This primer features a selection of stories that Globe and Mail journalists have written about Justin Trudeau during his years in public life. The stories have been curated by The Globe’s John Ibbitson, who has also written a preface and explanatory text for each story.

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**JEFFREY SIMPSON**
Justin Trudeau has transformed the Liberal Party. He has already won, whatever happens on election night.

A party whose share of the popular vote had declined through four straight elections now vies for first place with the Conservatives and NDP. A party once strapped for cash, workers or enthusiasm now boasts improved fundraising and teams of volunteers blanketing ridings and high-fiving each other on Twitter. A party once riven with infighting has united around a young, dynamic and charismatic leader.

Justin Trudeau has brought the Liberal Party back from the brink and put it back in the game.

Yes, there have been mistakes, some costly. Verbal gaffes, wrong-footed policy choices, the strange case of Eve Adams. But none of this is worse than you should expect from a young politician suddenly thrust into the leadership of a national party. Just ask Stephen Harper. He made some whoppers when he was starting out.

That said, the challenge for Mr. Trudeau remains daunting. Liberals like to call themselves the party of the radical centre, the place where reason trumps ideology, where people from different places and stations can make common cause.

But Stephen Harper has given Canada almost a decade of firmly Conservative government. And Thomas Mulcair’s NDP is strongly challenging the Liberals for the loyalty of progressive voters. Is there still room in federal politics for a brokerage party, a big tent party where economic conservatives and social progressives can live comfortably together? Or have we entered a more polarized age?

To reassemble the old Liberal coalition, Justin Trudeau must bring together left and right, French and English, students and seniors. It may be possible; it may not be. But who could have done a better job? When they made him leader in 2013, Liberal supporters saw Justin Trudeau as the party’s best hope for renewal. They were right.

The Globe has been covering Pierre Trudeau’s eldest son his entire life. The stories that follow chronicle that journey, from a grief-stricken high school teacher speaking at his father’s funeral to the man who would be prime minister.

It’s a remarkable journey. Read all about it.
Justin Trudeau has been a public figure since his birth, on Christmas Day, 1971, the first-born of Pierre Elliott and Margaret Trudeau. The Globe reported on the prime minister taking his oldest son with him on a visit to see the Pope in 1980. And when brother Michel Trudeau died in an avalanche in 1998, Justin spoke to the public on the family’s behalf. But Mr. Trudeau’s eulogy at his father’s funeral catapulted the young teacher to a new level of national attention.
‘Je t’aime, papa’

The very private Justin becomes a very public figure

By André Picard and Rod Mickleburgh with a report from Robert Matas
October 4, 2000

MONTREAL and VANCOUVER


“Je t’aime, papa.”

As a young man buried his dad, a star was born.

Justin Pierre James Trudeau captured the hearts of a country yesterday with a eulogy to his father that by turns brought smiles and tears to many as he said goodbye for himself, his family and the nation.

It was not the first time Justin, 28, has been a public spokesman for his famous family. He came forward when his brother, Michel, died in an avalanche two years ago.

But the powerful speech for his father, the tears, the head resting on the coffin, have made him a truly public figure, quite likely ending the privacy he has cherished.

The man who stood before Canadians yesterday has most recently been a drama and French teacher at a private school in Vancouver, one who encouraged his students to go on stage, even to the point of carrying them on.

“He always kept us motivated,” said Andrea Jukes, a Grade 10 student at West Point Grey Academy.

Justin has followed in many of the same footsteps as his father, Pierre Elliott Trudeau. He attended the Jesuit-run Collège Jean-de-Brébeuf in Montreal. Like his father, Justin is a skilled outdoorsman. He has even taught white-water rafting. Also like his father, Justin has revealed little of his private life.

Neighbours are protective of him on Vancouver’s west side, where he lives in a stylish, red-brick heritage apartment building, six storeys high. Some have even denied he resides there.

“Be good to him,” said a woman neighbour, who confirmed he does live in the building.

Justin, on a leave of absence from the school, has been granted virtually complete privacy by Vancouverites and its news media.

Most knew little about him until he appeared on the Gabereau Live TV show earlier this year with his mother.

Those who got a close-up glimpse of him at the time were bowled over by his stunning, matinee-idol looks, his tact, and his concern for the well-being
of his mother, Margaret Trudeau.

The pair went public to raise awareness about avalanche safety after the tragic death of Justin’s youngest brother, Michel, in 1998 at Kokanee Lake, high in B.C.’s interior mountains.

“He certainly has style. He knows what kind of a guy he is,” said show host Vicki Gabereau.

“As he’s shown in the past few days, unlike like most of us who often don’t know how to react, he knows exactly what has to happen and how it should happen.”

Ms. Gabereau said Justin is like his father in his ability to be in control.

She recalled accompanying Justin to the ski cabin where his brother stayed before his fatal accident.

“The photographers were pressing in on him a little bit, saying ‘over there,’ and so on. Finally, he said: ‘It’s enough, now.’ And they stopped.”

She said Justin was very conscious of his mother’s fragility.

“He was very protective of her. You can see, by the fact he’s a teacher of young people, that there’s tremendous character there.”

Justin, the eldest son, has taken on the role of protector. He was the one who, voluntarily, dealt with the media after Michel’s funeral.

“The reason I agreed to do this is to ask you to please leave my father be. Leave my mother be. Give us our time to grieve, and our space,” he said.

Justin has spent his life close to the limelight, though he has rarely been the focus of attention.

His birth—on Christmas Day, 1971—made national news when he became the first child born to a sitting Canadian prime minister in 102 years.

He was subject to intense scrutiny. A picture of him, a pudgy, bald-headed baby with one shoe off and one shoe on, adorned the prime minister’s Christmas cards in 1972.

At age 3, the boy made front-page news when he bellowed that his father was a “wicked old man” when he was spirited out of a party a little earlier than he wanted to go home.

But, as Justin grew older, his intensely private father sheltered him from the public. Even though Justin and his brothers travelled around Canada and the world—meeting the Pope and going to the North Pole to see Santa (a story he related yesterday to show his father’s tender side)—they were always considered off-limits to journalists.

The well-ingrained reticence to the camera remains, though only partly. The family allowed one Canadian Press still camera and one television crew in the church yesterday.

Justin has said repeatedly that politics do not interest him, but, like a good would-be politician, has never ruled out public life.

“I’m a teacher and I believe in mak-
ing a difference,” he told The Globe and Mail in an interview this summer. “If I ever felt that could be done in politics, I might end up there. But it’s not something I’m making plans around.”

Four and a half years ago, Justin gave early hints of the impressive young man he appears to have become, sitting in on meetings with world leaders at the international InterAction gathering in Vancouver in 1996. His father also attended the meetings.

During an interview after the conference, Justin, then 24, emphasized that he was trying to escape being identified as the son of famous parents. “They taught me my name means nothing. It’s who you are,” he told the interviewer. “I don’t make a big deal out of the fact that I have the privilege of attending this stuff.”

At yesterday’s funeral, he showed many traces of his father’s style. When he spoke, particularly in French, the voice was that of his father. So was the smile, the eloquence, the rose on the lapel and the ability to seize the moment.

At his young age, Justin has already lived through his parents’ very public breakup, buried a younger brother, and now a father. The pressures seemed to have left him mature beyond his years.
After the party’s defeat in the 2006 election, many Liberals searched for renewal from a new generation of Liberal leaders. They didn’t have to look far.
The man who would be king

Roy MacGregor questions whether Justin Trudeau, who will likely be running for the Liberal leadership next time around, is Trudeau II or Trudeau Lite?

By Roy MacGregor
November 25, 2006

OTTAWA

“You have to run!”
“We need you!”
“YOU HAVE TO RUN!”

They are two young women, university students, and they are almost screaming here in the middle of the Carleton University campus, their breath visible enough on such a crisp late November evening it seems the words are hanging from their open mouths.

“YOU HAVE TO RUN!”
The writing on the wall, so to speak.

He has heard it all before—and will hear it a whole lot more this coming week as the Liberal Party of Canada heads to Montreal in search of someone who can bring the lost magic back.

“I sometimes feel like running,” he says in a voice so small it barely mists.

“Running away.”

Justin Trudeau is 34 years old. As has become the social phenomenon of North America in the 21st century, he has pushed being a teenager right through his 20s and has now reached an age where he both profits from and pays for his lack of seasoning.

Some, particularly those who scan the grey prospects of the leadership stage, see him as a messiah, Pierre Trudeau incarnate at best, Pierre Trudeau Lite at worst, but all the same a future hope. Others cringe at the thought, particularly those of a certain age who perhaps no longer recall what it is to be young and a bit naive and refreshingly passionate about a world that will not hear them out—as well as sometimes acting, well, downright silly.

He is a young man so handsome even men turn to stare as he passes. He has the charming, shy smile of his father but not the father’s almost debilitating shyness. He has his mother Margaret’s thick black and curling hair. Some who like him say he has his mother’s warmth and his father’s drive; some who do not like him say he got his mother’s brains and his father’s arrogance. Everyone, on the
other hand, seems to have an opinion.
Victorious or vacuous?
Airhead or future head?
He has just brought a one-hour lecture to a close by turning a question-and-answer session into a game of Simon Says. He has had so many questions that, in an effort to ease into a conclusion, he has asked the final questioners to stand and go through something rather more suited to Grade 5, which he once taught, than the university population that has packed the hall, and he has had them play the game until only one question is left.

It is not, mercifully, the one that he cannot avoid, the one that trails him about the country like an outstanding warrant: “When will you run for office?”

The crowd this evening loves him. The son who delivered that memorable eulogy at his father’s funeral—the open-hearted emotion so admired by many, the “Friends, Romans, countrymen” theme so dismissed by others—has become an effective and often moving public speaker. For an hour he stood, not a note in hand, and spoke passionately about education and teaching and the environment. Ignoring the podium, he stood, jacket open, at the front of the stage, his stance missing only the hitched thumbs to remind everyone of Pierre Trudeau’s “gunslinger” pose.

The hints are constant, the shadow never far from the spotlight. The voice. The eyes. The way he sometimes shrugs and cups his hand. The way women quicken in his presence.

But there are vast differences, as well. The father was sewn up so tightly nothing ever got out he did not wish to be seen, the Jesuit Spartan micro-managing his own emotions. The son sometimes bursts through his stitches, the inside exposed for anyone within hearing distance.

“I’ve got to quit using ‘I’ so much,” he says at one point during a long day.

“I’ve got to quit using ‘I’ so much.”

But there are other things to notice after 12 hours in his company. It is one thing to fake it for the media, but quite another to be constantly polite, warm, generous with time and a good listener to every stranger.

“How can I put this?” says Marc Lemay, the Bloc Québécois member for Abitibi-Témiscamingue who bumped into Trudeau at a noon function. “He is much more. . . polite . . . than his father.”

They come at him everywhere he goes.

“We need you,” presses restaurateur Claudio Fracassi. “We need to get excited about this country again.

“We need Trudeaumania!”

The son flinches. It is no longer 1968; it is 2006. He is not Pierre Elliott Trudeau; he is Justin Pierre James...
Trudeau. Comparisons are simple; comparisons are odious. In John English’s new book on the father, Citizen of the World: The Life of Pierre Elliott Trudeau, he says that Pierre completed his schooling and then “spent the next decade and a half seemingly as a dilettante, writing articles for newspapers and journals, driving fast cars and a Harley-Davidson motorbike, escorting beautiful women to concerts and restaurants, travelling the globe wherever he wished, founding political groupings that went nowhere. . . .” Then, in 1965—“suddenly, or so it seemed”—he ran and won a seat and, three years later, was leader and prime minister “amid a media frenzy usually reserved for rock stars, not politicians.”

Justin Trudeau does not have the luxury of coming out of nowhere. It is, however, somewhat possible to describe the son’s early adult years as dilettantish: teaching snowboarding in Whistler, taking boxing lessons, signing up for various causes, speaking out on issues, appearing, somewhat surprisingly, as a host of the Giller literary awards, acting in a CBC film on the life of First World War hero Talbot Papineau, dabbling in school and politics.

But just as it has been said that Pierre Trudeau also did substantial matters in those years—getting involved in a famous strike, starting up a political journal, doing legal work—the son has had his own accomplishments that have their own value: teaching elementary school and high school, serving as chair of the Katimavik youth project, returning to McGill recently to complete a master’s in environmental geography.

But he is not alone in flinching slightly when the word “Trudeaumania” comes his way. The news media often recoil.

