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It Was a Pleasure to Know Such a Civilized Man^[1]

Fred Kaufman^[2]

Jean Beetz was not an easy man to get to know.

He was reserved, even shy; he shunned publicity, lest someone should think he had sought it; he preferred to remain in the background, content to let others be in the limelight.

Yet in the course of his lifetime, so tragically cut by a cruel disease, he served his country with wisdom and dignity, ever ready to share his immense knowledge with others, be they students or prime ministers. And all who sought and received his counsel were enriched by the experience.

Jean was a Renaissance man. Educated in the classical tradition of Quebec, he went on to Oxford to broaden his horizon „ and what a horizon it was! He relished the experience and made friendships that stood the test of time. The love of learning „ philosophy, literature and, of course, the law „ filled his life, never to be set aside, despite the strictures imposed on him by the remarkable careers that followed „ teaching, public service at the highest levels, a deanship at his alma mater, capped by a career on the bench, again at the highest levels.

One marvels at how much this remarkable man achieved in so relatively short a time. His academic career was distinguished, and had he done nothing else, it would have been enough. So, too, with five action-packed years in Ottawa, two with the Privy Council and three as special counsel to the prime minister on constitutional affairs. Again, to do but that would have secured him a place in the history books.

Then, at the beginning of 1973, just as he had settled down to resume his academic career, Jean was plucked from the classroom and put in the courtroom. Many, Jean included, were surprised by the appointment, for full-time professors then rarely acceded to the bench. But he plunged into the work, and whatever practical experience he may have lacked he more than made up for by his utter devotion to the task.

Before the year was out, the prime minister called once again, this time to offer Jean a seat on the Supreme Court of Canada. Again, this was quite unexpected, but as he told his friends, "on ne le demande pas, mais on ne le refuse pas." And so he donned his red-and-ermine robe, and soon a lifetime of preparation „ for that is what it was „ began to translate itself into judgments full of erudition and good sense, which left out nothing, yet never said too much.

When illness forced Jean to retire, he returned to Montreal, the city he loved, and a law firm which welcomed his wise counsel. Alas, it was not to last, for while his mind was unimpaired, his was weak, and leaving home to go to the office became an impossible task.

Jean's indomitable spirit served him well until the end. He accepted his fate with fortitude and dignity. Not once did he complain, for that was not the nature of the man. The last time I saw him, he had just finished reading an article in *Canadian Geographic*. "I don't do any heavy reading," he said. Yet the Oxford dictionary sat by his side, for there was always a new word to discover.

I would not wish to leave the impression that Jean was a bookworm who shut himself out from the world. Not at all. He had a finely honed sense of humour, he loved a good joke, he loved good food and good wine, he loved his friends, and he loved his late mother, his brother and his nephews and his nieces, to whom he was devoted.

His family will miss him greatly, and so will his friends and former colleagues. We were grateful for his presence among us, and we rejoice that Canada had in its midst such a civilized man.

[1] This Appreciation appeared in the Ottawa Citizen on October 2, 1991, shortly after the death of Jean Beetz. It appears here with the permission of *Southam Inc.* and the author.

[2] The Hon. Fred Kaufman, C.M., Q.C. is counsel at Yarosky, La Haye, Stober & Isaacs, Montreal. Recently retired from the Quebec Court of Appeal, Fred Kaufman was appointed to that court on the same day as Jean Beetz. They were sworn in on a joint ceremony on March 2, 1973.