

STEP INTO MY PARLOUR



By Shaun Proulx

SHAUN PROULX TALKS TO MAYOR DAVID MILLER



With February's **GGT** new and improved, it seemed only fitting to have a conversation this month with the man charged with creating a 'new and improved' of his own, Toronto Mayor **David Miller** .

The guy with the broom began his dark horse campaign an unknown but leapt from 11% support in January of last year to an astonishing 44% in November, sweeping Barbara Hall into the winds of change and far away from what looked like her job for the taking.

Following his hard-fought campaign we all know Miller's impressive resume: Harvard economics, U of T law, time at mega-law firm Aird & Berlis followed by nine notable years at Metro and City Halls, a highlight of which had to be then-Mayor Mel shouting at Miller in council chamber: 'You'll never be mayor of this city. You say dumb and stupid things.' The death of the idea to bury Toronto's trash in the Adams Mine was largely Miller's doing (he uncovered a legal loophole that would have cost the city millions), and he was one of the two councilors who stumbled across the MFP computer leasing deal, shining bright light on the City Hall backroom dealing that has helped cause Toronto's malaise.

When **GGT** first contacted the five major mayoral candidates last fall for our *Job Interview* piece, it was Miller who was the first to agree (Hall was last), and he was the only candidate to answer our questions in the spirit they were asked. Now well-entrenched in leading Toronto in the only direction it can go – up – what does our new mayor have to say about the often bitter race he took part in, and where does he stand now on some of the issues we raised with him in the fall? I spoke with him recently about this, and asked about the pressure of being Toronto 's new hero, staying positive, and what he'll be wearing on Pride Day.



When you started your campaign most of Toronto had never heard of you. Speaking not professionally but personally, the moment you knew without doubt you had won the race must have shaken your world.



It was not believable if that makes any sense.



I would imagine it was surreal.



Surreal, that's exactly what it was. From about mid-October on things were going well and I knew it was likely I would win. About ten days before the election my campaign manger said to me, 'there is only one person who can screw this up and that is you'. We were sitting watching the votes come in on television and I felt I was watching someone else. It is the greatest privilege in the world. People have hope in this city and that's a powerful thing.



With all the high drama and acrimony in the race, did you feel like you were in a soap opera?



Parts were bizarre, parts were unpleasant but I was very, very focused. I knew why I was running, I believed in the people of Toronto and I believed I could win if I could be heard by people. So when the ugly parts came I kept my focus.



If Dalton McGuinty had cold water thrown in his face when he found out how out of shape Ontario is post-Ernie and Mike, have you experienced similar shocks looking at the state of Toronto post-Mel?



During the election I understood our deficit was at \$200 million and found out after that it is actually \$344 million. But I'm not going to let that sidetrack the agenda I got elected on. Unlike Dalton, as a municipal politician I was a part of government already so I had access and could understand things as soon as I became Mayor.



Toronto's citizens have been on an extended honeymoon with you – you're the knight in shining armour on a white horse. Do you allow yourself to feel pressure from that? Do you look in the mirror in the morning and say 'don't fuck up'?



(Laughs.) No. I do occasionally look in the mirror and say, 'expletive of your choice, I'm the mayor!' As for the pressure, I'm clear about the city and what I believe in and I'm doing everything in my power to fulfill the commitments I made during my campaign. I have to remember why I was elected.



Have you even seen your family since you were sworn in?



Every second Tuesday. No. It's been a little easier to arrange my schedule now that the campaign is over. It was really campaigning that takes the time away.



On Human Rights Day December 10th a Pride Award was given out for the first time – tell me about that.



Human Rights Day and the Pride Award show one of the immense strengths Toronto has: the respect residents have for each other regardless of differences. The same-sex marriage decision was also powerful because it showed how cosmopolitan Toronto is. And that decision, it just had to happen here in Toronto because Toronto is the right place. That decision reflects how we are and what we believe in.



You're a supporter of same-sex marriage. We've now got a Prime Minister waffling on the issue. What will you say to him in support of same-sex marriage and how loudly will you say it?



I would say Mr. Prime Minister; every person is entitled to human rights. And I would tell him what I learned in Anglican Church as a boy: Jesus loves everybody, that in a modern Canada that is predominantly urban it's very important to acknowledge the rights of same sex marriage - so uphold the decision.



Although the Toronto GLBT community is far-reaching, Church and Wellesley remains home to the greatest number of GLBTs in Canada . As an advocate of the fact that neighbourhoods are what make a city great – tell me how Church and Wellesley fits into your 3-year plan.



I'm going to come there and have fun regularly and I think it's a very thriving neighbourhood. Concerns were brought to my attention during the campaign, and one of the reasons Kristyn Wong-Tam from the BIA was on my transition committee is because of the knowledge she has on the community issues. My office is there for Church and Wellesley.



You held town hall meetings across the city in January – what have you gleaned?



It has been amazing. At round tables we've had Torontonians of all kinds talking to their neighbours, and you know there are consistent themes: public transit, housing, another is *respect* for all of our communities. All unprompted. It reflects well what kind of open-mindedness the people of Toronto really have.



I'd like to go over a few things you told us during your campaign and see where you stand now. About the rise in reported gay-bashings and verbal abuse towards the LGBT community, you told us that 'as mayor, I will do all I can to make sure that Torontonians get the message that it will not be tolerated.' What's on the table concerning that?



The Pride award and human rights day was part of that – the message needs to go out from city hall and the police that we won't accept bashings. My office has been meeting with reps of the police services on a number of issues, including that one.



But it's very hard to watch Fantino in action on any hot button issue – racial profiling for another example – and believe there's any credibility with the people in charge of this city's police force. We talked to you about the often contentious relationship between the community and the police and you termed the Pussy Palace raids a 'total abuse of authority'. You called for a police department that took more steps into educating its officers and recruiting more gay and lesbian officers – do you really think we'll see that happen?



Yes I hope so. I think it's up to the police board to show leadership on these issues. It's a different kind of board now than before I was elected. It is still in disarray ... once things straighten out and the province makes changes by putting progressive people in place I expect we'll see progress.



What about the pot issue? What's your stand?



I think drugs need to be treated as a health issue, pot in particular. The system gets distorted trying to pursue people with a couple of joints. I'd rather see the police doing something more with their time.



You have this ability to put a positive spin on the state of things without seeming like you're bullshitting. Like when you first met with Dalton McGuinty to talk about financial support for the city – right after he found out what a poor financial state the Conservatives had left the province. We all knew in advance the news wouldn't be good, but there you were, still Mr. Positive.



You're not supposed to see through me so clearly!



That's my point. You don't seem glib or spin-doctoring; what's your sign?



Capricorn. I'm a positive person. And I think using the example you gave with McGuinty that there were positive things to talk about. You focus on those and you get results. I could have focused on the negative, but why?



You've joined in the Pride parades of the last few years – will you march again this year and more importantly, what will you be wearing?



Yes and I'll be wearing clothes.



You don't have to wear clothes if you don't want to, Mr. Mayor.



I know. But trust me. I will.