It would be fair comment to say Justin Trudeau is hardly a media favourite, though on this particular day—with Prime Minister Stephen Harper having announced “nation” status for Québeckers “within a united Canada”—they are chasing down his every word.

Still, his privilege, this sense of him never having done anything to warrant such attention, deeply offends many. They don’t like his celebrity—even when, in taking him on, they only make him more noticed.

After the young Trudeau was widely quoted for saying Liberal leadership candidate Michael Ignatieff’s concept of Quebec as a “nation” stood against “everything my father stood for,” he was taken on by one of the giants of Canadian journalism, the erudite Robert Fulford.

“In recent weeks,” Fulford wrote in his National Post column, “Justin Trudeau has upgraded his status from
minor annoyance to major national pest.”
Trudeau laughed off the piece, saying he’d heard worse and seen worse, but all the same has kept it from his wife, Sophie Gregoire. She is not so sanguine about such coverage, whether it concerns a shot at her husband or the two of them being compared to JFK Jr. and Caroline Bessette, as happened last year during their wedding.

Trudeau’s friends say he handles it all well. He has, after all, been in the media spotlight since Christmas Day, 1971, the day he was born. How many 11-year-olds could claim, as he can, that “The first dead body I ever saw was Leonid Brezhnev.” It was Justin who spoke for the family at the funeral of, first, his younger brother Micha, who was killed in an avalanche, and then, two years later in the fall of 2000, his father. He knows who he is, friends say, and he understands the baggage as well as the good fortune.

“That polarity,” says close friend from university Gerald Butts, who is now principal secretary to Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty, “is what he must deal with every time he opens his mouth. He’s not dealing with a father’s looming figure, but a ghost.”

“The danger in trying to compare anyone to my father,” Justin says about early comparisons of candidate Michael Ignatieff to Pierre Trudeau, “is that my father is no longer a man, he’s an icon.”

He has heard for years how “vacuous” he is. “What am I supposed to do?” he asks in exasperation as he races toward an appointment on Parliament Hill. “Recite pi to the 10th decimal? Ask them to throw me a line of poetry and have me finish the poem?”

“Justin is a very smart guy,” says Butts. “If any of us were called upon to demonstrate our intelligence in front of the public every day, I’m not sure how well any of us would do. And he’s just not interested in being a public intellectual—unlike some others I could name. He’s not a complainer and he’s not a whiner.”

“I have no interest,” Trudeau says during a morning break, “of becoming ‘The National Brooder.’ “

He is often dismissed as an airhead but is quite well read—in his overnight bag he carries a treatise on world water supplies and a book on modern capitalism. This day he moderates a panel debate on the United Nations role in the Darfur conflict and does so with grace and a considerable background of knowledge.

“People think I’m surrounded by policy advisers,” he says. But apart from occasionally talking to his father’s old policy adviser, Ted Johnson, and old family friend Dr. Joe MacInnis, he “muddles along” entirely on his
“People think I have people to handle my media,” he says. “They think I’m being ‘packaged.’ Well, I’m not.”

He can hold his own in debate. On the Hill he runs into Bloc Leader Gilles Duceppe at a reception and Duceppe challenges Trudeau on his statements that the whole “nation” debate is a waste of time and an old story.

Duceppe clearly feels otherwise—as do certain Liberal operators, one of whom at this moment is circulating an e-mail claiming that Pierre Trudeau would disagree with his son. Duceppe and Trudeau argue back and forth about definitions, about maps, about ethnic groups, and while Duceppe grows increasingly animated and red-faced, Trudeau never for a moment loses his cool.

“I think he thought he was scoring points against my father,” Trudeau laughs later.

Trudeau has no problem with the word “nation”—he points out its use throughout Quebec, including the “National Assembly;” nor did his father have difficulty with the casual use of the word, writing in his 1993 memoirs “Je n’ai jamais contesté l’existence de la nation canadienne-française.” Both, however, would fight any constitutional use of the word—which appeared to be the road on which the initial Ignatieff suggestion and, most assuredly, the Bloc proposal, were headed.

Later that evening, when the whole “nation” debate has been back-burnered by the government motion to let the word stand in conjunction with “within Canada,” he all but shrugs it off.

“I’m not crazy about it,” he says. “It’s an unnecessary step on a slippery slope, as I’ve been saying. But since it says Quebeckers, not Quebec, because it implies no constitutional consequences, and mostly, because it allows us to move on and deal with bigger issues, let’s use it to close a door that was foolishly opened.”

The door that most concerns him is opening in another direction these days. He has not yet stepped through it, but that is only a technicality. He will be an observer at the Liberal convention where he will support former Ontario education minister Gerard Kennedy. He will run for office himself, likely sooner than later. But he says he has to be “ready” first.

“You’re not supposed to be a finished product at 30,” he says. “You’re still a work in progress, surely.”

True, but equally true a work in progress in your late 40s, the age his father burst upon the national scene, as the CBC’s Gordon Donaldson so perfectly put it, like “a stone through a stained-glass window.”
That could never happen now, not in the current political climate, but a breakthrough is still well within the realm of consideration for the younger Trudeau, given the soaring interest in his pet issue, the environment. He is also realizing that, about to turn 35, it is time to embrace maturity and move beyond the campus persona.

“He can do it,” says Rahim Jaffer, the Conservative MP for Edmonton-Strathcona and also 34. “There’s just no doubt. He’s personable. He’s passionate. He has likeability—and he wants to make Canada a better place.”

As for the name, it will never change, never be anything but great fortune and great burden.

Geoffrey Pearson knows what that feels like. He, too, was born on Christmas Day, but 44 years before Justin Trudeau; and, unlike Trudeau, his father, Lester, was not then Prime Minister of Canada. He found the Pearson name a wonderful help in his life as a career diplomat. It opened doors. But it comes with a price of its own.

“I’m glad to see Justin Trudeau here,” Geoffrey Pearson says as he opens the Darfur debate.

“Both of us have a name to live up to.”

And then he pauses, nodding.

“It’s hard, isn’t it?”
Justin Trudeau sought to enter Parliament via Montreal’s working-class, immigrant-heavy riding of Papineau. Though he wanted people to get past his last name, that name would prove a valuable asset. He won in Papineau even as the Liberals suffered one of their worst election defeats to date.
The son also rises

‘My challenge,’ says Justin Trudeau, ‘is to get them to know the first name and not just the last one.’ Konrad Yakabuski hits the campaign trail with a candidate who is actually generating some excitement

By Konrad Yakabuski
September 20, 2008

Justin Trudeau, 36, the new glamour boy of Canadian politics, looks like the outsider that he is as he knocks on doors in Montreal’s gritty Papineau riding, where the roar of the Metropolitan Expressway that looms on stilts above the neighbourhood pervades the lives of the working-class denizens below. But it’s precisely because he is not one of them that so many people in Papineau will vote for the Liberal candidate on Oct. 14.

He is of famous stock, the scion of Canada’s only rock star prime minister and a man in whom some demoralized Liberals behold their ticket back to power. Held up against the current offer of colourless party leaders, beginning with his own, Mr. Trudeau is a rare Canadian politician who actually generates excitement.

He is also a target of abundant derision, much of it from Liberals themselves. They bemoan his eccentricities—such as this week’s bizarre Web video in which he repeatedly shifts from French to English in the same sentence and displays the kind of overwrought elocution of a poor thespian. His love of the camera delights the publishers of Quebec’s celebrity gossip magazines, but only serves to feed the Paris Hilton comparisons. He sent the eyes of fellow pols rolling when he showed up in the searing heat at this year’s Canada Day celebration in Montreal wearing his father’s famous fringed buckskin jacket.

More important, his infant political career has been characterized by a series of inopportune remarks chas-ising unilingual Canadians, likening linguistic school boards to segregation and dismissing Quebec nationalists as relics. He has championed the Charter rights of extraterrestrials. He often comes off as neither well read nor self-aware.

None of that is likely to matter in Papineau. Name recognition alone will take him far in this ethnically diverse, low-income riding. Besides, Papineau
had been red for decades until Bloc Québécois candidate Vivian Barbot narrowly knocked off Liberal Pierre Pettigrew in the wake of the sponsorship scandal in 2006.

“There are a lot of people who will like me instantly because of my name. And there a lot of people who will hate me instantly because of my name,” Mr. Trudeau says. “My challenge is to get beyond those initial impressions and get them to know the first name and not just the last one.”

The Trudeau haters surely exist. They are just not out on this day. One elated senior citizen runs off to install her teeth, intent on looking her best for the unannounced but welcome visitor. Her equally delighted neighbour furiously slides her hand back and forth across her apron before enfacing it softly with that of the prepossessing son of. She is having a moment.

“You make my day,” cries Marguerite Zuk, 79, grabbing the Liberal candidate’s arm on the doorstep of her modest duplex. “You’re just as handsome as I thought you’d be.”

The Haitian-born Ms. Barbot, a teacher and former head of the Quebec Women’s Federation, has one of the highest profiles of any Bloc MP. Though the 8,000-strong Haitian community in Papineau traditionally has been Liberal, she won over a large portion of its voters last time around. And Liberal Leader Stéphane Dion’s failure to launch could send enough federalists defecting to the Conservatives to push the Bloc over the top again.

It’s just not likely. Papineau is Mr. Trudeau’s to lose.

The riding was not his first choice. He wanted to run in the normally solid Liberal bastion of Outremont, the fashionable Montreal district where he lives with his TV host wife, Sophie Grégoire, and their infant son, Xavier.

Mr. Dion was not eager to share the spotlight with a silver-spooned political upstart and potential rival, especially not after Mr. Trudeau had exposed Liberal fault lines when he denounced Quebec nationalism, as he did in late 2006, as “an old idea from the 19th century ... based on the smallness of thought.”

Mr. Dion’s chosen candidate in Outremont lost to his NDP adversary in a by-election last year, a few months after Mr. Trudeau had won the hotly contested Liberal nomination in Papineau.

“This riding is exactly what I hoped it was when I chose it. It represents the future of Canada,” Mr. Trudeau says of Papineau. Immigrants make up 40 per cent of the population and half of all residents count neither French nor English as their mother tongue.

Mr. Trudeau is campaigning on a promise to work to build more social
housing and improve recreational facilities in a riding that is not immune to the kind of youth violence that rocked nearby Montréal-Nord last month.

“It’s not about building more prisons. It’s about building more community centres,” he says in response to the Tories’ tough-on-crime agenda. “That is one of the reasons I went into politics. I am tired of trying to convince politicians to invest in youth.”

Unlike that of his father, a constitutional scholar, Justin Trudeau’s entry into politics has not been preceded by any identifiable achievement. The English literature grad and former French teacher had been working on a master’s degree in environmental geography at McGill University before taking up politics.

“I’m very much someone who tries to be a generalist, who tries to understand a little bit about a huge range of things,” he explains. “My strength has always been talking to people who are specialists and drawing from them a fairly reliable big picture.”

There are Liberals in English Canada who are counting on Trudeau fils to become the party’s flag bearer for the strong federalist vision his father fought to preserve. Those hopes were bolstered when the younger Trudeau spoke out against Conservative Leader Stephen Harper’s motion, passed in the House of Commons in late 2006, to recognize that “the Québécois form a nation within a united Canada.”

“Who are Quebeckers to be recognized as a nation?” he scoffed last year in an interview with a community newspaper.

It didn’t quite have the sting or gravitas of his father’s attack on the 1987 Meech Lake accord, the deal struck by Brian Mulroney to entrench Quebec’s distinct status in the Constitution. But it did create another headache for Mr. Dion.

The “nation” debate is at the heart of the campaign in Quebec. The Tories are saturating the airwaves with ads congratulating themselves for accommodating Quebec. The Bloc tries to counter them with TV spots depicting the motion as a meaningless gesture.

“To see [Bloc Leader Gilles] Duceppe and Mr. Harper bringing up the national-unity file, and everything that goes with it, well, it’s a good example of the politics of division. To me, it is a desperate measure [that aims to] to recentre the debate around wedge issues,” Mr. Trudeau says.

Speaking of wedges, for every Liberal eagerly anticipating Mr. Trudeau’s arrival in Ottawa, there is probably another who is dreading it. Deputy Leader Michael Ignatieff, once deemed by Mr. Trudeau to “lack wisdom,” is hardly waiting with bated breath. Many
Liberals fear that Mr. Trudeau could accentuate the division in the caucus over party policy toward Quebec.

