



# DEBATES OF THE SENATE

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**THE LATE PETER A. HERRNDORF, C.C., O.ONT.  
THE LATE GORDON EDWARD PINSENT, C.C.**

Statement by:  
The Honourable Patricia Bovey

Tuesday, March 7, 2023

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### THE LATE PETER A. HERRNDORF, C.C., O.ONT. THE LATE GORDON EDWARD PINSENT, C.C.

**Hon. Patricia Bovey:** Honourable senators, Canada recently lost two internationally and nationally acclaimed icons — both with Winnipeg roots — Peter Herrndorf and Gordon Pinsent. Canada claims to have six degrees of separation. I contend that in Winnipeg it's only 0.6 degrees.

While Pinsent hailed from Newfoundland, his acting career began in Winnipeg. He stayed in our city after his Royal Canadian Air Force career. He talked about Winnipeg's quality of life, where he had sandbagged during the 1950 flood. His early jobs there included that as a ballroom dance instructor. But at 24, in 1954, he found the world of theatre, and soon met John Hirsch and Tom Hendry. That meeting changed his life. He had roles in their Theatre 77 productions of *An Italian Straw Hat* and *Death of a Salesman*.

Hirsch and Hendry then went on to found the Manitoba Theatre Centre, and in that inaugural year Pinsent starred in *A Hatful of Rain*, *Cinderella*, *Of Mice and Men* and *The Glass Menagerie*. He returned in 1972 for *Guys and Dolls*. We all know the heights and multi-dimensions of his career and will be forever grateful.

Peter Herrndorf, a lawyer with a Harvard M.B.A., had a legendary career in television and as CEO of the National Arts Centre. He grew up in Winnipeg, arriving from his native Netherlands when he was 8. Always curious, with a quick and

generous mind and determined nature, this avid reader charted a unique path. We go back decades. As students, he and my older brother had a summer job selling encyclopedias door to door together. They once hit a bit of a speed bump in Steinbach, but that's a story for another day.

An inspiration to many Canadians, Herrndorf's love of and pride in Canada was truly evident throughout his career. In television, he became vice-president of the CBC. He grew audiences through new programming like "The Fifth Estate" and by moving "The National" to 10 p.m. Not dumbing down programming, he made it more accessible.

He was TVOntario president before his 19 years at the helm of the National Arts Centre. There he put the "national" back into the organization. I was thrilled when he started inviting organizations from across Canada to perform on these magnificent stages in Canada's capital city. He also commenced Indigenous programming.

He and I met frequently, and we spoke of our goals for artists and audiences. We had both inherited troubled cultural institutions at the same time. Our lunches were always fascinating, and our discussions covered myriad topics, from growing up near each other in Winnipeg to challenges faced by the arts and how to solve them, and our futuristic dreams of a time when all society would realize and support the true importance of the arts in every sector of society.

May these two passionate, inspirational icons rest in peace.