



## Giles Walker

March 23, 2020

January 17, 1946 - March 23, 2020

One of Canada's pioneering and most celebrated film directors, Giles Walker died March 23 in Toronto after a 10-year battle with brain cancer. Born in Scotland in 1946, Giles began his career in 1974 as a documentary filmmaker with the National Film Board of Canada in Montreal. He soon made the switch to dramas, and his *Bravery in the Field* earned him an Academy Award nomination for Best Live Action Short Film in 1979. He went on to win many Genie and Gemini awards over his 40-year career in Canadian film and television.

In the early 1980s, he led an innovative trend to low-budget feature films, which drew on spontaneous performances by non-professional actors. Most notable was the comedy *90 Days* (1985), a tongue-in-cheek story of the misadventures of two single men and their search for modern love.

Giles was the son of novelist and former Black Watch Major David Harry Walker and Montreal native Willa Magee, herself a writer who had served as Wing Commander of the Canadian Women's Air Force. They settled in the small town of St. Andrews-by-the-Sea, New Brunswick, where Giles and his three younger brothers grew up playing pond hockey and sailing the St. Croix river.

Giles came to film in a roundabout way. He failed his fifth year of Engineering studies at McGill, largely because he devoted most of his time to his role as president of his fraternity house. His parents compelled him to pursue a make-up degree in Psychology at the University of New Brunswick, where he kindled a love of cinema. That led him to a Master's degree in Film Studies at Stanford University in California, which served as a springboard for his success.

Tragically, his first wife, Imogen, died of cancer, foretelling his own illness years later, and giving him the sensitivity to direct an acclaimed film, *Princes in Exile* (1990), about a

summer camp for young cancer patients, all searching for love, social acceptance and recovery.

With second wife Hannele Halm, a Finnish-born documentary film editor, he had two children, Anna-Kaisa, a writer, and Sam, a lawyer. Giles was an attentive and doting father, delighting in his offspring's accomplishments and nudging them forward, as well as making them laugh—his well-planned April Fool's jokes were the stuff of legend in the family.

Ever the organizer and gatherer of people, he was the master link in a sprawling, multi-generational clan that travelled from all over the world to spend summers in St. Andrews. Giles was happiest at the helm of the annual "lobster boil," a family beach bonfire featuring lobsters cooked in sea water, per Maritime tradition. His love for young and old alike and his teasing sense of humour brought everyone into the fun.

His network of friends in the film industry grew huge over many projects, including the feature drama *Ordinary Magic* (1993), the television series *Emily of New Moon* (1998-2000), *Il Duce Canadese* (2004) and *René Lévesque* (2006), and the documentary *The Way of Tai Chi* (2011).

Diagnosed with a brain tumour in 2010, he often stubbornly refused to accept his limitations. He threw himself into writing a compelling and courageous book, *Wake Me in the Morning*, about his experience of terrifying abuse by a teacher at Bishop's College School in the late 1950s. He traveled across Canada and the Caribbean to meet with other Old Boys and listen to stories many had never told anyone before.

As his health gradually declined in his later years, he sometimes lost touch with reality, but, ever the filmmaker at heart, was at times convinced he was working on a new project. "Get me to the train station, the crew's waiting, goddamnit!" he once commanded a longtime friend. Even on his worst days, he always seemed to have a film he needed to be working on, a family gathering to plan, or a friend he had to see.

Giles was steadfastly cared for by Hannele, whose unwavering devotion carried the family through his many years of illness. He also received outstanding care from the staff of Suomi-Koti nursing home in Toronto, Saint Margaret's Residence in Montreal, and his oncology team at the Royal Victoria Hospital, headed by Dr. Gizelle Popradi.

Giles is survived by Hannele, their daughter Anna-Kaisa (Matt Morrow and their daughter Julia) and son Sam (Anna Dare, and their son Matias); and by his brothers, David (Diane),

their children Jordan (Rachel Lee), Erica Conklin, Zoe (Davy Dhillon), Josh Conklin (Jessica), and Riley; and Julian (Caroline), and their children Matthew (Katherine Sawatsky), Meg (Brandon Schaufele); brother-in-law John Dean, as well as many grand-nephews, grand-nieces and cousins throughout the family.