But no one on this street is asking about his agenda. They don’t need to. As Mrs. Zuk says admiringly: “Tel père tel fils.” Like father like son.
Although he kept a low profile in Parliament, many were already looking to Justin Trudeau as the next Liberal leader, as Michael Ignatieff struggled to reverse the party’s continuing slide in popularity.
‘I don’t have anything to prove’: Justin Trudeau

The former PM’s son says he’d be perfectly happy if he never gets to 24 Sussex

By Sonia Verma

October 1, 2010

Justin Trudeau has this party trick and, as with most things about him, he maintains that it’s wildly misunderstood.

The prank involves hurtling himself headfirst down a flight of stairs. He has pulled it at Rosedale house parties, his own wedding reception and on a busy Ottawa street in front of a fast-moving car to impress Sophie Grégoire on one of their first dates.

It’s a stage fall, totally harmless and taught to him by his father, but, invariably, it shocks.

Is it a pathetic cry for attention? A lame attempt to copy his father’s famous pirouette behind the back of the Queen?

Or is it a clever way to poke fun at himself in the face of an establishment that can’t seem to decide whether to embrace him as the second coming or dismiss him as a charlatan who invokes his family name to trade up?

“I remember I was chatting with various folks and I said, ‘What this party needs is a little bit of a shake-up,’” Mr. Trudeau recalled the other day. “And I said, ‘Just watch me.’"

It was an unconscious reference to Pierre Trudeau’s famous response to a reporter’s question on how far he dared to go in the suspension of civil liberties during the October Crisis.

For most of his life, Justin Trudeau has danced with another dare: to follow in his father’s footsteps.

Ten years ago, he delivered a spine-tingling eulogy at his father’s funeral that thrust him onto the national stage.

But the former drama teacher retreated to the wings, determined to prove himself before running for office by “writing a few books, or running a school or starting an NGO or being a CEO … so I could build my own legitimacy outside of politics.”

And yet, here we are, sitting in the unimpressive office at the end of a long, dim hallway that he has earned as Liberal MP for Papineau without his
having achieved any of that.
He’s dressed in black pants and
a navy shirt unbuttoned at the col-
lar; his curly hair frames an unlined
face. He is 38 years old. He appears
immensely comfortable, immensely
pleased. He seems full of confidence.

Shockingly, there is nothing off
limits in a discussion with him: His
mother’s bipolar disorder, his past dif-
ficulties with women, his vanity and,
yes, his ambition to one day become
Canada’s prime minister.

“Do I hope my path takes me in that
nobody ever asks me do I ever want to
be minister of fisheries, like my grand-
father,” he sighs. (He is referring to his
maternal grandfather, James Sinclair,
who served in that office in the 1950s.)

Truth be told, he says, the 10th an-
niversary of his father’s death on Tues-
day didn’t mean much to him. “I don’t
really celebrate this day,” he says.
He spent the anniversary in Saskat-
atoon, talking to a group of teenagers
about the importance of “changing the
world.”

The phrase seems slightly ridiculous
for anyone approaching a 40th birth-
day to say without a hint of irony, yet
Mr. Trudeau does, again and again.

When someone asked why he didn’t
take the day off, he replied: “Because
I’m doing my job, making a difference,
trying to change the world.” Really?

Still, there’s something kind of ador-
able about the fact that he claims to
spend most mornings talking with
Sophie about whether “we are making
the best difference in the world” in-
stead of figuring out who will pick up
the kids from school or making dinner,
like the rest of us.

Obviously, Mr. Trudeau is not like
the rest of us. His first house was 24
Sussex Drive. When he was 8, he flew
with his mother to New York and par-
tied at Studio 54 with models Christie
Brinkley and Carol Alt. “The place was
still filled with feathers from Liza Min-
nelli’s birthday party the night before,
but I got to dance in the middle of the
afternoon with a couple of supermod-
els. … I wish I remembered it better,”
he recalls.

His parents’ divorce and his mother’s
depression scarred him. “If you want
to get all psychological, it certainly had
an impact on me through my early re-
lationships with women,” he says. He
declined to elaborate on this point.

He tends to blame his mother and
defend his father. “We wanted to be
good enough as kids to not have her
go, but she went,” he says of Margaret’s
decision to leave the marriage. “My
father,” in contrast, “was not an absent
father. … Every night, from 6:30 to 8
o’clock, the prime minister of Canada
would come home to be with his kids.”

Mr. Trudeau’s idealism is sometimes
mistaken as naiveté, which is in turn mistaken for stupidity. For his part, he is aware of all of the criticism, but calls it “ignorant.”

As far as he’s concerned, he has proved himself: “The day I walked onto Parliament Hill, you know sometimes you get that feeling where there’s been a terrible mistake? I’ve never felt any kind of a worry like that because I know how hard I’ve worked,” he said.

Mr. Trudeau is no dummy. He knows he’s good-looking (“I’m aware of that and I’m certainly not going to shy from it.”), lucky (“I picked the toughest riding and everything fell in.”) and special (“I think that I get to play by a bit of a different set of rules than many people because I don’t have anything to prove.”)

Which, of course, isn’t true. Mr. Trudeau has more to prove than most anyone else. His mother worries that he’s “too sensitive” for politics.

He seems to have come to terms with the huge expectations of him by convincing himself that if his dream crashes and burns, he could easily walk away from it.

“If I do the very best I can and at one point down the road, nobody asks me any more if I’m going to be prime minister one day because it becomes obvious that I’m not prime-ministerial material ... nobody will be happier than me,” he said.

Then what would he do? “Go back to teaching, write books, travel the world, run an international NGO. ... Go live somewhere with my wife and raise horses.”

If he ever becomes prime minister, “I’m not going to be a return to the good old days that everyone wants it to be,” he says.

“You put someone on a pedestal and it makes it almost impossible for them to achieve anything,” he adds.

And if he can’t manage that, at least he knows how to fall.
After the Liberals were reduced to third-party status in the 2011 election, Justin Trudeau announced that he would not be running for the party’s leadership, citing family commitments. But then he won a boxing match against Conservative senator Patrick Brazeau.
In the name of the father

By Lawrence Martin
April 3, 2012

There’s been a perception about Justin Trudeau that he’s the mother’s son, that much of the mettle from the father descended to the other boy, Alexandre. It’s the reason, many Liberals have felt, that the party shouldn’t invest future leadership hopes in Justin.

He’s undisciplined, critics contend, light on policy and cavalier. Not everyone holds to the perception, but it was reinforced recently with his blatherings about Quebec’s being justified in going its own way, given the Harper government’s values. That brought down a hailstorm of abuse on the 40-year-old MP, for whom there’s a lot of bile out there to begin with. This is Western Canada’s time, the country’s conservative time, and Pierre Trudeau, of course, symbolized other regions and other values. Thirty years on, Prairie people still haven’t got over the national energy program. They still react with wrath to the Trudeau name.

And so when they heard that Pierre Trudeau’s kid was going into the ring against tattooed, tough-guy Tory Senator Patrick Brazeau, they were licking their chops. They could picture him getting bloodied. A Trudeau on the canvas! The ultimate humiliation.

As we know, the opposite happened. “Trudeau celebrates Earth Hour by knocking Brazeau’s lights out,” said one online post.

The boxing match, while done for charity, was a fitting metaphor for our lowbrow politics. Verbal abuse verges on fisticuffs, so why not take it that extra step. The Trudeau-Brazeau fight could touch off a trend, here and abroad.

The most significant part of Saturday’s bout was not that all the Trudeau haters had to eat crow. It was the image transformation of Justin from mother’s boy to father’s son and all that this could entail.

It was daring for Justin to put himself in the position he did. He knew, as he told me with an air of cockiness a couple of days before the match, that Mr. Brazeau wasn’t as tough as people were saying. But it was still a gamble. He risked bringing humiliation not only on himself but on the family name. He risked a lasting career setback.

Entering the ring required his fa-
ther’s confidence, courage and penchant for risk taking. There’s a steeliness to Justin I’ve noticed over the years, a sense of belief, of purpose, and no sense that he’s one to crumble under pressure. His boxing skills came from his father, a martial arts enthusiast, as well.

Before entering the ring, he might have imagined his dad in the gunslinger pose or on the reviewing stand in Montreal on election eve 1968, standing alone and defiant as separatist demonstrators hurled projectiles at him. After the match, he was on Justin’s mind. “Je t’aime, papa,” he wrote.

Justin has had his growing pains, moments of naiveté, immaturity and winginess. But his potential is considerable. He’s strong in the languages and he has star-power charisma and, as he showed in the fight, it’s more than pretty-boy charisma.

The passions run deep. We saw it recently when he jumped to his feet in the House of Commons and rudely attacked the Environment Minister, using a synonym for the word excrement for the government’s treatment of opposition members who wished to attend a climate-change summit.

It wasn’t a staged moment. It was a reflex action. But like his ill-advised words on Quebec’s leaving, it got him into trouble. Many were starting to write him off. But a boxing match with “a star is reborn” story line changes that. It may come to be seen as Justin Trudeau’s defining career moment.

For the Liberal Party, Bob Rae is doing a very impressive job as pro tem pilot. But given his age, his baggage and Thomas Mulcair’s ascendancy to the NDP throne, chances of rebirth under him are remote. If the party is to rise again, it may well be that it needs someone of daunting name and spirit to remind the country of its daunting days.
The Trudeaus are Canada’s Kennedys, with very public triumphs and tragedies. So when Justin Trudeau married television host Sophie Grégoire in 2005, it was news. And as Trudeau became the prohibitive favourite to win the Liberal leadership, it was only natural to want to know more about his wife.
If there is a handbook for being a political wife, Sophie Grégoire has just torn it up.

Maybe it helps to be married to Justin Trudeau, for whom the old rules don’t apply, or to be on the receiving end of good advice from his non-conformist mother, Margaret.

But in the midst of the Liberal leadership campaign, the 38-year-old mother of two is talking to a crowd of female schoolteachers in Ontario more like a New Age healer than a risk-averse political partner.

“Focus on your breath, the breath is the divine pulsation within,” she says in the ballroom of a Toronto hotel. And then she begins chanting a precisely articulated Sanskrit invocation designed to help her audience feel more blissful and aware about their often under-appreciated profession.

Ms. Grégoire is a recently qualified yoga teacher, energetic supporter of women’s issues and public speaker who believes in sharing her knowledge “with as much truth and authenticity as I can.”

In the murkier world of party politics, especially at the higher levels to which her husband now aspires, these are not necessarily qualities to be honoured. And that is what makes Sophie Grégoire deeply interesting.

To the mostly young female teachers, who can’t get enough of her free-floating candour, she offers up yoga-class insights (“The sacred feminine is on the rise”), tips from the dance teacher at her children’s daycare, life lessons from a hiking trip in Morocco and reassuring quotes from the collection of fridge magnets she picks up on anonymity-seeking family trips to Vermont—“I’m at that awkward stage between jail bait and cougar” gets a good laugh. So does “Tequila, because beer isn’t fast enough.”

Political advisers to leadership candidates are a nervous race, eager to stave off outbreaks of spousal personality before they become hazardous. Ms. Grégoire seems bound to ruffle the all-knowing backroom boys, if not the girls. But when she’s asked in a post-speech interview if the more sober members of Team Trudeau have started leaning on her, she laughs an
uproariously independent laugh.

“They haven’t tried that out on me,” she says finally. “I think I have good common sense. I’m realistic enough to realize that sometimes, yes, I’m going to have to be careful. But to the extent of censoring who I am? No, I’m not sure that’s going to be necessary.”

In her political world view, truth and authenticity are paramount. When she introduced her husband at the launch of his leadership campaign, she says, “the one thing I wanted to share with people was the purity of his intention. He’s got brains, he’s got a great team, but beyond all that is the purity—it flows through his blood.”

They have that much in common, she allows. “What really drew me into his being was the child within. He is very present in his life in the best of ways, because he’s in tune with who he is. He’s done a lot of work to get to know himself, and I think we connect on that level: When we engage with people, it comes from a real place.”

That quality was very much in evidence at the teachers’ gathering, where one questioner broke into tears as she shared her experience of job stress, and many participants got personal hugs from the charismatic guest speaker.

But in other ways, Ms. Grégoire noted, she and her husband are quite different professionally and personally.

“He tends to be more reclusive when faced with stress, while I tend to expand and talk it out. We’ve been very aware of our dynamics as a couple and we’ve worked that out—nothing comes easy.”

