprise whose mandate is to bring programming on national importance to an entire nation—as opposed to radio aimed at particular demographic groups, was the ideal medium for Peter Gzowski.

As Communication Canada states, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, which began as a radio network, is Canada's largest cultural institution and "one of the world's foremost public broadcasting organizations." This federal government department points out that the CBC was founded in 1936 in reaction to cross-border broadcasting from the United States, and to help Canadians "to appreciate their nation and understand the Canadian experience." In addition to television, cable, and Internet programming, the CBC operates four national radio networks (two English, two French), a Northern radio service in both official languages and eight Aboriginal languages, and an international shortwave radio service in seven languages. It is estimated that the average Canadian listens to 20 hours of radio per week, and that over 50 per cent of adult Canadians listen to the CBC's radio services.

Canadian broadcasting is regulated by the 1991 Broadcasting Act, which calls broadcasting "a public service essential to the maintenance and enhancement of national identity and cultural sovereignty." Under the Broadcasting Act the entire broadcasting system—public and private—is expected to provide "a wide range of programming that reflects Canadian attitudes, opinions, ideas, values and artistic creativity."

CBC Radio was founded at a crucial moment in Canadian history, just before the beginning of the Second World War. As early as 1937 it was distinguishing itself as a major player in Canadian broadcasting, receiving praise from the U.S. magazine *Variety* as "providing more abundant, more diversified and more complete radio entertainment than is possible for private interests here in the U.S." During the war—having begun its own national news service—CBC Radio became what political columnist and commentator Dalton Camp called "the national tie that binds." "Public radio, almost alone, gave people their sense of being joined in a great common cause." Throughout the 1940s, the CBC continued to provide strong Canadian-based information and arts programming to Canadians.

The 1950s are often referred to as the Golden Age of Radio in Canada. During this period, CBC Radio was producing drama, concerts, opera, and variety shows as well as news and public affairs programs. With the rise of television, much of the audience of the radio side of the CBC went to the new medium. In 1970, however, two CBC staff members produced a report calling for a "radio revolution," arguing for a service "distinctive and different" from private radio, and proposing that the network drop all commercials. With no need to accommodate advertisers and sponsors, programmers were free to develop new shows and new types of shows. CBC-AM, now CBC Radio One, began to specialize in news and information programming. Regional and national open-line programs became especially successful; and programs like Peter Gzowski's *This Country in the Morning* and *Morningside* found an enthusiastic audience in all parts of Canada. CBC-FM, now CBC Radio Two, became the arts and music specialist.

CBC Radio continues to serve a major audience. By the time of its 60th anniversary in 1996, however, the entire Canadian Broadcasting Corporation—like most government institutions—was feeling the effects of major funding reductions. Indeed, many people were questioning the need to continue the public funding of a national broadcasting system. The argument was similar to that first being heard when public radio was first set up in Canada. At that time (1932) Dr. Augustin Frigon, a member of the public commission studying the issue, put forth the argument that continues to be used in favour of state-funded public broadcasting: “You cannot mix up the interests of the man who wants to make money out of the equipment, and those that want to render service to the country. You cannot blame the private broadcasters, it is their business . . . but the question is: Should you use the medium for better purposes in the interests of the country at large? If you decide that you should, then you cannot leave radio in the hands of profit-making organizations.”

The future for CBC Radio seemed much brighter in May 2001, when Prime Minister Jean Chrétien announced significant additional funding for the arts and culture in Canada. Part of that funding, an initiative called Cultural Industries for the 21st Century, is to include major re-investment in CBC Television and Radio. Meanwhile, at the time of this writing, the CBC has announced that it is reviewing all of its radio programming and planning major changes in its line-up. What this will mean for programs like *This Morning*—a program similar to *Morningside*—with host Shelagh Rogers is unclear. One expectation likely to be fulfilled, however, is that the Corporation will continue to focus on its main role, presenting Canada to Canadians.

## Discussion

1. Does Canada need to maintain a public broadcaster to “reflect the country back to itself?” Can private broadcasters accomplish the same goal? What economic, political, or cultural factors should be considered in this regard? Is “the maintenance . . . of national identity” a realistic expectation of any broadcasting industry regardless of the country?
2. In your opinion, what does the public reaction to the death of Peter Gzowski say about the relationship between Canadians and public broadcasting?