Giles was predeceased by his father and mother, David and Willa Walker, his brothers Barclay and Patrick, his first wife Imogen Dean, and his nephew, David A.M. Walker.

In lieu of flowers, the family would greatly appreciate donations to the Giles Walker Memorial Scholarship in Film Studies now established at the University of New Brunswick (via [www.unb.ca/giving](http://www.unb.ca/giving) or c/o Development & Donor Relations, University of New Brunswick, P.O. Box 4400, Fredericton, NB E3B 5A3) or toward research at the Brain Tumour Foundation of Canada, [www.braintumour.ca](http://www.braintumour.ca).

Due the ongoing pandemic, plans for a memorial service have unfortunately been postponed. The family hopes you can remember Giles in your own way, and will announce a date for a gathering when circumstances allow it. If you wish to see some of his work, his early films are available for free streaming at [NFB.ca](http://NFB.ca).

Free copies of Giles' book, *Wake Me in the Morning*, can be obtained by sending an e-mail to [hannele.halm@gmail.com](mailto:hannele.halm@gmail.com).

# Comments

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“ november 27th 2020 and i'm just getting this sad news....  
i am reflecting on many pleasant days and evenings at Melville Ave back when.....  
condolences to all...

**bob cohen** - November 27, 2020 at 05:27 PM

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“ 3 files added to the tribute wall



**Bruce moir** - April 26, 2020 at 10:44 PM

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“ Sue and I were terribly saddened this morning, Sunday 26 April, when Mike Rubbo rang to tell us of the death of Giles.

We met in 1974 when in Montreal for the year while I made the documentary co-production, Mr Symbolman, for Film Australia and the NFB. Giles became a good friend in that short period.

He and Hannele visited us in Sydney in the early 80's. The slight sickness Hannele was experiencing during that trip delivered a happy result 9 months later. This photo arrived Downunder 10 months later.

In 1990 we again caught up when I was in North America on other film business and managed to include a week back in Montreal. Giles and I together with his two kids spent a couple of days at his aunt's lake side cottage somewhere north of Montreal. ....my first and last sighting of a beaver dam

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He was such a lovely natural person I can see and hear him still so clearly even after 30 years, in which we only managed a couple of letters and one skype session-

I think there was a 'sympatico in our mutual Scottish ancestry and senses of humour. I was always impressed that his father had written the book about a Scottish hammer thrower who competed in the 1956 Melbourne Olympics. The film based on his book was called Geordie. My father had been on the organizing committee of those Games. The film was very popular in Australia

It was even sadder news to hear Giles had been suffering from major medical problems for so long before he died. Sue and I offer our deepest sympathies to Hannele and family for Giles' loss and the difficult route you all suffered on the way.

We'll keep Giles always in our hearts as he was. ....always rowing hard.

Bruce and Sue Moir

**Bruce moir** - April 26, 2020 at 10:44 PM

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“ Le 23 mars, on a perdu quelqu'un qui a beaucoup compté pour moi, dans la vie.

Giles a été la première personne à croire en mes qualités liées à la réalisation. Ça fait un long bout, oui! Dans les belles années de l'ONF.

Sans avoir besoin de se parler longuement, ça a toujours cliqué entre nous. Son départ me touche et je vais continuer de penser à lui, au-delà de sa mort. Sur cette photo, il a l'air d'une star.

Bon voyage, Giles ! Mes plus sincères sympathies à ta famille. xx

François Gingras

**François Gingras** - April 05, 2020 at 09:34 AM

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“ First off, I would like express my admiration for Hannele for being present for Giles and the children during this decade of struggle. My deepest sympathies go to the whole family, and I hope that soon all your good memories of Giles will prevail. My own memories of him go back so far, I only remember them through others' recounting of those early days in Saint-Andrew's when I used to play with Giles on the beach in New Brunswick as toddlers. Apparently, he liked to drop rocks on my head. My family teases me, saying that that is why I've never been normal. Then, I had the pleasure of knowing Giles at the NFB. I will forever remember his teasing radiant smile, and the sound of his laughter.

