

TOGETHER: REMEMBRANCE

Remembering Andrew Gregorovich, a librarian and author who promoted Ukrainian culture in Canada

The late Andrew Gregorovich worked to promote Ukrainian culture in Canada

By **Tracey Tong** Special to the Star
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When Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24, half a world away in Toronto, Andrew Gregorovich was in hospital, no longer conscious when it happened. His family believes this may have been a blessing in disguise, as Andrew — a pillar of the Ukrainian Canadian community for 60 years — would have been devastated at the news.

A retired University of Toronto librarian, Andrew worked tirelessly to advance Ukrainian culture in Canada, serving as president of the Shevchenko Museum on Bloor Street and founding editor of a Ukrainian literary magazine. The speaker and author was, sister Lesia Gregorovich says, “a very devoted and dedicated Ukrainian Canadian who through his writings and research expanded the knowledge of the Ukrainian experience.”

Born in Saskatoon, Andrew was the third of Ukraine-born Alexander Gregorovich and his wife Mary’s five children, who also included John, Hanya, Basil and Lesia.

When Andrew was four, the family moved to Edmonton, where Alexander, a teacher, became the founder and president of the Ukrainian National Federation. “We grew up knowing and learning about Ukrainian history because our father was so involved in it,” says Lesia. “We celebrated Ukrainian holidays — Ukrainian Orthodox Easter and Christmas. At home, both Ukrainian and English were spoken.”

The family moved to Sea Island, B.C. during the Second World War and in August 1946, relocated to Hamilton, where Andrew attended Gibson Public School and Central Secondary High School.

Andrew was in his 20s when he developed an interest in Ukrainian history, says Lesia. Once he did, he was unstoppable, speaking at McMaster University, as well as the University of Toronto, Harvard, the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, the Learned Societies of Canada Conference and the Vernadsky National Library in Ukraine, according to daughter, Larissa Gregorovich.

Following his graduation from U of T with a masters of library science in 1963, he served as librarian and department head at the University of Toronto. In 1967, he became the editor of the quarterly magazine Forum: A Ukrainian Review, a post he held for 43 years. A prolific volunteer, he was the president of the Ontario Library Association and the Ukrainian Librarians Association of Canada; board member of the Governing Council of the University of Toronto and chairman of the City of Toronto Historical Board, from which he received a medal of service in 1977. He also received the Ukrainian Canadian Congress’s Shevchenko Medal and in 1994, the Ukrainian Technological Society of Pittsburgh named him Ukrainian of the Year. Gentle, kind and soft-spoken, Andrew remained humble, says Lesia.

After retiring from U of T in 1996, Andrew dedicated many hours to work in the Ukrainian Canadian community, says Larissa. In a second career, he became executive director of the Ukrainian Canadian Research and Documentation Centre. The rise of the internet inspired him to create a website about Ukrainian writer, artist and poet Taras Shevchenko in 2000; and he was instrumental in designing Canada Post’s 2014 commemorative Shevchenko stamp. In 2012, the Academy of Science of Ukraine recognized Andrew — who at the time was serving as president of the Shevchenko Museum — as a supporter of the culture.

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Although he helped to curate historical artifacts and the artistic works of both Ukrainians and Ukrainian Canadians at the museum, Andrew also found joy in adding to his extensive private collection of vintage Ukrainian maps and books. “Wherever he was in the world, he would stop into antique shops to see what they might have,” says Larissa. The family is currently working to make his personal collection publicly available.

Twice widowed, Andrew shared his love and knowledge of Ukrainian culture with his family. He and his first wife, teacher and librarian Jennie Harmansky, whom he met through the Ukrainian National Youth Federation, had three children: Michael (born in 1966), Greg (1968), and Larissa (1976). His second wife was legal assistant Pat McElcheran.

The author of such books as “Anna Yaroslavna: Queen of France & Princess of Ukraine” (2011) and “Roxelana: Ukrainian Consort of Emperor Suleyman the Magnificent” (2014), Andrew was also an avid photographer and decades-long season-ticket holder for the Toronto Symphony Orchestra who loved to travel, says Larissa. He had gone to Paris, England, Italy and the U.S., and made many trips to Ukraine, even during a difficult political climate.

“In the 1970s, spies would follow him everywhere,” says son Michael Gregorovich. “He had no interest in taking photos of statues of Lenin, but someone advised him that he must take photos to avoid suspicion.”

In 1989, Brian was a member of the entourage that accompanied Prime Minister Andrew Mulroney on a tour of Ukraine to increase his popularity with voters back home. In 1991, he returned for a public unfurling of the blue and yellow flag and for the playing of the Ukrainian National Anthem, both of which were banned during Soviet rule.

Both Andrew’s illness and his death were sudden. “The timing of the two events (his death and Russia’s invasion) is absolutely staggering — something that would be written in a novel, rather heavy-handedly, to pull your heartstrings,” says Larissa. “Two schools of thought seem to have emerged about this timing. Some say that it would have broken his heart to know that Ukraine was under attack once again, so he was spared this pain. Others say that he left this world so he could continue the fight for a free Ukraine, in the company of all of our spirit ancestors.”

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