SHELTON OMEROBSON 1949–2004
Writer performs his stories
Award-winning Winnipeg author focused stories on city’s Jewish neighbourhood, wrote songs for Fred Penner

By Brian Brennan

Sheldon Oberson produced what he considered his first important work in 1967, the summer after he finished high school. He was working for the Canadian Pacific Railway as a cook on the Rocky Mountaineer, which was then running between Vancouver when a food-service car was hijacked by a group of truckers. The train’s chef had been killed in the attack, and several injured. Mr. Oberson sat in the dining car while the hijackers went through the train. He then wrote an essay about the experience, which he submitted to the University of Calgary for a prize. The essay was praised by the judges, who awarded him a prize and a scholarship. He went on to attend the University of Calgary and later moved to Winnipeg, where he continued to write and perform his stories.

Oberson graduated from the University of Calgary in 1972 and began to perform his stories on stage. He was a long-time fan of the Winnipeg-based theatre company, The Tuxedo Players, and often performed with the group. He became known as a spokesman on racial issues, and his work was featured in a number of publications, including The Globe and Mail, a division of the Toronto Star.

Oberson’s work was also featured in the book, The Always Prayer Shawl, which was published in 1990. The book was a collection of vignettes about the life of a Jewish Canadian woman, and it was praised for its insight into the experiences of Jewish Canadians. Oberson was also a retelling of the story of the Winnipeg Opera, Bizet’s Carmen, which was performed in 1991.

Oberson’s stories were collected in a number of anthologies, including The Impressionist (1995), Imaginative and the Lonely Mutability (1999), and The Always Prayer Shawl (1999). His work was also featured in the book, The Globe and Mail: The Impressionist (1995), which was published in 1995.

Oberson’s work has been praised for its insight into the experiences of Jewish Canadians, and he is remembered as a gifted writer and performer. He died in 2014, leaving behind a legacy of powerful and moving works.