With political enemies looking for evidence to cast Mr. Trudeau as soft and naive, isn’t that a dangerous remark? “I don’t accept that,” she says. “What we need is more goodness in society, and people are ready to elevate not only their thinking but their awareness of human consciousness to a more refined place.”

Ms. Grégoire knows politics can be a dirty business, but she came round to the decision that it was time to share her husband with Canadians. She believes, after some consideration, that it’s possible for him to be both a good father and “complete his responsibility as a human being”—i.e. become a successful Liberal leader.

Although her daughter, Ella-Grace, and son, Xavier, are just 4 and 5, she thinks they have the inner peace to handle their father’s political accession. “I realize now, they were born to this. It’s normal for them when they see a huge group of people and everyone’s rushing up—they’re not stressed.”

As for how she deals with her husband’s absence, she answers, “I’m an only child and I’m very independent.
I never feel lonely when I’m alone. I miss my husband, but our time together is so precious and so full that there are ways to make this happen.”

The twinned world of family and politics she inhabits is much different from that of her mother-in-law, but she couldn’t help but take in Margaret Trudeau’s words of wisdom. “She looked me in the eyes and said in one true moment: ‘Be wise, be grounded, protect the people you love. It’s not always going to be easy.’”
Winning the Liberal leadership turned out to be the easy part. But taking the Liberals from last to first meant overcoming the dominance of not only the governing Conservatives but also the opposition New Democrats. And that meant taking on the NDP in Quebec.
Will winning over Quebec be Trudeau’s greatest challenge?

Though it’s his home province, Justin Trudeau’s father left a complicated legacy

By Konrad Yakabuski
April 12, 2013

Fewer than 12 per cent of the 127,000 people eligible to choose the next federal Liberal leader live in Quebec. That is a telling reminder of the Trudeau brand’s complicated history in a province where Pierre Trudeau, despite winning 74 of Quebec’s 75 seats in 1980, is not always remembered fondly.

If Justin Trudeau’s ascension has attracted thousands of new Liberal recruits in most parts of the country, it remains far from clear that a Trudeau-led party could be a contender in francophone Quebec.

To be sure, a recent Léger Marketing poll showed the Liberals taking the lead in Quebec with Mr. Trudeau at the helm. But the margin of error is too high, and voter engagement too low, to make the results very meaningful.

Mr. Trudeau consistently talked tough, and sometimes condescendingly, toward sovereigntists during his first term in Parliament, leading a certain segment of hardcore Quebec federalists nostalgic for his father to see him as their champion. The problem is, most of those people are English-speaking and confined to 20 odd seats on the island of Montreal and western Quebec.

With only eight Liberal seats in the province now, the lowest number since Confederation, Mr. Trudeau can only go up. The party stands a reasonable chance of recapturing half a dozen or so Montreal seats that fell to the New Democrats in 2011, and perhaps two or three more in the Outaouais region.

Those also appear to be the parts of Quebec where the Liberals still have a semblance of organization. Elsewhere, they have had a hard enough time finding candidates in recent years, much less workers and voters.

The key to reviving his party in francophone Quebec may lie in Mr. Trudeau’s ability to bite his tongue. That could be problematic. Defending the federalist vision embodied by
his father is what Mr. Trudeau does best. But his tone and comments on the topic typically earn him unfavourable coverage in the Quebec media and only serve to remind francophone Quebeckers what they disliked about his father.

Take his February reaction to an NDP bill requiring only a simple majority of Quebeckers to vote for sovereignty in order for Ottawa to begin negotiations on Quebec’s secession. Mr. Trudeau quipped that such a profound change to the country should require at least as many votes as it takes for the NDP to amend its party constitution. That threshold is two-thirds, leading to headlines in Quebec suggesting Mr. Trudeau was setting the bar that high for a future ‘yes’ vote to warrant Ottawa’s recognition.

Since then, Mr. Trudeau has avoided engaging on the issue, simply saying Quebeckers are tired of the division and don’t want to talk about it. That is certainly true. But letting sleeping dogs lie also carries risks for Mr. Trudeau. The hardline federalist Liberal base in Quebec expects him to be a strident defender of his father’s vision. And as leader, Mr. Trudeau will be constantly provoked by his opponents on the issue.

“For too long, people have tried to buy off Quebec rather than involve Quebec in building the future of Canada,” Mr. Trudeau said at the final Liberal leadership debate, held in Montreal last month. For too long, he added, federalist politicians have reasoned that “if we can only extend a certain gesture or a certain recognition toward Quebec, that the Canada-Quebec question will be settled. We’ve been trying that for 30 years. At some point, you have to move on.”

That comment was directed at Liberals voting in the leadership race, not Quebec voters at large. And it drew a stiff rebuke from leadership rival Martin Cauchon, who spoke for the large number of francophone federalists who believe that having Quebec sign the 1982 Constitution must remain the stated goal of Liberals. The new leader of the party’s provincial wing, Philippe Couillard, has taken the same stand, even if all agree the time is not ripe for negotiations. That is bound to produce intra-party tensions and some awkward moments for the new federal leader.

Will Quebec turn out to be Mr. Trudeau’s Achilles heel?
No one had a more clear-eyed appreciation of the challenges facing the new Liberal leader than the eminent historian Michael Bliss.
Canadian politics: the third man

Justin Trudeau has won the right to spend years trying to turn around a crippled party. If he’s looking for a role model, he should look to Stephen Harper, who knows there’s no magic formula for dislodging a well-entrenched governing power.

By Michael Bliss
April 16, 2013

Who would not wish Justin Trudeau well as leader of the Liberal Party of Canada?

He has taken on a job shunned by Liberals of much more seniority and achievement, who have opted for lucrative sinecures outside politics. The perception out there—think about the other candidates—is that the Liberal leadership isn’t much of a prize. Who in his right mind wants to spend years trying to turn around a crippled, nearly moribund organization?

It’s like trying to save the old Eaton’s department stores, once a great and apparently impregnable national institution. There were young Eatons who tried to follow in Timothy’s footsteps. They found that history, and their industry, had passed them by. They couldn’t compete with more nimble opponents schooled in the best American approaches to retailing. Ultimately, the family name counted for little—and now it survives mostly in Canadian history books and museums. Maybe Stephen Harper’s hidden agenda with the new Canadian Museum of History is to create a mausoleum for the Liberal Party.

Which is to say that it’s unlikely Mr. Harper is quaking in his boots at the changing of the Liberal guard. The real meaning of polls this season is that support for the government is holding up better than most prime ministers could expect after seven years of governing in difficult times. The Conservatives have a fiercely loyal base that extends across the country, are the best fundraisers in Canadian politics and have a leader now widely acknowledged, even by his enemies, to be the most capable politician of this decade. Mr. Harper leads a seasoned cabinet, does not lack for potential successors and has a B-team of MPs being nicely seasoned for promotion. Their restlessness is probably a sign of health and energy on the back benches.

High hopes, a friendly press gallery and bumps in the polls greeted Stéphane Dion and Michael Ignatieff as virginal Liberal leaders. Each seemed
to be the kind of person around whom thoughtful Canadians would surely rally. Each would surely best the wick- ed Mr. Harper in Parliament and on the hustings.

Then the honeymoons end. Election campaigns require real supporters, not virtual ones. The Liberal reality is that the party barely exists west of the Great Lakes; it can’t come close to matching the Conservatives in fund-raising; no one knows what it or Mr. Trudeau stand for. He hasn’t attracted prominent new faces to the Liberal cause. Most of the 30 new ridings to be contested in the next election will go Conservative. The NDP is still alive and kicking.

Canadian elections are usually contests to win the opportunity to form a government. Recent exceptions came in 1997 and 2000, when the opposition was so divided that no one seriously believed the Chrétien government could be toppled. The main struggle was for second place.

This will characterize our national politics in the first few years of the Justin Trudeau area: not Mr. Trudeau versus Mr. Harper, but Mr. Trudeau versus Thomas Mulcair—the elimination round that has to be settled before we have a meaningful title fight. The fiercest battles, especially in Quebec, will be between Liberals and New Democrats. Once there’s a clear victor, or an agreement to merge, the real challenge to the Tories will begin.

Goodwill for Justin Trudeau has a lot to do with a sense that he’s not so much exploiting his name as trying to modernize and maintain the organization that so many of his father’s successors, and even to a degree the patriarch himself, did so much to damage. It would be nice if we still had the option of shopping at Eaton’s.

Not only is Mr. Trudeau hard-working, free-spirited and telegenic, but there will be no knives out for him—not for a long time. No matter what happens to the Liberals in the next election, his leadership will not be challenged. He will have at least two, maybe three, opportunities to win his spurs.

It took Canada’s conservatives many years, many elections, to learn there was no magic formula for dislodging a well-entrenched governing power. You have to be disciplined, canny, opportunistically principled, ruthless, relentless and in it for the long haul. For Justin Trudeau, the exemplary politician to guide him along the hard road he faces is probably not Pierre Trudeau, who lived in a different Canadian political world. The more important model for a Liberal leader in this century and in the party’s current predicament is Stephen Harper.

Michael Bliss is a historian, author and professor emeritus at the University of Toronto
With the Conservatives plagued by a growing scandal over the expenses of Conservative senators Mike Duffy, Pamela Wallin and Patrick Brazeau, the Liberals soared in popularity under their charismatic young leader. But galvanizing young voters would be crucial to any sustained success.
The youth vote is key for today’s Trudeau

Unlike older Canadians, Millennials tend to view casting a ballot as a choice, not duty

By Michael Adams
August 26, 2013

Justin Trudeau, leader of a Liberal Party that many recent polls have found nudging ahead of the Conservatives, is fond of describing his growing army of young volunteers across the country. This hints at a bold claim: that young people aren’t really disengaged; they have simply been waiting for the right leader—and Mr. Trudeau is it.

Maybe.

Environics Research Group’s social-values research seeks to measure the orientations that underlie Canadians’ attitudes on issues of the day: to probe beyond party preferences and current affairs to examine deeply held convictions about concepts like authority and fairness. Our values surveys find young people to be strong on the “rejection of authority” value and weak on the “duty” value. In short, Millennials are less willing than older Canadians to defer to institutions, parties or leaders. No coincidence, then, that only about a quarter (24 per cent) of Canadians between 18 and 29 say they identify with a political party. By contrast, the proportion among those 60 or older is four in 10 (41 per cent).

To the extent that young Canadians find a leader compelling, it’s likely to be because of a sense of affinity or even emotional connection, rather than hail-to-the-chief allegiance. Young people score high on a number of values associated with social and emotional connection, such as “social intimacy,” “introspection” and “empathy.” These values, combined with a relative aversion to duty and authority, suggest that Millennials’ attachment to leaders may be less a matter of dutiful deference and more a matter of simply liking, trusting or relating to another person.

The alchemy of personal connection—whether through mass media, social media or even real-life contact—can be powerful, but it can also be fleeting. As a result, young people’s attachment to leaders may be in-
tense but changeable. Idealistic young people who are really turned on by a public figure may be motivated to use their social and online influence to shore up that person’s support; 18- to 29-year-olds are slightly more likely than other cohorts to say they have persuaded others how to vote.

But leaders may or may not be able to keep the love alive over the months leading up to election day, let alone in the course of years in government. Indeed, even candidates who seem to hold strong appeal for young people can have trouble getting them out to mark a ballot.

In the 2011 federal election, 39 per cent of 18- to 24-year-olds and 45 per cent of 25- to 34-year-olds turned out to vote—rates well below the national average of 61 per cent. And these numbers are by no means anomalous; youth voting is in long-term decline.

Low youth turnout is not equally damaging to all political parties. According to our most recent vote-intention survey, just 16 per cent of Canadians between 18 and 29 would support the Conservative Party if an election were held today, while 34 per cent would support the New Democrats and 32 per cent the Liberals. When young people stay home, Conservatives suffer least. Mr. Trudeau has brought the Liberals into the overall lead in many polls, but in order to convert this support into seats, he must get young people to vote. If not, his party risks meeting the same fate as the B.C. NDP, which showed a steady lead in the polls before getting thumped on election day. One part of the disconnect was that youth “support” evanesced.

One clear area of divergence between the young and others is the extent to which young people view voting as a duty or a personal choice. Most Canadians (57 per cent) see it as their duty to vote. But those between 18 and 29 disagree: A minority (44 per cent) see voting as a duty, as compared to 49 per cent of 30- to 44-year-olds, 58 per cent of 45- to 59-year-olds, and 60 per cent of those 60 and older.

