



## *Laurie Watson*

*1950-2014*

For over 21 years, Laurie Watson led Merlin Edge Inc. She was a unique creative force who conceived and drove hundreds of projects that were always imaginative and often brilliant in their themes, visual presentation and verbal expression. These ranged from corporate history books to calendars of high-end wildlife photography that she personally photographed, to hundreds of annual reports and websites.

Who else but Laurie could have thought to depict a company that fabricates giant steel pressure vessels as a hummingbird sipping nectar? Who else would have argued so passionately for the concept that the company owner would buy in?

Laurie was nurturing, protective and unswervingly loyal to the many companies and individuals she and Merlin Edge did business with. Merlin's motto – her motto – *Our Unwavering Focus: The Success of our Clients*, was no marketing pose, but a core belief within her.

Laurie passed away peacefully at 8:19 a.m., Friday, November 28, 2014 after a long battle with cancer. The staff and families of Merlin Edge mourn her loss. Foremost among them is her husband, best friend and business partner, George Koch. We thank everyone for the many expressions of sorrow and support, offers of assistance, and gifts such as the beautiful flower bouquets.



## Biography

Laurie Mae Watson was born in Regina, Saskatchewan on August 26, 1950. She and her twin-sister, Lynn Marlene, were adopted as infants by Harold and Freda Watson. The family lived in Vancouver before moving to Edmonton when the girls were six. They grew up there. Laurie graduated from Strathcona Composite High School and attended the University of Alberta.

Laurie always loved to read, and along with her natural curiosity and a restless spirit was drawn to journalism. She began to write for the *Edmonton Journal* while still in high school. This blossomed into a varied career writing for trade publications in the construction sector, marketing and advertising on the agency side, and reporting for a major international wire service. She spent many years in Ottawa covering national politics, and travelled to the 40th anniversary of the D-Day landings in Normandy in 1984.

Laurie and George met in Ottawa in 1989. The two remained together ever since and were later married in Calgary.




## Calgary Business Career

Laurie and George returned to Calgary in 1992, and in 1993 founded the Merlin Creative Group. Merlin was very small at first. George mainly worked as a freelance journalist throughout the 90s. For several years, Laurie essentially *was* Merlin.

The company was named after the Merlin falcon – a light, agile and fast raptor. This reflected both our view of ourselves and the nature of Calgary's business community at the time. With our city having its own stock exchange, and with natural gas exports recently deregulated, Calgary was a dynamic place filled with emerging and junior publicly traded companies – 800 of them by one count.

It was truly wonderful how, in that era, the principals in a small start-up company like Merlin could stroll into the offices of a junior oil company and chat with the CEO. Laurie and George always remained grateful to the company owners who decided to take a chance on Merlin.





## *Growth of Merlin*

The founders had a vision for Merlin: to take the opposite of the traditional agency approach to designing marketing and investor relations materials. Normally, designers would not care too much about what a company was all about at heart, or what it really did. They would design something they thought was brilliant for themselves, and then try to sell it to the client.

The Merlin concept was to thoroughly *listen* to the client, to learn about the company's business model, what it was trying to achieve, how it was different from its competitors. Only *then* would we begin the conceptual development process, producing a design that reflected the realities and needs of the client.

That became our animating principle – and it remains so today.

Initially Merlin focused on annual reports, at one time producing nearly 40 annual reports per season. The company produced all the related investor relations materials. Merlin was quite early to embrace the Internet, producing its first websites in the late 90s.

Merlin grew steadily, adding numerous permanent staff, moving into ample, company-owned agency space, and doing business with companies large, small and in-between. Laurie particularly loved working with entrepreneurs, where the point of contact was either the CEO or a senior VP. She also developed a number of close and enduring relationships with marketing and communications specialists in larger companies.

Laurie and George deeply appreciated the depths of knowledge and insight that so many of their clients shared with them. In this way, Merlin's clients themselves strengthened the company immensely.

With the evolution of Calgary's business sector, today the focus is increasingly on industrial companies providing products and services to a variety of sectors, chiefly energy. Annual reports and related investor relations materials remain core services.

It says much about Laurie and the people she did business with, that she developed relationships lasting many years or even decades, in many cases following her clients through two, three, four or even more corporate cycles. In some cases, clients added only this year were actually people who found their way back to Merlin after many years. Laurie loved these reunions the most. Laurie also deeply appreciated the fine work done by numerous staff and specialist contractors and vendors over the years.



## *Laurie's Life*

Because relationships were central to the way Laurie did business, many of Merlin's clients know quite a bit about Laurie's life. She and George spent weeks every spring, summer and fall roaming Montana and Wyoming in their truck camper.

Laurie became an avid bird photographer, taking technically meticulous, detailed photos ranging from hummingbirds to golden eagles. She achieved magazine-quality results, culminating in the 2014 bird calendar that many of you have seen. There is a 2015 edition coming!

She was a superb fly angler, fishing with George on the Bow River in their drift boat and spending many camping days wading remote mountain streams or drifting wild rivers with guides. Several of the guides considered her the best female angler they knew.

One highlight of Laurie's later years was being on the Board of Trustees of two of Canada's major museums, the National Museum of Civilization in Ottawa and the newer Museum of Immigration in Halifax. Laurie applied her usual drive in conceiving and helping to develop fundraising methods and the itineraries for some of the major travelling exhibits. She also contributed to bringing proper financial reporting processes to the Museum of Civilization. Laurie found this work very fulfilling, and resigned for health reasons only in October.



## *Merlin Edge*

Laurie is irreplaceable – but she wanted the company to go on. George and the staff at Merlin Edge together made the decision to do so.

In recent months, Laurie's health struggle became a basically full-time focus, so that Laurie had little day-to-day involvement in company operations. She continued to provide brilliant advice on the conceptual creative side until her last weeks. This past year, George has been stirred by the degree to which the Merlin Edge staff have stepped up and have outdone themselves in the quality of their work.

We are determined to live up to Laurie's legacy on every level. First and foremost is continuing to serve the needs of our clients. This is the driving theme that was central in Laurie's character – and has been crucial to the enduring success of Merlin Edge.

**George Koch**

December 1, 2014