RIP Giles, our friend.

Margaux Ouimet

margaux.ouimet@gmail.com

**Margaux Ouimet** - April 04, 2020 at 08:08 AM

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“ Giles was one of the first film professors I had back in 2007 at the University of New Brunswick. I admired him very much and no matter how small the crew or set was, he would always treat it with the respect of a legitimate film set.

I remember it was the first time I felt like I was learning from a true filmmaker and he gave me a ton of confidence moving forward.

Most of all he was just a good man -- he treated us with so much kindness and respect. I have nothing but the fondest memories of Giles.

My condolences to family and loved ones.

**Greg Melanson** - April 03, 2020 at 08:06 PM

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“ It is with great sadness that I found out about Giles passing. I had the pleasure to work with him as production designer on the NFB production BRAVERY IN THE FIELD which got him a nomination for an Oscar. He was a wonderful man and a dedicated artist. Calm, collected and gentle. Last time I met him he told me about his fight over cancer. Rest in peace Giles. My sincere condolences to the family. Claude Paré

**Claude Paré** - April 03, 2020 at 07:32 PM

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“ A posting I wrote for the NFB Oldtimers Club.

“After ten arduous years battling a brain tumor and its cure Giles Walker died last Sunday night. He and his wife Hannele Halm were in a Finnish long term care facility in Toronto. I had not seen Giles since they left Montréal last year, but from everything I know they were as happy as they could be under the circumstances. Hannele had an apartment in the same building where Giles was being cared for. This allowed her to be with Giles constantly. She was an angel. Hannele said Giles had been refusing to eat the last couple of days. He knew it was time to go, and he was not about to relinquish control.

I had known Giles for fifty years - we went to film school together; he gave me my first job at the Film Board; we went to the Academy Awards together (we lost together); we were each other's Best Man.

I had the privilege of seeing a lot of Giles during nine of the last ten years. He was very sick. Through it all he fought hard and endured much. But he never changed. Sometimes we'd sit and hold hands for an hour saying nothing (I can't pretend to know what he was thinking, but his grip never faltered); sometimes he'd be cussing me out because of something I'd done, or not done. He never suffered fools.

In the last few years Giles started losing his grip on reality – or at least discovering new ones. He would make up stories that usually had to do with a film he was prepping. He would often command me to get him to the train station – ‘Now goddamnit, the crew's waiting!’, he'd scream. I'd wheel him up and down the hall quickly a few times. He'd calm down. Nobody did pre-production like Giles.

When I said goodbye to him as the ambulance waited to transport him to his new Toronto home last year his embrace was as strong as ever. As his gurney was loaded I'm sure I saw the excitement on his face that always signaled he was starting a new production. Good on you Giles. Have a fine shoot my friend.”

Paul Cowan - April 03, 2020 at 05:57 PM

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“ I had the pleasure of working with Gilles a few times and it was always a wonderful collaboration on every level. Gilles was respectful and caring with all members of the crew. He was a genuine team player and leader.

He will be missed...

My sincere condolences to all of his family and loved ones.

Zoe

zoe sakellaropoulo - April 03, 2020 at 04:03 PM

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“ I'm very sad to hear this. Giles was one of the most thoughtful and generous directors I ever had the pleasure of editing with.

Please accept my sincerest condolences. The world has lost a truly great man.

