
BRIEFING NOTE

About Bram and Bluma Appel

Bluma Appel

Bluma Appel was born in Montreal in 1920. She died in Princess Margaret Hospital on July 14, 2007. Although she began volunteering as a child in Montreal, much of her charitable work was in Toronto. Her father, Jack Levitt, came from Vilna, Lithuania, and her mother, Dora, from Kovna, Russia, probably around 1905 as Jewish emigration from czarist Russia surged because of wide-scale repression. Bluma was the youngest of four children. Her father, who made a living initially selling photographs on Montreal street corners, went into the textile business and eventually formed a prosperous company called Town Hall Clothes.

Mrs. Appel learned French at a young age and was friends with a young Pierre Trudeau. She went to high school in Montreal but never attended university. In a speech to the Canadian Club, she said she had refused to take the entrance examinations for McGill University in 1936 because, "being Jewish, I needed straight A-plus to qualify."¹ Since B-minus was good enough for anyone else, this struck her as unfair.

In 1937, she was introduced to a young chartered accountant named Bram Appel. They married in 1940, a marriage which lasted 67 years. They had two sons, David (1941) and Mark (1944). As a young wife and mother, Mrs. Appel made a career of volunteering. "I learned early on you enter every door open to you," she said in her Canadian Club speech. "A locked door particularly intrigued me and I never gave up looking for the key."²

Mrs. Appel credited her love for theatre and arts to her initial involvement in plays in New York City in the 1950's. For a time she tried identifying and supporting the creation of various art forms by becoming part-owner of Waddington's art gallery in Montreal in 1957 and producing plays in the 1960s in New York City. She described this period as being fundamental to "loving the arts and understanding the importance of arts to a civilized society."³

Mrs. Appel had a strong interest in politics. In 1979, she ran unsuccessfully for the Liberals in the federal election and during her years in Ottawa she worked for Secretary of State, Gerard Pelletier at \$1 per year. Her charitable causes were diverse. She was one of the first people to become involved in AIDS research and was instrumental in founding CANFAR, the Canadian Foundation for AIDS/HIV Research. Interested in giving women a voice, she "led the charge to ensure a place for women on the Board of every bank."⁴

Mrs. Appel's life-long interest in the arts led her to invest her time, energy and money in the Toronto theatre scene. She supported the St. Lawrence Centre for the Arts which named one of its theatres in

¹ Bluma Appel as quoted by Sandra Martin The Globe and Mail. July 17, 2007

² Ibid.

³ Bluma Appel as quoted by Iain Marlow The Toronto Star. July 16, 2007

⁴ Media Advisory. Bluma Appel Canadian of the Year. Newswire. April 24, 2007
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her honour in March 1983, after she made a donation to help renovate the theatre. She was also a significant force behind Opera Atelier.

The SARS epidemic in Toronto focused her attention on nurses and their vulnerability in caring for infectious patients so she donated \$350,000 to help the Faculty of Nursing establish a Clinical Simulation Learning centre within the New Health Sciences Building at the University of Toronto.⁵

Boards and Directorships

Mrs. Appel made a significant contribution of her time as well as monetary support. She served on the board of many organizations including the Canadian Opera Company, the Canadian State Company, Opera Atelier, the Royal Ontario Museum, the Canadian Psychiatric Research Foundation, the Metropolitan Toronto Community Foundation, Second Harvest, and the Toronto Arts Awards.

Orders and Awards

Community Leadership Award, National Council of Jewish Women 1987
Toronto Life Award, Women Who Make a Difference 1992
City of Toronto Award of Merit 1992
Commemorative Medal for 125th Anniversary of Canadian Confederation
1993 Hero, Metro Toronto Community Church
University of Toronto Arbour Award 1995
Member Order of Ontario 1997
Order of Canada 1998
William Kilbourn Award 2001
Mount Blanc Arts Patronage Award 2002
Officer of the Order of Canada 2002
Dora Mavor Moore Award 2005
Honorary Doctor of Laws, University of Toronto 2006
Honorary Doctor of Laws, Brock University 2007
Canadian of the Year 2007, Chair of CANFAR

Bram Appel

Abraham (Bram) Appel was born in Montreal in 1915 and grew up on St. Urbain Street in Montreal, the fifth child of Israel and Sophia Appel. He died October 11, 2007 at the age of 92, three months after the death of his wife.

As a wealthy entrepreneur he is said to have never forgotten his humble beginnings in a poor Jewish neighbourhood in Montreal. "My parents were immigrants and I knew financial difficulties. I was a pupil in an inner city school. The experience left an indelable impression." ⁶ Mr. Appel began work at age 11 working three jobs to put himself through university. He graduated near the top of his class as a chartered accountant in 1935.

At McGill, Mr. Appel met David Pall, a science student from Saskatchewan, who became a life-long friend and business partner. Together they founded Pall Corporation which has become a world leader in the manufacture of filtration, separation and purification systems for a variety of life sciences and

⁵ Sehri Safa. "U of T nursing school receives \$500,000 from estate of Bluma Appel. [Canadian Jewish News](#). September, 18, 2008

⁶ Bram Appel quoted by Diane Francis. "A better idea for schools" [Maclean's](#). July 31, 2000
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industrial applications. In addition to his involvement with the Pall Corporation, Mr. Appel invested in IMAX and laser technology.

David Appel, the Appels' son, recognized his father as an "unsung hero"⁷ who supported many of Bluma Appel's charitable causes. Mr. Appel was a philanthropist in his own right. He donated money to pilot a school nutrition program in North Bay which became a model for similar programs in other Ontario schools.

Mr. Appel served on the boards of many corporations including as Governor of Mount Sinai Hospital. The Appels have donated substantial amounts of money to the arts and medical research. Significant gifts were made to the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, Mount Sinai Hospital, the Royal Ontario Museum, the Art Gallery of Ontario, the Royal Conservatory of Music, McGill University's, Faculty of Dentistry, the Hincks-Dellcrest Centre and the University Health Network. In addition, the Appels made less public donations to specific cancer researchers and hospitals.

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⁷ David Appel quoted by Rebecca Penty. The National Post. October 10, 2007
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