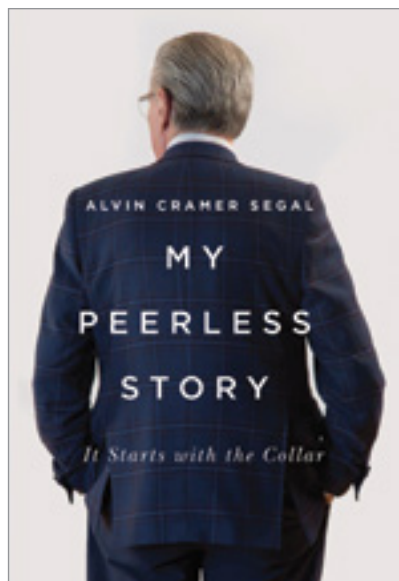


Summer Reading



The King of Suits

Alvin Cramer Segal

My Peerless Story: It Starts with the Collar. Montreal and Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017.

Review by
L. Ian MacDonald

When Alvin Segal started as an 18-year-old worker in the family-owned Peerless Clothing, he knew nothing about the business. “My job at Peerless truly did start with the collars,” Segal writes in his memoir, which he’s been working on for several years.

“Collars became an obsession of mine,” he writes. “If the collar doesn’t hug the neck properly, the finished coat doesn’t fit the way it should.”

And that’s how Segal learned the clothing business, on the factory floor, from the ground up. Three years later, when he was just 21, his stepfather Moe Segal told him: “Alvin, you’re now in charge of the factory.”

At the time, in the mid-1950s, Peer-

less was a modest maker of low-priced suits and trousers located in the heart of Montreal’s *schmatte* district. Its sales were about \$2 million a year with profit margins around five per cent. All its customers were in Canada, in places like Eaton’s basement.

Today, Peerless is the largest maker of men’s and boys’ tailored clothing in the world. Among its global high-end labels are Ralph Lauren and Calvin Klein.

And Alvin Segal sits atop the clothing world as the King of Suits. Now 83, and for decades the company’s executive chairman and CEO, he still works at the Peerless plant on Pie-IX Boulevard in the North End of Montreal, a place glittering with all the modern tools of the trade.

The story of how Segal built a Canadian world champion is one that starts on the floor of that factory, with suits shipped every day across the border to a distribution centre that is the largest employer in St. Albans, Vt.

But the Peerless success story is also one of how Segal made the most of free trade, first the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement (FTA) implemented in 1989, and then the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) beginning in 1994.

During the FTA negotiations from 1985-87, the Mulroney government struck Sectoral Advisory Groups on International Trade (SAGITs), with Canadian industries. “On the apparel SAGIT,” he writes, “I represented men’s fine clothing.”

He continues: “Regular SAGIT meetings were held for three years, and I gathered a tremendous amount of knowledge throughout the proceedings.” During the SAGIT talks, he writes, “it became very clear that the apparel industry needed access to raw materials not made in North America

to compete with free trade.”

Shifting the rules of origin in fabric, with foreign materials qualifying as domestic content, was Segal’s signature breakthrough in the FTA round. Segal writes he was “introduced to the words ‘imports’ and ‘quotas’ and began to gain a full understanding of their meaning and importance to our industry.” Under the FTA, Peerless would make the most of both.

“We had a fabric advantage, the right product and no international union stopping us from making changes,” he writes. “It was the perfect combination of ideal conditions and unique opportunities.” Segal also built a strong sales team in New York, the home of the American clothing industry.

Sales was not a role Segal would ever have been cut out for himself, because of a serious stutter—one of the reasons he was first put in the cutting room, and learned the business bottom to top.

Segal’s personal narrative is one of twists of fate, leading to destiny, fate being something that happens and destiny being something that’s created.