**Simon Webb** - April 03, 2020 at 02:42 PM

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“ Toutes mes condoléances à la famille de Giles qui vivent son départ et doivent le faire en ces temps difficiles.  
J'ai eu le plaisir et le privilège de collaborer au montage avec Giles au cours des ans de « Emily » jusqu'à « René » et plusieurs autres productions. Sa sensibilité, son calme et sa vision de chaque projet restent pour moi mes plus beaux souvenirs. Que de fous rires nous avons partagé en nous rappelant des répliques célèbres de personnages qu'il avait mis à l'écran!  
Adieu Giles. Repose en paix.  
Jean Beaudoin, monteur

**Jean Beaudoin** - April 03, 2020 at 05:34 AM

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“ I had the pleasure of working with Giles a long time ago, still have very fond memories of that movie! My sincere condolences to the family, he will be sorely missed in the film industry!  
Alex Amyot

**alex amyot** - April 02, 2020 at 09:15 PM

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“ J'ai eu le bonheur de travailler avec Giles sur Emily of New Moon, Mes plus sincères sympathies tous ses proches.

**Ginette Guillard** - April 02, 2020 at 06:27 PM



“ Un homme gentil et professionnel. Une perle en tournage. Mes sincères condoléances à toute la famille

**André Normandin** - April 03, 2020 at 03:23 PM

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“ Toutes mes sympathies à la famille et aux amis de Giles. J'ai rencontré Giles il y a environ 15 ans, lorsque j'étais stagiaire en droit dans un bureau d'avocats dans le vieux Montréal. Nous avons gardé contact au fil du temps et je garde un excellent souvenir de lui. Un homme qui traitait tous les gens de façon égale, à la générosité hors pair.

Il m'a bien souvent parlé des ses enfants dont il semblait extrêmement fier, je vous envoie, sans vous connaître, de douces pensées. Dans cette période étrange dans la quelle la planète est actuellement plongée, le départ de Giles me touche énormément. Bon repos Giles.

**Sophie Papillon** - April 02, 2020 at 06:18 PM

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“ J'ai eu le privilège de travailler avec Giles comme assistante à la réalisation sur la magnifique série "The Neverending Story". Que du bonheur, du plaisir et beaucoup de rires avec l'équipe et les comédiens. Giles était un homme de coeur, un réalisateur talentueux, inventif et d'une grande sensibilité. Il va nous manquer. Toutes mes condoléances à la famille et aux proches. Par pur hasard, j'ai trouvé il y a quelques jours cette photo de notre équipe réalisation sur Nervending Story. Un moment heureux. Merci Giles xxx



**Josee Drolet** - April 02, 2020 at 05:54 PM

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“ Giles was a warm, generous person, a talented director, a dear friend to Robin (Spry) and to me as well while Robin and I lived together. He collected a very touching series of tributes to Robin when we lost him in March 2005. I understand he held against health problems for some ten years, which doesn't surprise me from such a quietly determined man. I wish to offer my most sincere condolence to those he loved and those who loved him. In the middle of this worldwide storm, the death of a dear one hurts even more while good memories grow in importance. Those were great times, when the Film Board was a family and filmmakers worked together to keep an eye on the world and make it better. Thank you, Giles. Carmel Dumas

**Carmel Dumas** - April 02, 2020 at 03:17 PM

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“ I met Giles in September 1964 at McGill University. We shared a floor in Molson Hall ... the relatively new McGill residences. We were, I think, five doors apart and Giles was a notoriously playful, mischievous prankster who felt I was too serious (didn't help my grades at McGill) and would occasionally, surreptitiously enter my room and spray me with shaving foam. A wonderful smile that magically infected the whole floor and me. Often there were water fights and other forms of humorous deeds that Giles precipitated.

Giles invited me to join him and his father, David Walker, for a dinner at a downtown Montréal restaurant. I remember the humour and the darkness of the restaurant. I had read Geordie and Mallabec but was probably too shy to say much during the evening.

I went on to barely graduate with a B.Sc. degree and in the remaining few years didn't get to know Giles much better. Probably because I had not joined his fraternity. But I recall watching his interview by Barbara Frum years later. Her most insightful question to him after a 'feminist' moment ... "Do you know how many eggs are in the refrigerator at home right now?" The smile that emerged was mischievous. Always direct, always fun.

