

FEATURE

He ‘was like the Hollywood casting version of the crusty news editor with a heart of gold’: friends, colleagues, former students remember Elly Alboim

Elly Alboim’s career included time at the CBC, Earnscliffe Strategies, and Carleton University’s School of Journalism, in addition to once being a senior adviser to then-Liberal prime minister Paul Martin. Alboim died on Feb. 8 at the age of 78.

BY JUSTIN S. CAMPBELL

Elly Alboim, the former legendary CBC parliamentary bureau chief, journalism professor, adviser to prime minister Paul Martin, and principal at Earnscliffe Strategies in Ottawa, was a force of presence in his professional life on the Hill and at home with his family, with everyone from colleagues to former students and family describing him as a man with a sharp intellect and zero tolerance for nonsense.

“Elly Alboim was like the Hollywood casting version of the crusty news editor with a heart of gold,” reads the writeup on Carleton University’s School of Journalism website which has created a scholarship in Alboim’s name. “And across close to five decades as a journalist with the CBC and a journalism professor at Carleton University, he was a no-nonsense mentor to generations of young journalists.”

Alboim worked at CBC from 1970 to 1993, becoming the parliamentary bureau chief for CBC in 1977. He also worked as CBC’s national political editor, and produced live news specials in a senior role. For 16 years, he led CBC’s parliamentary bureau and covered some of the biggest political events in Canadian politics, including the 1980 Quebec referendum, prime minister Pierre Trudeau’s National Energy Program, the North American Free Trade Agreement, and the Meech Lake and Charlottetown accords. He taught at Carleton’s journalism school from 1980 until his death earlier this month.



Elly Alboim works as an assignment editor at the CBC in Montreal in the early 1970s. Photograph courtesy of Alboim family

As CBC’s parliamentary bureau chief, Alboim created what former student and colleague Allan Thompson, a former Hill reporter for *The Toronto Star*, referred to as the “golden age” of television news and public policy in this country.

“He understood what a good story was and what the role of journalists was in a democracy, and he was very adamant about accuracy and fairness and journalism ethics,” said Thompson, who is now director of the journalism school at Carleton University.

Thompson said Alboim was a teacher, mentor, and a loyal colleague.

“The school has only been around for 80 years, and so Elly had been part of Carleton’s journalism program for half of its existence, which means more than half of the people who went through that journalism program would have had contact with Elly,” Thompson said.

Alboim died of heart failure on Feb. 8, 2026. He was 78 years old. He leaves behind his wife, Kathy, three children, seven grandchildren, and a sister. His parents, Sam and Helen, were Polish immigrants who built a life in Montreal, where Alboim grew up. His mother was a Holocaust refugee. Alboim received a bachelor’s honours in sociology

at McGill University, where he wrote for *The McGill Daily*, and a master’s in journalism at Columbia University in New York City.

He has been described as “crusty” and “gruff” in memorials, but people close to him say he was direct with his arguments, often given at the tail end of meetings after much opinion and perspective had been tossed around, and his judgments were so accurate and succinct that others might be taken aback at such blunt, but reliable summarizations.

“There was no grey area for my dad,” son Jaime Alboim said. “If you wanted his opinion, he’d give you his opinion. If you

approached him with something, then you better approach him with something that’s worthy of his time.”

Jaime Alboim remembered his father always answering the phone, no matter how busy he was at work.

He would first ask if the caller was okay, and if their family was okay, according to the younger Alboim.

“Once he got through the list to say, ‘Is everybody okay?’ he would say, ‘Okay, well, I’m just with the prime minister. Let me call you back in five,’” Alboim said, referring to when Elly Alboim worked for prime minister Paul Martin.

Craig Robinson, CEO of Earnscliffe Strategies where Alboim was most recently a principal, also remembers a lighter side to Alboim.

“The Earnscliffe holiday party used to have a tradition of almost being a talent show, and the highlight was when Elly would get up and sing his union songs and get everyone clapping along,” Robinson said.

“For those who were new to the team, just the shock and awe at seeing what appeared to be so out of character became so expected once you worked with him.”

Alboim helped create golden age of TV news in Canada

Peter Mansbridge, former anchor of CBC’s *The National* and host of the *Good Talk* podcast, worked with Alboim for years and the two were good friends.

“He was a mentor to me, and we were friends. Our families summer together. We all learned from him, and he was never shy about challenging assumptions, whether they were being made by a cabinet minister or by a reporter,” Mansbridge said.

Rosemary Barton, CBC News’ current chief political correspondent, credits Alboim for helping her find her place as a junior reporter in a bureau staffed with senior journalists.

“I didn’t know how to go about making my mark. I reached out to him, and he helped me figure out how to carve out a bit of space for myself in the bureau because, of course, he ran the bureau for so long,” Barton said.

Barton remembered lunches with Alboim, where she absorbed his insights on current affairs and political strategy.

“He was deeply committed to public policy. He had lots to say about strategizing and the politics of something, but he also cared a lot about the content. That was a good lesson for me: it’s not just the cut and thrust, it’s also what these people are doing and how they’re making decisions,” she said.

‘Elly was extremely well-known and well-respected in Ottawa’: David Herle

After covering Kim Campbell’s successful bid to replace Brian Mulroney as leader of the Pro-