HISTORY IS ANOTHER WORD FOR EXPERIENCE: A TRIBUTE TO DESMOND MORTON (1937-2019)

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Among the many remarkable legacies left by the late Canadian historian Desmond Morton is an autobiographical essay he penned in 2011 for publication in *The Canadian Historical Review*.

Titled "Is History Another Word for Experience? Morton's Confessions," the 27-page article explores the author's own life and offers many astute observations about his principal life's work – the writing and teaching of Canadian history.

Morton, a renowned figure in Canadian scholarly circles, was a leading chronicler and interpreter of the country's military, political and social history. 'Des' was, we are so proud to say, a friend of the Association for Canadian Studies and a generous contributor to its activities over the years. His passion for Canada, his deep insights about its past, and his willingness to share his knowledge with others will be greatly missed.

In his 2011 essay, Morton structured his thoughts about his personal journey through life around the notion that "history is another word for experience." He elaborated on the phrase: "If I want an epitaph, I have not encountered this combination in anyone else's writings, though I always hesitate to claim originality. I think it also makes sense if reversed. Experience is another word for history and, I would claim, my versions of history have been powerfully influenced by my own experiences as a student, a soldier, a writer, and especially as an unashamed political activist and an academic administrator."

Recalling Morton's exploration of this idea is especially à propos in this edition of *Canadian Issues*, where we examine the intersection of genealogy – the personal past – and Canadian history writ large. In Professor Morton's case, we can only praise fortune that the unique circumstances of his ancestry and upbringing – then his life choices, his service as a

soldier, his education, his activism and his scholarship – conspired to produce a body of work that has immeasurably enriched Canadians' understanding of their country, and will continue to do so for generations to come.

At the time of his passing on Sept. 4, 2019, at the age of 81, Morton held the position of Hiram Mills Professor Emeritus in the Department of History and Classical Studies at McGill University. He had previously served (1986-1994) as principal of Erindale College at the University of Toronto. He had authored more than 40 books, an oeuvre marked by his rapt attention to the lives of ordinary people through centuries of Canadian history as much as to the actions and impulses of the most powerful shapers of the past.

As McGill itself has noted in its remembrance of Morton, a 2017 celebration of his 80th birthday had drawn a memorable tribute to the esteemed historian from former federal NDP leader Ed Broadbent, who described his friend as "intellectually honest" and much more: "Des is one of the best writers in Canada, bar none. His writing is a model of intelligence and clarity. He was never interested in the so called 'great men' of history, but rather the working people, the soldiers and their families, always including the women. Inclusive and unpredictable, he always reached out to people with whom he personally disagreed."

Morton was the founding director of the McGill Institute for the Study of Canada, and authored – among his many books and scholarly papers – the classic, indispensable, multi-edition survey of the country's past, *A Short History of Canada*. First published in 1983, the seventh edition of every Canadian history buff's must-have book appeared in 2017, including a short preface that is so packed with Morton's wisdom – perhaps most notably his views about the importance of marrying the Big Topic histories of politics and economics with the smaller, personal, but equally important stories of everyday people – it's difficult to select only one excerpt.

So, we won't try; here are four:

> "Many Canadians believe that their history is short, boring, and irrelevant. They are wrong on all counts. The choices Canadians can make today have been shaped by history."

> "In each generation, Canadians have had to learn how to live with each other in this big, rich land. It has never been easy. If we ignore history, we make it doubly difficult."

> "(This book) is concerned with politics and economics as well as how Canadians have lived their own lives, because our greatest problems and achievements have come through the entwining of our lives with a community."

> "Whatever our future, we should understand how Canada has travelled through its most recent centuries to the present. If we follow that voyage, our history will give us confidence in change and compromise and in some enduring truths about communities and families and human beings. It should also tell us that no ideas, however deeply held, last forever."