We never met again, but apparently he inquired of my mother in White Rock, B.C. of my whereabouts ... I was either in Borneo or on one of the Gulf Islands.

I wish we had connected.

Please accept my deepest condolences to his family.

Sincerely,  
Gordon A. Bailey  
Gordonbailey972@gmail.com

Gordon Bailey - April 02, 2020 at 02:28 PM

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“ Giles hires me for 2 film projects as an actor and then let me shadow him as a director. He was the first film director that I respected. He was integral, intelligent, kind, generous... I am so very saddened by this news and send his family, who I know he adored, all the strength and peace. He was the real deal. Best, Vanya

Vanya Rose - April 02, 2020 at 02:07 PM

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“ 1989. Giles was involved in a project to assemble NFB film clips in celebration of the NFB’s 50th anniversary. He came to ask for my advice regarding animation titles. I suggested it was too bad the National Film Board was instead not making a new original piece to celebrate. But, given the target Genies Award telecast was now one week away, impossible. I will never forget the way Giles’ eyes lit up as I said the word “impossible”. A time lapse tour of the entire NFB was in production by that afternoon and, in one of the most delightful weeks of my own professional life, I watched as Giles drove – directing, cajoling, guiding, charming literally everyone at the NFB at that time. Needless to say, an excellent result was part of that Genies Award telecast.

David Verrall

David Verrall - April 02, 2020 at 11:08 AM

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“ Dear Hannele,

So sorry to hear this. He was remarkable in many ways, but the thing I will never forget is how when I saw him occasionally over the past couple of years, that Giles wit, sense of absurdity, and searching observation was still there.

With love,

Maurie Alioff

Maurie Alioff - April 02, 2020 at 12:14 AM

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“ I was greatly saddened to learn of Giles' death. We were good friends in 1966-67 as summer students at the Biological Station in St. Andrews and had many good times together, including with his very hospitable parents at their home on the shores of Passamaquoddy Bay. Of course my acquaintance with Giles preceded his career in film, I did not know all the details of this as we had lost touch in recent years, but I knew he was an admired film-maker. Our last meeting was in 2008 at the centennial celebration for the St. Andrews Biological Station, but also got together in 2005 - I will try to upload a picture or two. Heartfelt sympathies to the family and much appreciation for a good friend.



Howard Powles - April 01, 2020 at 05:25 PM

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“ My heartfelt condolences to Hannele and the children of the inimitable Giles Walker. He was a creative force that influenced the last forty years of my life. He gave me my first great role in the late seventies as a troubled homeless street thug in the celebrated "Bravery in the Field". He was a genuine collaborator from the very first moment. I still remember the care and compassion he had for not only his cast and crew but the townsfolk of Saint John, N.B.. His commitment and love of telling stories was infectious and for a young actor a great gift. His curiosity about all things was always at the forefront. I so admired him. We all hold a special place in our hearts for those that help us get our start in life and Giles is that special man for me. Rest in Peace.

Love, Matt Craven

Matt Craven - April 01, 2020 at 03:36 PM

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“ His book Wake Me in the Morning was a courageous and very welcome (and well written!) account of a dark time at BCS. I thanked him for it when he was alive, and I thank him for it now. Michael Harris, BCS 1953-1959.

Michael Harris - April 01, 2020 at 03:02 PM

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“ On behalf of my late father John Anderson, I would like to say that Giles was one of his heroes. He had so much respect for Giles’s cinematic and diplomatic skills. Giles will not be replaceable.

**Peter Anderson** - March 31, 2020 at 05:14 PM

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“ Sam, we are so sorry to hear of yourDad’s illness and death. Our deepest condolences to you and all your family.

John & Lee Carsley

**John Carsley** - March 31, 2020 at 12:24 PM

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“ Dear Giles was a treasure. Thinking of Hannele, Kaise, Sam and their families with love,  
Katie Malloch

**katie malloch** - March 31, 2020 at 09:48 AM