John Horgan

John was born the youngest of four children to Alice (née Clutterbuck) and Patrick (Pat) Horgan in 1959 in Victoria. John's first challenge in life was losing a parent as Pat died suddenly when John was only a baby. Alice resolutely refused to give up and supported John and his three older siblings with her civil servant's income, love, and sheer force of will. This early adversity taught John that a person can survive difficult circumstances with a good team and compassionate, determined leadership. He developed friendships at Lakehill Elementary School and found satisfaction and meaning in sports – first in soccer and then lacrosse. Even in the last month of his life, John could fondly recall some of his earliest sports-associated memories: "After the games we got oranges cut into quarters and a five-cent bottle of pop. It was pure sugar in a glass bottle. No sweeteners or plastic in the '60s, man."

As an adolescent, John's motivations wavered and he found himself skipping school and achieving grades that were well below his capability. Mother Alice was again there to guide him back to the value of education, as were several particularly dedicated teachers at Reynolds High School and basketball coaches in the community. After pulling up his socks, John became student council president in Grade 12 and graduated high school on time.

With minimal family finances available for post-secondary education, John left Victoria for a time to earn money working in the pulp mill in Ocean Falls, BC. As fate would have it, there were brochures for two universities in the Ocean Falls career centre; UBC in Vancouver and Trent in Ontario. John enrolled in the

latter and on the first day of term he met Ellie Mast, the love of his life. After a four-year course of study that combined the love of learning from “Dead Poets Society” with the camaraderie of “Animal House,” John graduated with a BA in History and Political Science. He and Ellie married in February 1984 and were off to Sydney, Australia where John completed his MA in History over the next two years. The newlyweds loved Australia’s warm climate and the unpretentious energy of its people but fear of sharks, venomous snakes, and immigration red tape brought the Horgan’s back to Canada.

John’s interest in government and public service led him to work for members of parliament in Ottawa where their first son, Nathan (Nate), was born. Younger son Evan joined the family the following year. The frigid, snowy winters of Canada’s capital were too much for a born-and-raised Vancouver Islander so John, Ellie, and the boys relocated to the West Coast, settling in Langford in 1992.

Fatherhood was a daunting prospect for John, having not had a paternal figure in his own household, but he emulated the love and boundaried parenting he had received from his mother and things worked out just fine. John worked hard to support the family financially, but weekends and summer holidays were filled with afternoon sojourns to Sooke Potholes or Witty’s Lagoon and camping trips to Miracle Beach or Gordon Bay. As much as he believed in the importance of leisure, it was John’s conviction that his boys would not have the wobbles in education that he had. To support this, he and Ellie alternated reading to their young sons every night. From “Goodnight, Moon” in pre-school days to “The Chronicles of

Prydain” by late elementary school, these readings instilled in both children a love of the printed word. John involved himself in his boys’ schooling by coming to parent-teacher evenings whenever he could and building positive relationships with the people teaching his children. He was happy to help with homework when it was humanities or literacy-based, although math more complicated than Pythagoras was primarily Ellie’s domain.

Beyond academics, John allowed his sons to find their own interests and encouraged and supported them wherever he could. Evan became a keen hockey player while Nate started playing bass and joined a band as a teenager. John was delighted to be able to cheer on his offspring at Juan de Fuca rec centre or on stage at such Langford haunts as The Waterwheel and Glen Lake Inn. One of the most satisfying chapters for the Horgan family was the year the boys played on the same basketball team in the community league with their dad as the coach. They weren’t the best players on the team but they worked hard and made smart plays with their teammates, which resulted in winning the league.

In 2005, John decided to run for election to represent his community in the BC legislature. He had been a member of the

NDP since university days but this was the first time he had his name on a ballot. This first campaign was very much a grassroots affair with

John’s older brothers Brian and Pat putting out lawn signs and sister Kathy managing the books whilst Ellie, Nate, Evan and their friends went door to door with leaflets. John was elected in 2005 and the following 17 years of his political career have been thoroughly documented elsewhere. As he rose to opposition leader and eventually premier of BC, John’s family and community remained fundamentally the most important

things to him. The only thing that really changed was the progressively larger and larger number of people that he considered to be his community.