# PETER GZOWSKI: A CANADIAN EVERYMAN

## ➤ *On Literature and Literacy*

“If radio provided his most appreciative audience, print remained his real home.”—Robert Fulford, *The National Post*

Throughout his career, Peter Gzowski was a prolific writer. He wrote for both newspapers and magazines and he produced 16 books. At the time of his death he was at work on yet another book, on the Canadian North.

Gzowski loved books and writers, and literary interviews became one of his specialties. He interviewed both the famous, such as Margaret Laurence and Robertson Davies, and new authors, introducing their books to Canada. (As Christie Blatchford wrote in *The National Post*, he “did Oprah’s book club before she ever thought of it.”) Broadcaster Rex Murphy called him “a zealous friend to Canadian letters, and to the men and women—academics, novelists, essayists, and publishers—who hold Canadian letters in their care. . . . His taste and evangelism on behalf of Canadian letters was always part of a fuller campaign to find the best and most distinctive of Canada, give it notice and celebration.” Robert Fulford has noted that the growth of Canadian literature over the past few decades has been unprecedented, and Gzowski played a major part in this growth.

His love of writing and reading led him to make literacy his great charitable crusade. In 1986 he decided that, over the remainder of his lifetime, he would raise \$1-million for literacy programs. To do this, he chose one of his favourite activities, golf. The result was the series of tournaments called the Peter Gzowski Invitational Golf Tournaments for Literacy (PGIs). The PGIs are most unusual tournaments, featuring music and poetry. All have a poet laureate in attendance who writes a poem about the day to recite at the banquet. Michael Ondaatje and Margaret Atwood are among those who have served in this capacity. The major award is the Knudsen Award, given in memory of golfer George Knudsen, for the person deemed to have had the most fun during his or her round.

The PGIs are held under the sponsorship of the ABC Canada Literacy Foundation, a coalition of business, labour, educators and the government promoting literacy awareness in Canada. ABC Canada maintains a Web site ([www.abc-canada.org](http://www.abc-canada.org)) where it provides some interesting, and sometimes surprising, statistics about Canadian adult literacy. These include:

- Twenty-two percent of adult Canadians have serious problems dealing with any printed materials.
- An additional 24 per cent of Canadians can only deal with simple reading tasks.
- Seventy-four per cent of young Canadians who graduate from high school have strong literacy skills. The remaining percentage can handle simple reading and writing tasks. Those who leave school before graduation generally have lower literacy skills.

- Canadians with low literacy skills are more likely to have lower incomes than those with higher skills. Over 80 per cent of Canadians at the lowest level and over 60 per cent in the second literacy level have no income, or incomes of less than \$27 000.

Much of Gzowski's fundraising was on behalf of Frontier College, Canada's most famous literacy organization. Its mission statement reads: "Frontier College is a Canada-wide, volunteer-based organization. We teach people to read and write and we nurture an environment favourable to lifelong learning. Since 1899, we have been reaching out to people wherever they are and responding to their particular learning needs. We believe in literacy as a right and we work to achieve literacy for all." Among their guiding principles is a commitment "to working with people who have been rejected or not given adequate learning opportunities before."

The college recruits student volunteers at campuses across Canada to serve as tutors in its various programs. Its initial program, the Labourer-Teacher (LT)—in which LTs have been placed usually in rural or heavy-labour situations where they do the same work as other labourers while providing them with educational opportunities—continues to this day. Many programs, however, are now set in urban and rural communities where volunteers work with adults, ESL students, children, teenagers, street youth, and prison inmates.

Of special interest to teenagers is Frontier College's Homework Club program, where volunteer tutors provide one-on-one assistance to young people to improve their reading and writing skills. The College helps community-based groups to set up the clubs, and provides training for the volunteers. Information on this and other programs can be found on the Web at [www.frontiercollege.ca](http://www.frontiercollege.ca).

In March 2000, the federal government announced that it was investing \$15-million to assist Frontier College to expand its programs over the next five years. The college would increase its chapters from 40 to 70, one for every major university in Canada, and expand its student tutors from 2000 to over 10 000.

At the memorial service for Peter Gzowski, it was announced that the PGIs he had founded would carry on, and that his efforts would continue to play a major part in making literacy a reality rather than a dream for all Canadians.

# PETER GZOWSKI: A CANADIAN EVERYMAN

## ➤ *A Preventable Death*

Smoking killed Peter Gzowski.

For 50 years, he smoked as many as three packs of cigarettes a day. It was only in February 2000, after he had sought professional help and had already developed emphysema, that he was able to quit. The emphysema was followed by a chest infection, and Gzowski spent his last year always accompanied by a portable oxygen tank. Ultimately, chronic obstructive pulmonary disorder—“slow death of the lungs”—led to his death.