It won’t be easy getting young people to the polls, but harnessing the electoral power of the most diverse, socially liberal and world-connected generation in our history is a vital task for centre-left politicians. Part of the recipe will surely be channelling the frustration of the majority in areas such as the environment, justice, inequality, defence and foreign policy. But harnessing public dissatisfaction with a government is not enough; a plurality of voters must be persuaded to choose one of the opposition parties.

Targeted appeals in areas of special concern to the young will help win
over the engaged, but for a generation that tends not to parse the news too closely, a grab-bag of specific policy ideas won’t work. More promising may be rekindling the sensibility (though not necessarily the policies) of happy Jack Layton.

Right now, it looks like Mr. Trudeau may be the leader to represent the values of openness, empathy and idealism as we head toward Canada’s 150th birthday in 2017. As the party approaches, Mr. Trudeau must warmly invite everyone, including boomers and elders—and hope like mad the cool kids show up, too, perhaps bringing a joint for everyone to share.

*Michael Adams is president of the Environics Institute.*
With the Liberals on top of the polls, and the NDP pushed down into third place, it appeared that the natural political order that existed before Stephen Harper’s arrival had finally returned.
Mulcair has to confront the Trudeau effect

The supposedly weightless Liberal leader has a 14-point lead over the New Democrats

By Lawrence Martin
September 10, 2013

A year ago this month, as we were leaving a restaurant, I posed a question to NDP Leader Tom Mulcair about Justin Trudeau: He could be a very serious problem for you guys, especially in Quebec, no?

Mr. Mulcair’s countenance turned haughty. He’d expected more from the questioner. “You’ve worked in Montreal. Surely you know enough about Quebec politics not to think that the Trudeau brand still carries any weight in the province.”

There wasn’t much to fear from vanity boy, he went on. He categorized the young Mr. Trudeau as a “decent on-the-ground politician.”

It’s a year on and the Trudeau Liberals have bolted past the New Democrats, returning the blue-collar party to its traditional third-place ranking. In Quebec, according to a recent poll, the supposedly weightless Mr. Trudeau has a 14-point lead over New Democrats.

As the Dippers stage their annual caucus retreat in Saskatchewan this week, Mr. Mulcair is trying to put a happy face on things. The party isn’t panicking. But worry has appropriately set in, with members saying it’s time to change tack.

New Democrats have been attacking Mr. Trudeau for being light on policy, but how much have they put in the window themselves? “I think the No. 1 thing we have to do is start developing new policies and get them out there in the public for debate,” said popular Nova Scotia MP Peter Stoffer.

Former MP Lorne Nystrom agrees. Still a player in NDP circles, Mr. Nystrom knows a little about the Trudeau effect. He was first elected in 1968, the year Pierre Trudeau first became prime minister. Father and son are different in many ways, he observed, but not so different in terms of their broad voter appeal. He listed the similarities: appealing to federalists in Quebec, ethnic minorities, particularly in Ontario, new-generation types who are tired of
old politics. On top of that, there’s the charisma effect.

Long-time NDP leader Ed Broadbent, who faced Pierre Trudeau for 15 years, is careful not to criticize Mr. Mulcair. He seems to have more appreciation of the leader’s strengths, of which there are many. As Mr. Mulcair displayed in the Senate-scandal debate, he is arguably the most powerful force in the Commons.

The NDP’s strength, Mr. Broadbent said, is in having a different economic vision than the other parties. By putting all the emphasis on the natural-resource economy, “Stephen Harper wants to take us back to the 19th century.”

In Mr. Mulcair’s inner sanctum, there is well-advised talk of the need to modernize the party’s image and language. Irony has it that while the Liberals are seen as the party of the new generation, the NDP benches are stacked with far more youthful members, some of whom are impressive. But party images being so leader-centric, the NDP looks old hat by comparison.

In order to maintain his strong Quebec base, Mr. Mulcair faces a dilemma: appealing to nationalist Quebeckers frequently requires policies out of sync with opinion in the rest of Canada. There is also the problem of voter conditioning. Despite the NDP’s magi-

cal breakthrough in the last election, Canadians still tend to think of the NDP as the third party, as Mr. Nystrom observed. It’s a hard habit to break. In his view, with the old order restored in the current standings, the next few months are crucial. The New Democrats have to move hard against the Grits before the impression gets cemented that our politics have returned to the old Tory-Liberal rotation.

That means progressives will be fighting among themselves, a fact the Conservatives, who have lost 25 per cent of their support since the last election, will no doubt enjoy.

But Mr. Mulcair has no choice. Since making his way out of the restaurant a year ago, his view of the Trudeau effect has no doubt been substantially altered.
While Mr. Trudeau appeared immune to Conservative efforts, it was clear he still faced a very steep learning curve as Liberal leader.
Don’t let it go to your head, Mr. Trudeau

By Jeffrey Simpson
November 30, 2013

Justin Trudeau can bask for a few days in the good by-election results the Liberals received this week in Quebec, Ontario and Manitoba.

He should not, however, let these small triumphs go to his head, because he has made some of the kinds of mistakes that didn’t count for much but, if repeated, will hurt his credibility. And on a leader’s credibility hang a lot of a party’s political fortunes.

Some months ago, Mr. Trudeau announced that he favoured the legalization of marijuana. It was already party policy, but people don’t follow party convention resolutions. So when he declared himself for legalization, plenty of Canadians took notice for the first time, and the Conservatives, predictably, began to unload on him.

Mr. Trudeau has given only sketchy answers as to why this new policy would be wise. He says he’s thought about the issue and offered a few reasons. But frankly, that isn’t good enough. If a leader, especially one not known for deep policy thinking, is to highlight a new policy for the country, he needs to back it up with a position paper or something more than a few rather slight comments.

As it was, it looked as if Mr. Trudeau was trying to look hip for younger voters, most of whom don’t care that he said he once smoked pot. (U.S. president Bill Clinton said he didn’t inhale and no one believed him—at least Mr. Trudeau told the truth.) But if Mr. Trudeau intended to provoke a serious debate about a new policy, he did it with much too little backup and did nothing to alleviate concerns that he is light on policy.

He did the same thing in a recent speech at the Petroleum Club in Calgary, hardly a comfortable venue for federal Liberals. His speech was largely music to the petroleum industry’s ears—including support for the Keystone XL pipeline from Alberta’s bitumen oil deposits to the Gulf of Mexico. But then, toward the end of his remarks, he slipped in a reference to the need to put a price on carbon.

Mr. Trudeau is right, of course, but how a price is imposed and at what level is absolutely critical. It’s also politically very, very risky, as former Lib-
eral leader Stéphane Dion discovered with his carbon tax and as the New Democrats are discovering while the Conservative falsely and repeatedly accuse them of wanting a carbon tax. (They favour a cap-and-trade system.)

If a leader wades into such dangerous water, he had better know what he is talking about. Otherwise, his opponents—in this case the Conservatives—will store away that quote and unleash it at a time most opportune to them.

Then there was that complete gibberish about China in an improvised answer to a question at a women’s event. Mr. Trudeau said he sort of admired their system because it allowed the country to get things done, which is right about the system but doesn’t make it admirable. At the very least, a lot more hedging would have been appropriate.

One supposes that the hordes of people who surround Mr. Trudeau wherever he goes don’t follow the policy details. They seem to like him and his looks, and he has become a bit of a celebrity. But he’s very ordinary in the House of Commons (which is all right given that the Prime Minister is hardly Pericles) and only so-so while speaking outside Parliament. An orator he is not, which is also all right provided that, over time, he has something to say beyond mush.

To Mr. Trudeau’s credit, he was the first leader to deplore Quebec’s values charter. He’s lined up behind Keystone and the Canada-European Union trade and investment deal. He seems to get most worked up about the style of the Harper government, which is indeed grating and arrogant.

The lessons from his mistakes are to avoid improvising, to take time to flesh out new ideas so as to avoid the impression of shallowness, and to avoid letting short-term triumphs lull anyone into believing they mean long-term victory.
Perhaps Justin Trudeau’s greatest accomplishment in his first year as leader was to slip free of millstones from the past that had been dragging down the Liberal Party.
Trudeau has cannily cast off Liberals’ Chrétien-era baggage

The Liberals’ rookie leader has managed to spend eight months waving aside calls for details on where he stands. But aside from vague and light, there’s also been shrewd.

By Campbell Clark
December 16, 2013

OTTAWA

The airy success of Justin Trudeau, unburdened by specific policies, must be maddening for his opponents. But that vague, light touch accomplished a key goal in 2013: he’s discarded baggage that’s weighed down his Liberal Party for years.

Friday’s arrest of a key figure in the sponsorship scandal, Jacques Corriveau, serves as a reminder of the biggest negative the Liberals long faced, their own past. But so many years later, Mr. Trudeau’s caucus has only three Chrétien ministers left, none implicated in the scandal. Liberals will hold their breath and hope they’re moving on.

Mr. Trudeau, their rookie leader, has managed to spend eight months waving aside calls for details on where he stands. He skated through year-end interviews, deflecting gaffes with claims he’s unscripted, and absence from the Commons by arguing he gets more done by touring.

But aside from vague and light, there’s also been shrewd.

He and his party will tiptoe out of 2013 without a tie to reviving the long-gun registry, a ball and chain in ridings outside cities for 20 years. And he’s got a pro-pipeline, pro-resources policy in the oil patch, shedding the legacy of Stéphane Dion’s Green Shift and his father’s National Energy Program, which helps tell middle-Canada voters he’s pro-business.

It won’t be so easy in 2014. The vague environmental policies Mr. Trudeau promised to detail will complicate his resource-sector embrace, one of many fences he can’t sit on forever. The Conservatives and NDP will make him their primary target.

But don’t underestimate the value, in pure political terms, of what he’s done already.

His novelty, famous name and cha-
risma played a big part in his good fortune, allowing him to revive interest in the Liberal Party, revitalize fundraising and attract a few high-profile figures like retired lieutenant-general Andrew Leslie and new Toronto Centre MP Chrystia Freeland. But offloading millstones was job one.

The long-gun registry was an icon of Liberal policy since 1993, but an unpopular symbol in rural communities across the country. Mr. Trudeau, flying high in a leadership race, performed an incredible feat of political escape, managing to declare that he supported keeping the long-gun registry, but also that now it’s gone, it’s too divisive to bring it back. Presto, a policy that weighed down the Liberal vote in small towns and rural areas—not just in the Prairies but in northern Ontario, B.C., and Atlantic Canada—disappeared.

And then Mr. Trudeau and his strategists re-positioned the party on resources. As a leadership candidate, he supported the Chinese takeover of Nexen. As leader, he went to Calgary and Washington to declare his support for the Keystone XL pipeline, and oil-sands development.

This, too, made some Liberals nervous. But it wasn’t a quixotic quest for victory in Alberta, it was a symbol for middle-income voters, worried about jobs, that Mr. Trudeau’s party will be pro-business and pro-trade. It was designed to shed the legacy of the NEP and Mr. Dion’s Green Shift, and the notion that grand Liberal plans might threaten growth.

Mr. Trudeau positioned his party in the middle—unlike Stephen Harper, he opposes the Northern Gateway pipeline to the B.C. coast because of an environmentally risky route. The NDP opposed Keystone, which the Liberals portray as akin to supporting a shut-down of the oil sands.

Mr. Trudeau’s position rests on a vague and implausibly artful environmental-policy-to-come that will include carbon pricing, but not the Green Shift, and regulation that won’t hamper the oil sands, but will persuade the world that emissions won’t run amok. In the meantime, he’s shed baggage.

It’s certainly frustrating for opponents. The Prime Minister’s father-knows-best image as a steady hand in uncertain times, in full control, puts him increasingly on the hook for the past and current scandals. The NDP’s Tom Mulcair, able in Question Period and press scrums, with sharp political instincts, established himself as a leader, but hasn’t yet gained. They must find the lightness of Justin Trudeau unbearable, because so far, it has worked.

Even before Mr. Trudeau, both par-
ties had more interest in attacking Liberals than each other. Surely his vague policies are a target. They’ll redouble their efforts to damage him in 2014, and pin him down. But in the meantime, he’s already succeeded in ditching some weight.
Whatever else Justin Trudeau might be, he is certainly a celebrity. So it was hardly surprising that he wrote an autobiography, even though he was young and hadn’t done much yet.
A Trudeau autobiography already? In this, age doesn’t matter

By Elizabeth Renzetti
March 29, 2014

Haters, as a wise philosopher once observed to his followers, gonna hate. By this token, a fair number of eyebrows were raised at the news that Justin Trudeau, merely 42, will publish his memoirs later this year. You have to wonder if he’s done enough living, apart from half a decade in Parliament and an MA in Twitter. Is this a case of premature autobiography? I believe there’s a pill for that.

