



ELMIRA Independent

Gladwell and Martin brighten stage in Floradale

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Gail Martin - Independent Editor

The combined IQ on the stage was astounding.

Hometown boys Malcolm Gladwell and Roger Martin, both on the London Time's 100 Most Influential Thinkers List, carried out a casual conversation at Floradale Mennonite Church on Friday.

The chat was like following an evenly matched game of tennis — volley after volley, with neither one dropping the ball.

Gladwell and Martin's mothers introduced their sons at the fundraiser for Woolwich Counselling Centre, a nice homey touch to the evening.

Joyce Gladwell mused aloud as to what kinds of things a mother was expected to share about her son, and then provided three images of the young Malcolm Gladwell.

"I think the child is still very present in Malcolm," said Gladwell.

The first scene was when he was only 14 months old, when he still had blonde curls, before he darkened to show his Jamaican heritage.

He was sitting on the lawn by himself at their rural property in England, catching leaves as they fell, only to joyfully throw them back up in the air.

"This is a picture of the joyful Malcolm, who delights in life," said his mother. "He continues to experience his delight in the world around him."

Another scene pictured the entire family walking through farmers' fields on a Sunday afternoon. When the family encountered cows, Joyce "literally" sat on the fence, afraid to move.

Malcolm came back and grabbed his mother's hand.

"Mommy, are you frightened?"

He took her hand, and encouraged her to join everyone else.

Joyce Gladwell said this highlights his caring and compassionate side, as well as his generous spirit.

A final scene had Malcolm's father Graham taking the boys — Graham Jr., Jeffrey and Malcolm — to see the changing of the guard in London.

Malcolm was five years old, and ran off on his own, to get a closer look.

"Malcolm is quick on his feet, and quick-minded," said Joyce. "He knows what he wants, and goes after it in a straight line."

Delphine Martin, who introduced her son Roger — dean of the Rotman School of Management — said that he gave their family few surprises in life, until he became a teenager. When he was graduating, he told his family he would like to go to Harvard, instead of a local school.

"Well, we thought, he probably won't get accepted," said Delphine, to much laughter. "He survived very well."

Very well indeed. Roger Martin went on to Harvard Business School, and has tremendous influence in today's world of business and commerce.

When the two luminaries finally made it to the stage, it was clear they were ready to have some fun.

They started talking about sports, and Gladwell's new feeling of guilt at watching football, after learning just how many football players end up with permanent injury as a result of the sport. He likened it to Roman nobility watching the gladiators battle.

He also spoke about being one of the 20 per cent of Canadians who did not watch the Canada vs. United States hockey game at the Vancouver Olympics, because he was on a plane at the time.

He did, however, walk up and down Fifth Avenue in New York, wearing his red and white Canada Olympic mittens.

Gladwell said there have been two times in history when Canadians have been able to march proudly around New York City, declaring their pride as a Canadian.

The first time was when Canada helped save the American hostages in 1979, said Gladwell dryly. The second?

"Last Sunday."

Gladwell then turned the tables on Martin, who had been asking the questions. Now it was Martin's turn.

Gladwell wanted to know if Canada's ability to weather the recession was due to skill or pure chance.

"Are we lucky, or are we good?" asked Gladwell.

Martin replied that it was a little of both.

"We've been good in not letting our banks do whatever they darn well please," said Martin, although he noted Canada was heading in that direction, by giving the banks the ability to give out 40-year mortgages, for instance.

If the global meltdown had happened a few years later, Canada's recovery might have been just as troubled as the United States, said Martin.

"So we were saved by how slow we were?" mused Gladwell.

While there was much humour in the evening, there was also the sense of privilege — that, given time, Gladwell and Martin could likely tackle most of the problems of the world, and, if not solve them, explain them in a way that could help all of us make sense of the world we live in.

That has certainly been the hallmark of Gladwell's success, as both a writer at the New Yorker magazine, as well as author of several books, including *The Tipping Point*, *Blink*, and his latest, *What the Dog Saw*.

His ability to see what no one else sees, and to write about it in a way that anyone can understand, is what has earned him his influence in the world.

Martin, who is perhaps less well-known outside of the world of business, has the same trait — that ability to see the world in a way that presents opportunities, rather than challenges, and innovation, instead of obstacles.

The evening was a fundraiser for Woolwich Counselling Centre, and was definitely a success.

Mary Wilhelm, executive director of the counselling centre, said that the evening in Floradale, which included a meal, was sold out.

Money raised from the evening will help offset the costs from some of the work the counselling centre is doing in the local schools.

"It's true to form for us," said Wilhelm. "We really believe in prevention. We want to catch things early, and the only way to do that is to get in the schools."

Wilhelm said she owed the success of the fundraiser to help from the WCC board, including Ron Cressman, who helped organize the event.

As well, it didn't hurt to be able to bring such big names to Woolwich, or the fact that WCC is "one of (Malcolm's) favourite charities."

Or the fact that Joyce Gladwell was one of the founding members of the counselling centre.

"We're really lucky," said Wilhelm.

Audience members who attended Friday night's gathering would tend to agree.



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