Gzowski wrote about his smoking and his conditions in his last major published work, an article titled “How to Quit Smoking in 50 Years or Less,” that appeared in *Addicted: Notes from the Belly of the Beast*, a book edited by Lorna Crozier. In it he wrote, “I am pretty well confined to barracks with an oxygen tube up my nose and a four-wheeled buggy, like a baby’s pram without the baby, that enables me to walk from one end of the apartment to the other.”

Gzowski made no attempt to hide his condition or the reason for it, and he talked freely about his poor health. His friend Stuart McLean spoke of his courage in exposing his pain to the world. “It was one of his final, perhaps the ultimate, triumph of his extraordinary life—this shy, reserved and very private man coming to terms with his illness in public.”

Before he died, he filmed two documentaries for the Canadian Lung Association. The first of these was intended to raise awareness of lung disease among Canadians. The second was an attempt to get Canadians to stop smoking. The Lung Association planned to use some of the footage to create a series of anti-smoking commercials. At present, the footage remains unedited. The family will decide whether to proceed with the project.

The day after Gzowski died, *The Globe and Mail* published an editorial titled “Gzowski on Smoking.” In it the newspaper focused on the message of “How to Stop Smoking in 50 Years or Less,” a message underlined by the way he died. The editorial concluded:

“His honesty on this subject [his addiction to cigarettes] has weight beyond his life. Teenagers who take up smoking think they are immortal. They may delight in thumbing their noses at the earnest warnings that cigarettes can take years off their lives and lead to cancer and heart and lung disease. They think it cool to live dangerously. Many carry this philosophy through their adult life, kicking at friends and authorities they see as telling them how to live their lives. But just as the photographs on cigarette packs are graphic evidence that smoking is not cool, testimonials from people as eloquent as Peter Gzowski about the consequences of smoking may encourage some smokers to quit who would otherwise find excuses to continue.”

# PETER GZOWSKI: A CANADIAN EVERYMAN

## *Discussion, Research, and Essay Questions*

- 1. Comparing radio to television, Gzowski said that he much preferred radio “because you can have pictures in people’s minds that are more exciting than any picture that could ever get onto a television set. So when you’re working with all the vocabulary of the mind and undistracted by pictures, then it’s more versatile.” Express in your own words what he meant by “the vocabulary of the mind.” In what ways is radio more versatile than television or film?
- 2. As noted in the section on smoking on page 55 in this resource guide, an editorial in *The Globe and Mail* expressed a hope that Gzowski’s efforts to discourage smoking might have an effect on some members of the public. Who would be most likely to respond to an anti-smoking campaign featuring Peter Gzowski? Would such a campaign have much effect on teenagers who according to the newspaper are the most likely to take up the habit?
- 3. Illiteracy remains a significant problem in many parts of Canada. Using the Web sites for Frontier College ([www.frontiercollege.ca](http://www.frontiercollege.ca)) and ABC Canada ([www.abc-canada.org](http://www.abc-canada.org)), as well as other sources these sites lead to, prepare a report on the extent of the problem in Canada. Include information on the parts of the country where the problem is especially significant, the social and age groups most affected, its relationship to education levels, and its effects on income and employability.
- 4. Writing in *The Toronto Sun* after Gzowski’s death Peter Worthington suggested that Peter Gzowski’s perspective on Canada was limited. “He was consumed with Canada, but only Canada within our borders. While he visited every nook and cranny of Canada, he had no realistic sense of Canada’s role in the world. How could he have, never viewing us from abroad?” Is Gzowski’s failure to travel in other parts of the world likely to have skewed his understanding of and appreciation for Canada? Is it impossible to fully understand Canada—and Canadians—without leaving it?
- 5. Suanne Kelman of the Ryerson School of Journalism said that “Peter was terrific with ordinary Canadians, and if you look at what’s on the air now, that is a fairly rare skill. He did it without that creation of phony controversy you see in much commercial radio. He did not work by making people angry.” How does her description of the “Gzowski approach” compare with other talk-radio programs you have heard? Are such shows unnecessarily and artificially provocative?
- 6. Understanding the talent of Peter Gzowski and the popularity of *Morningside* is difficult without having experienced the man and his work. If you are interested in developing good interviewing skills, obtain a copy of Peter Gzowski’s book *The Morningside Years* (McClelland & Stewart, 1997). The book also includes an audio CD of many examples of his work.