Perhaps the Liberal Party Leader could look for comfort to a fellow Canadian—who happens to share not only his name but also his impressively bouncy locks:

“A lot of people think I was an overnight success, but that wouldn’t be exactly true. Sure, it’s only been five years, but it has also been a lot of hard work that took time, sacrifice and relentless dedication.”

See? No one thought Justin Bieber should be writing his memoirs, either, and he managed to publish two by the time he was 18 (the quote above is taken from his 2012 memoir). And Mr. Bieber wasn’t even the leader of one of Canada’s main political parties or scion of one of its most famous political families. He’s just a kid with a lot of gold records and impressive aim when peeing in a bucket, but by 18 he’d published two volumes of his pensées, titled First Step 2 Forever and Just Getting Started.

It is a small tragedy that those titles are already taken. So, apparently, is Bossy Pantsuit, which Hillary Clinton jokingly said would be the name of her forthcoming memoir. It’s a funny old coincidence that the second volume of her autobiography will be coming out this year, just as everyone expects her to prepare for an election campaign, and Mr. Trudeau’s will be released in the fall, a year before Canada’s federal election. What crazy timing! It’s a good thing his publisher has promised a “candid” biography, and not one of those book-shaped things that are mainly just a hunk of campaign slogan slapped between two slices of platitudinousness.

When you think of it, the majority of political memoirs fall into one of two categories: bridge-building (when the career is on the rise) or grudge-settling...
(after the bridge has collapsed). The latter is obviously more fun, but it’s in the former where Mr. Trudeau will find lessons for the canny political memoirist:

Admit failure. Okay, maybe Mr. Trudeau’s joke about Ukraine wasn’t so funny, and that comment about admiring China was impolitic (brave, but impolitic). No matter; it could have been much worse. Listen to Barack Obama, writing about his crushing 2000 congressional defeat in his memoir The Audacity of Hope: “My own mistakes were compounded by tragedy and farce.” His approval rating at the beginning of his campaign was 8 per cent, which suggests the idiocy of hope more than anything else. His opponent’s son was murdered during the campaign. Mr. Obama lost that race by 31 points, but we all know where he ended up. Everyone loves a (temporary) loser. There are always exceptions, of course: Richard Nixon wrote 1,000 pages of memoir, RN, without admitting blame for his downfall. Minima culpa is its own category.

Have an epiphany while running. No one has a blinding realization about his political destiny while sitting on the couch watching The Bachelor. At the beginning of Olivia Chow’s new memoir, My Journey, she is at the end of a five-kilometre run when she thinks, “Canadians are generous; we believe we can create a fair and balanced society. So how can we come together to form a government that reflects our values?” In The Audacity of Hope, Mr. Obama’s run takes him up the steps of the Lincoln Memorial: “I think about America and those who built it. ... My heart is filled with love for this country.” Both Ms. Chow and Mr. Obama were preparing to run for office when their books came out. It’s a metaphor that works. Run with it.

Embrace your inner hedonist. Mr. Trudeau drew flak for admitting he’d smoked pot at a dinner party, which hardly makes him the Courtney Love of the political scene. It barely qualifies him to be mayor of Toronto. Look at the confessional precedents: “I have enjoyed the company of women,” Senator Edward Kennedy wrote in his memoir, True Compass. “I have enjoyed a stiff drink or two or three.” In A Journey (not to be confused with My Journey, see above), Tony Blair worried that 10 Downing St. had turned him into a tosspot: “Stiff whisky or G&T before dinner, couple of glasses of wine or even half a bottle with it. [Alcohol] had become a prop.”

Of course, these confessions could hardly hurt their authors: Mr. Kennedy was dying when he wrote his book,
and Mr. Blair found religion after publishing his. What voter these days is really going to care if a politician has taken an illicit puff here or there? Hell, in some parts of the country it’s a path to re-election.

In the end, it doesn’t really matter how old the storyteller. What matters is the freshness of the tale.
Neither promising to legalize pot nor expelling all the senators from caucus could top Mr. Trudeau’s demand that all Liberal MPs and candidates must be pro-choice.
Pro-choice? That’s no-choice

By Lorna Dueck
May 13, 2014

Justin Trudeau has a lot of explaining to do. His statement last week that “The Liberal Party is a pro-choice party and going forward, all new members and all new candidates are pro-choice,” has voters decrying his dictatorial stand on a highly controversial issue of conscience.

At least six national polls in recent years suggest that Canadians are deeply conflicted about abortion, especially over the life of an unborn child having no protection at any point during pregnancy. Canada is one of a handful of countries with no laws on abortion. It’s outrageous for Mr. Trudeau, without consultation, to say to existing Liberal MPs who hold pro-life views that they would be “grandfathered in … to a certain extent.”

This is an issue that defies the kind of simplification Mr. Trudeau has bandied about. We will always have the “grandfathered in” view on abortion: voters like me, who, for moral and religious reasons, have principled objections. I was born in the day when a woman had no right over her pregnancy, and I’ve listened to my birth mother’s harrowing despair of how she pursued four illegal attempts to end my life in the womb. I’ll never be neutral on this topic, and I’ve lived through the change of this era.

We’re on the cusp of another era, because now technology has taken abortion far beyond where feminists and activists intended it to go. We have well-documented reports of Canadian clinics helping women abort female fetuses because certain cultures devalue the female child.

Babies are not babies only when we choose them to be. For some, it defies logic to say that aborting a baby at 22 or 24 weeks is not taking life, when such lives can survive outside the mother’s body.

Ontario teenagers aborted 152 pregnancies for every 100 live births in 2007, according to the Project for Ontario Women’s Health Evidence-Based Report (POWER). The policy issue should be directed to more pregnancy prevention tools, not less discussion about abortion.

There has been public outcry from coast to coast on the shrinking space in the Liberal Party’s “Big Red Tent” policy. “The political choice is clear. A Liberal choice equals a leader with a distasteful acceptance of discrimina-
tion as acceptable political practice,” wrote one Facebook poster.

The pro-life, pro-choice quandary our country faces is only expanding. The Winnipeg Free Press wrote of the Trudeau debacle: “Canada is not done with complex debates over public policy riddled with morality. Euthanasia is a pressing legal and political debate that will demand consideration of all its implications. If Mr. Trudeau would have his MPs relinquish autonomy on a question so intimate as abortion, on what issue will he see fit to allow them the freedom to dissent?”

What we need from Mr. Trudeau is real leadership in this area. We also need other leaders, in particular Stephen Harper, Thomas Mulcair and Elizabeth May, to front a debate on this, such as we’ve seen recently in Britain.

An irony was that Mr. Trudeau’s anti-democratic stand was delivered on the eve of his appearance at Ottawa’s National Prayer Breakfast. It’s an annual all-party gathering of leadership and, at last moment, Mr. Trudeau declined the previously arranged Scripture passage, and instead chose to read Proverbs 2:1-11 to the hundreds gathered.

It’s a passage that advises, “Tune your ears to wisdom, and concentrate on understanding. Cry out for insight ...” The crowd was polite and hopeful that there could be a new attitude coming.
If Justin Trudeau refused to commit to policies, he was prepared to offer himself as a very different leader from Stephen Harper: open, inclusive, willing to listen and to share. “He is the anti-Harper. If the Liberals did not have him, they would be trying to build him.”
A year away from the federal election and with a new biography on the shelves, Justin Trudeau is still portraying himself as a sea change in political styles from Stephen Harper. But he needs to cultivate more than differences to win the country.

Justin Trudeau took only a few minutes after touring the University of Waterloo to take off his jacket and bound in front of a standing-room crowd at the Student Life Centre. For the next hour, he would speak without notes or Teleprompter, repeating questions into the mic so all could hear.

“What do I plan to do to engage youth in politics?” he said, looking around in mock surprise at the question, and then shrugged: “This.”

His audience laughs. He points out that the student union has asked all party leaders to do the same. “Somehow, I don’t think the Prime Minister is going to take them up on this invitation.”

It’s self-serving, but rings true. It is hard to imagine Stephen Harper sauntering across a college stage in shirt-sleeves, promising shorter answers so more people can ask questions, or generally doing things the way Justin Trudeau does. Sometimes that seems to be the point of Justin Trudeau.

He is the anti-Harper. If the Liberals did not have him, they would be trying to build him. In some ways, they are.

Whereas Mr. Harper often paints politics as choosing between right and wrong and “standing up” for principles, Mr. Trudeau has titled the autobiography he will publish this week Common Ground. One year from an election scheduled for Oct. 19, 2015, that book is part of a bigger brand-building.

As federal politicians swing into what is effectively the county’s longest-ever election campaign, Mr. Trudeau has already given glimpses of his approach.

Between talks to students in Waterloo and the Chamber of Commerce in London, Ont., The Globe and Mail sat down with Mr. Trudeau, and found a man insisting that the process of building his political platform and approach is a key factor in setting him apart, and treating the policy platform as a final exam—insisting voters will be able to test his policy substance in
the end.

“If, by the time they reach the ballot box, they’re not satisfied that I have demonstrated that—yeah, they have a right to ask about that,” he said. “In the meantime, a year out from the election, I’m not going to shortcircuit some valuable conversations.”

But it is all building around a contrast of personae, of approach, rather than policy details. Clearly, many Liberals around Mr. Trudeau think that if there is a sentiment for change next year, it will not be driven just by disagreement with Mr. Harper’s policies so much as irritation with the way he does things after nine years in power. It is visceral. It will be a referendum on Stephen Harper’s persona, and Mr. Trudeau wants to be the other side.

And he is different. Mr. Trudeau keeps underlining it.

Sometimes, he overreaches.

When opposing a Canadian combat mission in Iraq this month, he tried to show his reflexes are less war-like than Mr. Harper’s—but slipped into a glib blooper, warning Canada should not “whip out our CF-18s to show how big they are.” It played into his weakness: the perception that while Mr. Harper takes things seriously, Mr. Trudeau is not serious.

When it came to time to repair the damage, former prime minister Jean Chrétien stepped forward to defend his position on Iraq—a telling sign that the Liberal leader needed to borrow a cup of gravitas from a heavyweight.

He is open to charges he lacks policies. That has become a half-truth: He has taken stands on not reviving the gun registry, oil pipelines, RESPs, corporate taxes, the Senate, abortion, and yes, legalizing pot. But it is still a hodge-podge with many gaps.

Parties have typically waited for the writs before releasing platforms, but his opponents, notably the NDP, are revealing policies early—pressuring him.

But as he speaks to students or supporters or business people on key electoral turf along southern Ontario’s Highway 401, many of the issues he raises underline the contrasts with Mr. Harper.

He talks about Mr. Harper’s failure to hold a premiers’ meeting, and suggests the country suffers without that kind of cooperation. He insists Mr. Harper is ideological: that his unwillingness to show concern for the environment is damaging Canada’s economic prospects, encouraging other countries, and First Nations, to reject Canadian resources.

He is specific about some things. He explains why he would keep corporate taxes unchanged, or why he favours the Keystone XL oil pipeline to the U.S. gulf coast but not the Northern Gate-
way through B.C.

There are also a lot of generalities. But amid vague statements about values are outlines of direction for his political strategy and his policy.

The next election, he told students in London, will be about the economy and how it treats those who feel vulnerable in the middle class. Mr. Harper will offer tax cuts, but Mr. Trudeau says he will offer policies he frames as pro-growth, like spending on infrastructure and job training.

Yes, he tells a questioner, a national daycare program should be a priority, but growth-oriented spending comes first, and he wants to see what the budget surplus will be.

On other social programs, you can learn Mr. Trudeau’s approach, if not his policy. When a student asked about the high cost of tuition, the Liberal Leader said society has an interest in more people going to university, and so it should invest in that—up to the point where it is good for society as a whole.

So instead of giving $1,000 to everyone who goes to university, it is better to give $5,000 to those people “for whom it makes the difference of going to school” or not. In other words, government should spend up to the point that it benefits society, not just the individual.

But of course, politics can get in the way of planning, and the real trick in policy is the details.

Mr. Trudeau did not offer any.