Although he was not a “weekend warrior” who went snowboarding or whitewater rafting in middle age, John stayed active into his 60s by hopping on his bike and riding ten or fifteen kilometres along the Galloping Goose trail. When friends of a similar disposition came to call, he often enticed them to play disc golf on the course he had designed on the hilly parkland behind the family home.

On very special occasions, John even followed trails blazed by those with knowledge of the backwoods to crane his neck upwards in awe at some of the largest trees in Canada. John was also a fierce competitor in games such as bocce ball, cribbage, or Settlers of Catan, although daughter-in-law Daisy was recently giving him a run for his money in the latter.

In the final chapter of his life, John Horgan was honoured to be appointed Canada’s ambassador to Germany. He and Ellie had a grand time on this European adventure from their base in Berlin until the cancer diagnosis meant he needed to be taken into urgent care. After 40 years of marriage, his and Ellie’s love remained as strong as it had ever been; she took two buses and a train to visit him in the hospital every single day for five

months. John’s body was weakened by illness in the last months of his life, but his mind and spirit stayed vibrant until his final day. He became deeply sad at times when he thought of the work he was leaving unfinished, but his ability to find a smile and a laugh even in dire circumstances showed the true quality of his character. When the possibility of recovery was uncertain, he made sure to tell his loved ones how he felt, via text message, phone call or simply the Vulcan salute.

Upon returning to Victoria, John was visited by a seemingly endless line of friends from all different eras of his time on

Earth, particularly from the Booth, Bridge and Finerty clans. The Horgan family extends our condolences to those friends who weren’t able to see him before he departed this life. Please know he was profoundly grateful for the many, many good people that had been on his team in one way or another and he would have stuck around to see you if it had been in his power to do so. We also wish to thank the staff of the Charité Hospital in Berlin and the Royal Jubilee Hospital in Victoria. If John gave you a rock, you know you were doing something right. John’s valued colleagues from his many roles in public service are simply too many to list but sincere thanks are due to the Canadian Embassy staff Frank, Fannie, Mayleen and Timo who went well beyond their remit to support the Horgan family in time of great need. In addition, we are

supremely grateful that brothers-in-law Rick and Fred Mast, cousin Ron Lootsma and mother-in-law Jennie Mast (88 years young) making the journey from Ontario to see John in his last week and were even gracious as he trounced them in his final game of cribbage.

John is pre-deceased by his father Pat, his mother Alice, his brother Pat, his sister-in-law Anne, his nephew Pat, his niece Danielle, and his father-in-law Andy Mast. He is survived by: his wife Ellie, his brother Brian, his sister Kathy, his sister-in-law Shirley, his good son Nate (Daisy) & grand-kitty Thea and gooder son Evan (Veronica) & grand-puppy Pickle, as well as fifteen beloved Horgan and Mast nieces and nephews and their partners and children. We are grieved that Dad left us before Evan and Veronica were due to welcome the first grandchild to the family but we know that she will grow up with wonderful stories of the good man her grandfather was.

A Provincial State Memorial Service for John, was held on Sunday, December 15, 2024 at 1:00pm, in the Q Centre Arena, 1767 Island Highway, Colwood, BC, with the Rev. Dr. Keith Howard officiating.

The service was open to the public. However, admission tickets were required.

The ceremony was livestreamed and the link is still available to be viewed at: https://www.youtube.com/live/TDdSwnZ-p_0

In lieu of flowers, at the request of the family, consider making a donation to the Goldstream Food

Bank: https://goldstreamfoodbank.org
Or to a food bank of your choice: https://www.foodbanksbc.com/find-a-food-bank

Condolences may be offered to the family below.

McCall Gardens
www.mccallgardens.com