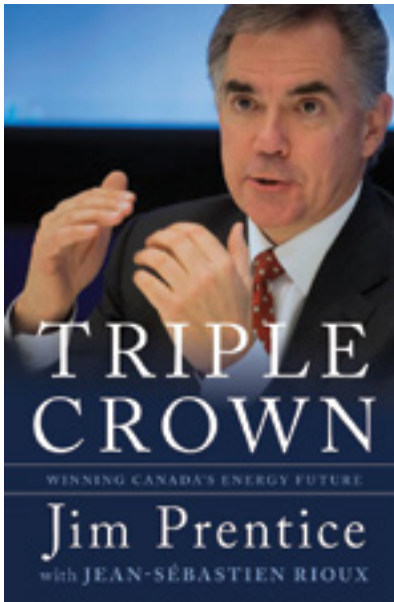
Born as Alvin Cramer in upstate New York, his father George Cramer died when he was only seven. Relatives set his mother, Betsy Pearson Cramer, up with the recently widowed Moe Segal in Montreal, which is how Alvin came to Canada, adopting his stepfather’s name when he went to work for him.

From there, the stepson with the stutter whose gut instinct and one-sentence business philosophy—have a long-range plan that changes every day—made him one of the most successful manufacturers in Canadian history, bought the company, lost the stutter and became a prominent philanthropist in Montreal’s Jewish

community, supporting cancer research at the Jewish General Hospital, and creating the Segal Centre for Performing Arts.

His Peerless story demonstrates how success in business can also lead to a culture of giving back, both to his employees and his community. It's a worthy story, on both levels. **P**

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A Policy Legacy

Jim Prentice with
Jean-Sébastien Rioux

Triple Crown: Winning Canada's Energy Future. Toronto, HarperCollins, 2017.

Review by Jaime Watt

It would be challenging for any reasonable Canadian—Conservative, Liberal, New Democrat or Green—to read the late Jim Prentice's book *Triple Crown: Winning Canada's Energy Future*, and find a significant objection to his central argument.

This non-partisan, policy-driven, thoughtfully crafted and emotion-

ally charged manifesto by Alberta's former premier and federal Conservative cabinet minister clearly and elegantly posits that Canada should be the country the world looks to for responsible energy development.

Prentice, who tragically died in a plane crash late last year, argues that Canada has the potential to redefine itself as a global force in the energy world. Canada, Prentice notes, has one of the world's largest asset bases of oil, natural gas, uranium, coal, hydroelectricity and renewable energy. He reminds us, however, that when Canadians and others talk about Canadian energy, the first thing that comes to mind are the Alberta oil sands along with the negative imagery that quickly follows.

He speaks to the fact that Canadians are proud of their aviation industry, universities, technology centres, and world-class manufacturing hubs in Ontario and Quebec, but are embarrassed and withdrawn when it comes to the energy sector. As Prentice sees it, the proof is in the pudding—not one major global energy company is headquartered in Canada.

The book starts with a comprehensive overview of Canada's resources, and their strategic interest. It quickly digs deeper to offer an eye-opening, first-hand account of the Canadian-American relationship from a nuanced perspective. It provides a measured account of hurdles the energy economy faces, namely what many consider to be environmental challenges. Prentice frames these instead as opportunities—legitimate issues that relate to Canada's First Nations. To conclude, Prentice describes opportunities in the Asia Pacific Basin and offers recommendations for a better future.

Prentice argues that for Canada to have a future in the energy business it must excel in the business of the environment.

Prentice's view is that a prosperous economy and a healthy environment go hand in hand, and that Canadian politicians often don't understand

this. The economic cost of doing nothing on climate change is high, he says, noting that the Keystone XL Pipeline—the most significant expansion of Canada's energy export capacity into the United States—was blocked only because the U.S. president didn't want to be associated with Canada's climate change policies. He also notes that Canada's pipeline push to both the east and the west is being challenged by First Nations and by municipal and provincial governments, on environmental grounds.

It's a valuable lesson to pragmatic conservatives across the country: Canada, for the sake of its continued prosperity, must respond to the issue that critics are using to undermine this success—the environment.

New Conservative Leader Andrew Scheer should heed this advice. Few people now doubt the science of climate change, virtually everyone under the age of 30, and even a majority of Albertans see the environment as an important issue. Scheer's chances at electoral success will be significantly weakened unless the Conservatives have a mature policy position on climate change.

So far, Canadian politicians have not come up with clear, forward-looking policies on energy and the environment. These, Prentice argues, are desperately needed.

Prentice makes clear we need to lead more aggressively on the environment, and that energy success will depend on reducing our carbon emissions and greening our energy systems.

This book should be mandatory reading for any aspiring Canadian leader, regardless of partisan stripe. It is the definitive text on how to move our energy and resource economy forward in a political world that is increasingly impeding its successful future. **P**

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