He insists he wants people to see an “iterative” process that they can join to develop policies where he outlines “how I see the issues, how I see finding solutions to the issues.”

“I think it’s a big contrast against what people see a lot in politics, which is, ‘These are the talking points, this is what we’re sticking to, and I’m broad-casting one way to you,” he said in the interview in London. “I’m a teacher. I believe in sort of sharing in a discussion and coming out of it with new insights on both sides.”

It may not be so easy to stick with such a long process. The NDP is releasing policies now—it has already proposed a national child care plan. If Mr. Trudeau does not reply for seven months, he may find himself again facing the perception that he lacks substance.

While Conservatives complain Mr. Trudeau tops opinion polls without a complete policy book, there is another side of the equation: Mr. Harper has slipped and his policies are not really the problem.

Polls regularly show a plurality of Canadians approve of Mr. Harper’s handling of the economy or foreign policy. Ipsos-Reid found 49 per cent of Canadians approve of his record—but
67 per cent want another party to take over.

Perhaps it is Mr. Harper’s persona that polarizes. When another pollster, Angus Reid Global, asked Canadians what attributes they ascribe to world leaders like Mr. Harper, the composite was that he is secretive but strategic.

Those who voted Conservative in 2011 think he is strong and credible. Those who voted NDP or Liberal called him uncaring and a bully.

Many Liberals say they think that, outside his Conservative support base, irritation with Mr. Harper is solidifying. Perhaps people who feel that way will be motivated to turn out to vote, and to band behind whoever is more likely to beat him.

Perhaps they will look to someone who strikes them as very unlike Mr. Harper.

And if they want a contrast of style, it is more likely to be Mr. Trudeau than Thomas Mulcair.

The NDP Leader is sharp and strong-willed, but seen as scarcely more upbeat than the Prime Minister.

The other side of embracing Mr. Trudeau’s contrasts with Mr. Harper is emphasizing what people like about the PM.

“The number one thing the Prime Minister has going for him is that he’s serious,” one former aide said. Even people who do not like him think he works at it, and is credible. He likes to make tough decisions, and people see that. He is not trying to look warm and fuzzy.

“He doesn’t want people to see him as the guy you’d have a beer with. He says the job is making decisions.”

The plan is to use a team—star candidates, a former general, and economic players such as Morneau Shepell chair Bill Morneau or former Business Council of Manitoba president Jim Carr—to counter the public’s questions about whether Mr. Trudeau has the same substance.

Liberals say their leader is not too proud to hire and rely on the right people. Now the question is whether Canadians will want a political chairman of the board, or a hands-on CEO like Mr. Harper.

There is no doubt Mr. Trudeau has remodelled Canadian politics, taking his third party in the Commons to front-runner in the polls.

Does he think Canadians take him seriously now? His eyes darken when he answers: “My opponents do.”

It is clear that many voters have not drawn their conclusions yet. In every crowd, there is interest, and those who ask for pictures, and leave smiling.

At the University of Western Ontario, he followed an hour-long, no-notes talk to students with 20 minutes of posing for selfies with them. But some
are disappointed. They want to know where the contrasts lead.

“The only thing I’d heard about Trudeau was the weed thing, and I was hoping he’d have some other ideas,” said Alex Tonelotto, a 20-year-old international relations student. “It was more general. Bring Canada together—what does that mean?”
But where the young Liberal leader proved to be vulnerable was on the question of national security, especially when he flippantly dismissed Canada’s mission in Iraq.
Why Trudeau may regret saying no to the Iraq mission

Stephen Harper will almost certainly make security a wedge issue in this election year

By John Ibbitson
January 21, 2015

Shortly after Parliament returns next week, the Harper government will introduce a new anti-terrorism bill. One purpose of that bill will be to wedge Justin Trudeau on security. This is bad news for Mr. Trudeau.

A wedge issue is one in which Politician A takes a clear stand on one side and Politician B takes a clear stand on the other, causing some of B’s supporters to switch over to A because the issue is so important to them. Stephen Harper has been seeking a wedge against the Liberals ever since Mr. Trudeau became leader, but without success.

He thought he might have it on trade, after Canada negotiated an agreement with the European Union. But Mr. Trudeau stood in the House and congratulated Mr. Harper on the accord. Trade will not be an issue in the election.

He thought he might have it on foreign policy, when Israel entered Gaza in response to rocket attacks, or when Ukrainians rose up against their Russian-dominated government, but Mr. Trudeau was every bit as bellicose as the Prime Minister on both issues.

Then Islamic State arose in Syria and Iraq, and Mr. Trudeau made the wrong call.

Security is the right-wing equivalent of the environment. Both are event-driven. A terrible hurricane or forest fires caused by drought will increase voter concern over global warming. But if the climate is behaving, environmental concerns take second place to economic concerns.

The same is true of security. A terrorist attack, especially one close to home, will have people worrying about what their governments are doing to keep them safe. But as the memory of the latest bombing or shooting fades, so does the fear.

Politically, Mr. Trudeau had sound reasons last October to oppose the government’s decision to join the Americans and Europeans in fighting
Islamic State. Mr. Trudeau supports a more Pearsonian, peacekeeping-based, bridge-building (rather than bomb- ing) approach to foreign affairs, unlike what he sees as Mr. Harper’s bellicose solidarity with the United States.

Jean Chrétien’s decision not to support the American-led invasion of Iraq was popular at the time he made it, and even more popular once he was proven right.

Foreign excursions never go down well in Quebec, where Liberals are determined to make gains against the NDP, who also oppose the mission. On the whole, it must have seemed like a good idea at the time.

But Mr. Trudeau went further, dismissing the Canadian mission in Iraq as “trying to whip out our CF-18s and show them how big they are.”

And then came the killing of Warrant Officer Patrice Vincent in Quebec and Michael Zehaf-Bibeau’s attack on Parliament Hill. And then came the attacks in Paris. Mr. Harper’s claim that “the international jihadist movement has declared war” on the Western democracies seemed entirely accurate. Mr. Trudeau seemed guilty of flippant passivism in a face of a dangerous threat.

The Liberal Leader can only hope— we can all only hope—that future threats are few and thwarted, and the security issue recedes in importance in voters’ minds.

But the government will do everything in its power to keep the issue alive. There will be the privacy-versus-security debate over the anti-terrorism legislation. Then, in the first week of April, the mandate for the Canadian mission in Iraq will expire. Mr. Harper will certainly announce its extension, and ask Parliament to endorse his decision. The Liberals will have no choice but to continue their opposition.

Assuming the extension lasts another six months, the next date for renewing the mandate will occur in the first week of October—right in the middle of the election campaign.

In that campaign, Mr. Harper will remind voters that his government has fought Islamic extremism in Afghanistan, in Iraq and at home, and with the new anti-terrorism law. He will tell voters that Mr. Trudeau prefers crude jokes to tough decisions. He will seek to make security a major issue, and the chances are good he will succeed.

It may not be enough to swing the election: hope and change may trump jobs and security. But it’s the kind of ground on which Conservatives love to fight.

Mr. Trudeau may come to wish he had not opposed the mission in Iraq. And he will certainly wish he had never made that joke.
Canadians clearly liked Justin Trudeau. But did they take him seriously?
Canadians see Harper as a CEO, Trudeau as fun: poll

Abacus Data asked Canadians to rate what political leader they’d prefer to see in a series of roles or activities

By Chris Hannay
February 4, 2015

OTTAWA

Canadians see Prime Minister Stephen Harper as a CEO, Thomas Mulcair as someone they can rely on in a jam and Justin Trudeau as a guy they want to hang out with, a new poll suggests.

Abacus Data surveyed 1,005 Canadians about their opinions of the three leaders of the biggest federal political parties. Respondents were asked which of the leaders they would rather have involved in a series of activities or roles.

Mr. Harper, leader of the governing Conservatives, scored best on questions of money and management. He was the top choice among respondents on who they would like to be CEO of a large company (47 per cent), and who they would like to get advice from about how to invest their money (46 per cent) or advice about their career (41 per cent).

Mr. Mulcair, leader of the Official Oppo-
Taking on board a defecting Conservative MP seemed a strange decision to many political watchers. The decision would later be questioned even more, after Eve Adams lost her nomination bid in Eglinton-Lawrence.
Liberals’ latest angst: It’s all about Eve

Rift developing among party supporters as Adams, having fallen from grace with Tories, considers running for Grits in Toronto riding

By Jane Taber
April 11, 2015

Floor-crossing MP Eve Adams’s bid to run for the federal Liberals in Toronto is causing a rift between local party supporters and Justin Trudeau’s team in Ottawa just as the federal election approaches and the party looks to the GTA to pick up much-needed seats.

Some federal Toronto Liberals, who raised money for Mr. Trudeau and his team and worked to help him win a couple of key byelections, are dismayed they weren’t consulted about the decision to bring Ms. Adams into the Eglinton-Lawrence riding. They question why Mr. Trudeau would bill her defection as such a triumph given that the Conservatives told her she couldn’t run for them after alleged misconduct in a nomination race last year.

One senior Liberal organizer, who has been active on the federal front and asked that his name not be used, describes the decision to embrace Ms. Adams as “stupidity,” especially given that Mr. Trudeau “ran around” saying nominations were open and he would not appoint people.

He says he may sit this election out—and some provincial Liberals feel the same way.

Mike Colle, the long-time Eglinton-Lawrence Liberal MPP, has helped his federal counterparts in past general elections—but says he “won’t go near her” if she becomes the candidate.

In fact, he’s not talking to her or her campaign manager, Tom Allison, a successful and respected Liberal organizer. Mr. Colle says Mr. Allison lectured him about being loyal to the party. “You’re using that word loyalty in terms of Eve Adams?” Mr. Colle says he said to Mr. Allison. “I don’t want to talk about it.”

This angst in the ranks is playing out against the backdrop of vote-rich Ontario—the province is gaining 15 seats under redistribution and will elect 121 of the 338 MPs in the coming election. The Liberals, who are the third party in the Commons, are focusing a lot
of their effort in the Greater Toronto Area, which has close to 50 ridings. Strategists believe they have a big opportunity in the GTA, which is evident given the amount of time Mr. Trudeau is spending in the area.

A united front with all Liberals working together could help their election prospects.

But Mr. Colle says parachuting Ms. Adams in from the Tory ranks, where she has been the MP for the suburban riding Mississauga-Brampton South since 2011, and directly into a riding where she has no close connection is an “affront” to all the Liberals there.

Mr. Allison, meanwhile, says he would be an “idiot” to try to lecture an elected official. “What I actually asked Mike was would he ever accept Eve’s call or return her call, or should she stop trying to speak to him. He smiled and walked away from me,” Mr. Allison wrote in an e-mail.

There has been speculation among some local Liberals that Ms. Adams’s campaign is being helped by the Trudeau team in Ottawa. But a spokesman for Mr. Trudeau says Ms. Adams chose to run in the Eglinton-Lawrence riding and has to organize herself, and the nomination process is open.

However, not every prospective candidate is welcomed by Mr. Trudeau on national television.

In addition, her campaign manager, Mr. Allison, is a top organizer in the region. He managed Kathleen Wynne’s 2013 Liberal leadership campaign and John Tory’s successful bid last year for Toronto mayor.

Helping out, too, is another Toronto Liberal heavyweight, Alexis Levine, a lawyer and supporter of Mr. Trudeau. He was a senior strategist on Toronto Centre MP Chrystia Freeland’s campaign—she was hand-picked by the Trudeau team to run—and he is now introducing Ms. Adams to some of the local Liberals in the riding.

Ms. Adams is no stranger to controversy. She is engaged to Dimitri Soudas, one of Mr. Harper’s strategists, who served as his spokesman and later as executive director of the Conservative Party. He left his position amid allegations that he interfered in her nomination for the riding of Oakville North-Burlington.

She and Mr. Soudas, who helped broker her move to the Liberal Party, would not return calls or respond to e-mails.

Despite her savvy campaign manager, it’s unclear whether Ms. Adams will win the nomination.

She is running against Marco Mendicino, a lawyer, who has lived and worked in the riding for almost a decade. He has been campaigning—knocking on doors and signing up new members—for the past eight months.
Mr. Mendicino, who was a prosecutor on the Toronto 18 terror case, won’t comment directly about his opponent. Rather, he says, he is an optimistic person and believes Mr. Trudeau when he said that the nomination process will be “open and fair.” He adds that people in the riding are “thrilled to have the choice of supporting a strong local Liberal.” Mr. Colle has endorsed him.

Rocco Piccininno, president of the Eglinton-Lawrence federal Liberal riding association, says Ms. Adams’s candidacy brings “a lot of attention to the riding and attention is good.”

He denies her presence is causing a rift—“Mike’s Italian,” says Mr. Piccininno about Mr. Colle’s comments. “We’re upset one day. We’re drinking together another.”

Stephen Harper’s Conservatives, meanwhile, are watching the Adams saga unfold with some amusement. Privately, they are hoping she will win the nomination, believing Joe Oliver, the incumbent MP and Finance Minister, would easily beat her in the federal election.
Having opposed the mission in Iraq, the Liberals decided to support Bill C-51, the Conservatives’ anti-terrorism legislation. The NDP strongly opposed the bill, claiming it threatened civil liberties. With even some conservatives agreeing with the critics, the Liberals’ support for the legislation seemed difficult to explain.
For Liberals, Bill C-51 story of calculation and miscalculation

Justin Trudeau’s decision to choose the safe position on the security bill has backfired, casting the Liberal leader as someone who won’t take a stand

By Campbell Clark
May 25, 2015

The Conservatives start their last push to pass their controversial security bill this week, but it’s Liberal Leader Justin Trudeau who is getting squeezed.

His decision to choose the safe, popular position on Bill C-51 has backfired and become a significant weakness.

That’s not because the bill is now massively unpopular. A campaign against it has lowered its once sky-high approval ratings, but not to the floor. Many of those who really care, especially left-leaning voters, were looking for someone to oppose the bill and Mr. Trudeau didn’t. The NDP’s Thomas Mulcair did.

The Liberals took the unusual position that they’d vote for a flawed bill and change it if they win government.

They faced grumblings from their own supporters. The security bill has, according to Liberal MPs and insiders, become a weakness in their rivalry with the NDP, especially in places like downtown Toronto, Vancouver or Montreal, where the two parties fight each other.

And it’s not an issue that’s fading away. Prime Minister Stephen Harper pushed it last week, when he went to Montreal, just after the RCMP arrested 10 people at the city’s airport believed to be travelling to join foreign terror groups, to tout new spending for security agencies, as well as Bill C-51.

On Monday, the Senate starts two days of hearings on the bill, before a last vote that will pass it into law. Most members of the Liberal Senate caucus—no longer part of Mr. Trudeau’s caucus—plan to vote against Bill C-51, in what they call an act of principle.

Ouch. For the Liberals, it’s all been a story of political calculation and miscalculation.

The bill, unveiled in January, marks a major change to Canada’s spy powers. It includes a major new role for the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) to disrupt perceived threats to national security—and the power to get a warrant, in secret; to break the law or Charter of Rights—as long as
the threats don’t entail killing, causing bodily harm or sexual assault. It doesn’t include substantial oversight.

But after two homegrown terror attacks in Canada in October, and the Charlie Hebdo attacks in Paris in January, the bill got a warm reception: An Angus Reid Institute survey in February found 82 per cent favoured it.

The Liberals had already opposed Canada’s decision to join the air strikes against Islamic State, and were feeling politically vulnerable on security issues. They decided to vote for C-51 to play it safe.

The NDP, as it turned out, acted more wisely. At first, they took no clear position. They sent out level-headed foreign affairs critic Paul Dewar to deliver what one New Democrat called a “values statement.” He stressed the need for security, but argued that undermining basic rights undermines security. In the meantime, they would study the bill.

That helped the NDP avoid the appearance of knee-jerk opposition. When Mr. Mulcair eventually stated his opposition, he said that may be an unpopular position, but it was one he had to take.

It turned out to be good politics. NDP supporters were the most opposed, but there was also a constituency that wanted someone to oppose it. As activists campaigned, that constituency grew. Potential Liberal or NDP voters who really cared were mostly against it.

Just how much opposition grew is unclear, but some polls now show opposition substantially outstripping support.

Mr. Harper’s Conservatives still think they’ve got a political winner in the bill. They probably do: People want governments to expand security measures, with no caveats, and the Conservatives have something to appeal to them. The NDP appealed to opponents.

The Liberals, meanwhile, have had a hard time explaining themselves.

As the activists railed against C-51, Mr. Trudeau was cast as the leader who won’t take a stand. David Christopher, a spokesperson for OpenMedia, one of the groups that organized campaigns against the bill, said the Liberal position alienated people, including the party’s own supporters.

“It sort of reeks of political gamesmanship, and Ottawa, and inside baseball,” he said. “That’s just clanging with people out there.”

Mr. Trudeau thought he was taking the safe, popular choice, but it sent a message that he’d ceded the job of opposing the government. And the Liberals were hoisted on their own political calculation.
In late spring, the Liberals were ready to unveil their policy platform, which centred on increasing taxes or clawing back benefits for high-income earners in order to lower taxes and improve benefits for middle-income earners. There were also policy releases on everything from electoral reform to the post office. The Globe’s editorial board found the platform a mixture of good ideas and bad.
Some good Liberal ideas, some half-baked

The Globe and Mail
June 16, 2015

The strangest item in the Liberal Party of Canada’s new platform for democratic and governmental renewal is plank No. 26 of 32: “Save Home Mail Delivery.” Then again, maybe it’s not so hard to explain. This is, after all, an election year. The name of the game is winning votes, and this issue surely polls well with a key voting group. And so, however relevant it isn’t, there Canada Post is.

The platform Justin Trudeau unveiled on Tuesday may be titled Real Change, but it has been built with more than a little timber recycled from Old Politics. And for all of that, it contains some good ideas, whose adoption would make Canada a better, and better governed, place. But mixed in are more than a few ideas that are half-baked, hastily trotted out to fend off an NDP surge, and read more like marketing slogans than considered proposals for running the country.

Let’s start with what’s good in the Liberal plan.

The Liberals promise more independence for government watchdogs such as the Parliamentary Budget Officer. They promise to make Question Period more relevant and useful by introducing the British practice of Prime Minister’s Question Period—the PM will have to stand and answer. They promise ongoing parliamentary oversight of Canada’s national security agencies—an amendment to Bill C-51, which they voted for while simultaneously promising to change if elected.

They promise that there will be more free votes in the House of Commons, though the conditions under which these will happen are unclear. (Liberal MPs will not be free on any issue touching on “the shared values embodied in the Charter of Rights,” which is about as vague and wide as can be.) And they’ll further empower MPs by making parliamentary committees more independent of the prime minister and better funded.

Also good: a promise to repeal the “anti-democratic elements” of the Conservative government’s Fair Elections Act and scrap the Citizen Voting Act, both of which make it more difficult for some citizens to vote. Sections of the Fair Elections Act limiting and muzzling Elections Canada and the Chief Electoral Officer will also
be repealed. The parties’ pre-election spending, which thanks to a loophole is now unlimited, will be limited.

What’s more, the Liberals promise to pass legislation preventing the government of the day from using public money to fund what are effectively political ads—a long-standing Conservative government practice. The fact that the Liberal government of Ontario is currently undoing its own legislation banning partisan government advertising, the better to compete with the federal Tories, only proves just how effective such a law can be.

The Access to Information Act will be brought into the 21st century so that almost all government data is available online, by default, rather than forcing Canadians to go through a cumbersome, ancient application process. It’s an idea we’ve long supported. The same goes for bringing back the long-form census. Doing away with it was the equivalent of putting out the eyes of policy-makers and researchers.

And then there are the promises that don’t quite cut it.

A promise that future cabinets will have an equal number of men and women is exactly one sentence long. Nice slogan. How exactly will it work?

And that marketing-slogan-as-platform is followed by this: “We will also adopt a federal government-wide open and merit-based appointments process, which will ensure gender parity and that more Indigenous Peoples and minority groups are reflected in positions of leadership.” Did anyone in the party consider that the first part of that sentence sits uncomfortably with the second half? Or is this just the flip side of the Conservative Party’s wedge-issue campaigning, where the goal is to put out markers and dare the other side to criticize you?

And then there’s this: “Ensuring that 2015 will be the last federal election conducted under the first-past-the-post voting system.” The Liberals promise, if elected, to create a “national engagement process” and to remake our entire democratic system within 18 months. Will they bring in proportional representation? Ranked ballots? Mandatory voting? The Liberals promise a revolution, details to be determined.

Before jumping into the unknown, it’s worth remembering that Canada is one of history’s most successful political projects. This place, warts and all, is a miracle—a remarkably enduring one. It needs to work better in a million small ways, but a total overhaul of the political system is a different matter. Which may explain why, faced with referendums on changing the voting system, voters in Ontario, Prince Edward Island and British Columbia all came down against the idea. Many of Mr. Trudeau’s smart, modest proposals are to be embraced. This big one? Approach with caution.
As spring gave way to summer, the three parties appeared to be in a tight three-way race. Some polls had the Liberals sliding into third place. But summer is the wrong time for predicting a fall election.
Summer isn’t the time to predict which way the political winds blow

Three men who became prime minister for long stretches of time trailed in opinion polls during Canada Day week

By Jeffrey Simpson
July 4, 2015

OTTAWA

Do you want to place a bet on the outcome of the Oct. 19 election based on today’s polls? Before you do, consider a little recent history.

Three men who became prime minister for long stretches of time trailed in the polls during Canada Day week. All were written off as roadkill against opponents who, in early July, appeared to have mojo.

Think back to the early summer of 1984. Liberal prime minister John Turner, having won the party leadership, had the wind at his back. That is, until the election campaign in which he and the Liberals were thumped by Brian Mulroney and the Progressive Conservatives, who won in a landslide.

Reflect for a moment on the situation facing prime minister Kim Campbell in July, 1993. She was a new leader, the first woman prime minister, a breath of fresh air who promised to do politics differently. Except that when the campaign ended, her Progressive Conservatives had won only two seats. They were thrashed by the Liberals under Jean Chrétien, dubbed “yesterday’s man” by his detractors.

In the summer of 2005, Liberal prime minister Paul Martin seemed destined to win a whopping majority. The economy was humming, new Liberal candidates had emerged (remember Belinda Stronach?) and Mr. Martin unveiled big ambitions for Canada. Except that when the election campaign arrived, things went downhill for the Liberals. Stephen Harper became the Conservative prime minister, a job he still holds, at least until Oct. 19.

Go ahead, place a bet if you want on tomorrow’s results based on today’s polls, but remember that polls are snapshots of today and not necessarily predictors of what will transpire tomorrow. And, by the way, campaigns matter.

If you doubt that statement, ponder recent provincial elections. Who would have predicted an NDP sweep
in Alberta a month before voting day? Think of the past British Columbia election: An apparently sure thing for the NDP turned into a Liberal triumph. Or Quebec, where the smarty-pants in the Parti Québécois government were so sure of impending victory that they called an election and got slaughtered by the Liberals. Even in New Brunswick, the Liberals won all right but not nearly by as much as had been predicted when the campaign began.

Why the swings? The obvious reason is that more citizens pay attention to politics during campaigns than at any other time. A lot of people don’t think much, if at all, about political choices most of the time. They turn their fleeting attention to politics only during elections, if then.

These largely uninterested voters tend not to decide on issues or platforms, but on impressions and images of leadership, and sometimes on that vague but powerful sense that it’s “time for a change.” They are particularly susceptible to “information” conveyed by partisan political advertising, especially attack ads, which explains why parties rely so heavily on these ads that have nothing to do with substance but everything with image.

The summer before a vote is dead time, politically speaking. People have plenty better to do with their time than follow politics in a country with only one short burst of warmth and sun each year (except, of course, on the West Coast). Which is one reason why indications about which way political winds are blowing before and during the summer are not accurate predictors of what might happen come fall.

Then there are unexpected events—crises such as a financial collapse, slips of the tongue, good or poor performances by leaders in televised debates, an issue that catches fire and helps or hurts a party. Every party works hard to prevent damaging developments, but they can happen—a story out of nowhere on social media, a dumb statement by a local candidate, a tired leader who loses his or her cool, a maladroit comment that gets blown into something.

Then there is the contest between expectations and results. A leader—Justin Trudeau today—who has been knocked down a few pegs in recent months (at least in media coverage) might pleasantly surprise people if he can walk and chew gum at the same time. NDP Leader Thomas Mulcair is riding high these days, even being talked about as a prime minister, which means that anything he says will be scrutinized as never before.

Finally, there is Mr. Harper who, after so long in office, is who he is and what he has done. The election ultimately will be about him. You can indeed bet on that.