

JOURNALISM TEACHER STAN MURPHY NURTURED HALL-OF-FAME WRITING CAREER

by King Lee (VHS 1958)



When sports columnist/humourist Jim Taylor accepted his induction as a Victoria High School “Illustrious Alumni” at the inaugural Black and Gold dinner in May 2014, he credited his journalism teacher for paving the way to three inductions in Canadian sports halls of fame and three awards for lifetime achievement in writing.

Taylor’s respect for Stanley Albert Murphy was such that in his acceptance speech that evening, he referred to him as “Mr. Murphy,” nearly six decades after attending his journalism classes at Vic High.

“He liked all his journalism students. I know that,” said Barbara Mae Norton, who was married to Mr. Murphy from 1950 to 1966.

But he was particularly fond of Taylor, spotting his talent early and sending him to the *Victoria Daily Colonist’s* sports editor Jim Tang to work as a full-time sports writer -- even though Taylor was still in Grade 11.

Taylor recalled that when Mr. Murphy told him there was a job opening in the *Colonist* sports department, Taylor, not enamoured with sports writing, said he wished whoever took the job well and the teacher responded with a resounding “You’ve taken it!”

Taylor jokingly told the audience that Mr. Murphy threatened to kick him all the way to the Victoria Press building on Douglas Street.

Thus began Taylor's journalism career that has produced 16 books, more than 7,500 newspaper columns, induction into the Canadian, British Columbia and Greater Victoria sports halls of fame, and three lifetime achievement awards, including the prestigious Bruce Hutchison Award. (Hutchison too was a VHS grad, class of 1917.)

"I will always be grateful to Vic High," said Taylor, now a Shawnigan Lake resident. "In terms of a career, I owe everything to Stan Murphy."

Mr. Murphy was born on January 6, 1916, in Alberta. The place is in dispute but Mrs. Norton believes it was Medicine Hat. Some records indicated it was Edmonton. He died of an apparent heart attack on December 28, 1971, in Victoria.

He served in the Royal Canadian Air Force during the World War II and lived in Montreal for about a year afterward before taking a position teaching English and journalism at Vic High in 1948.

Mrs. Norton said he lived in France just before the war and, after returning from service in the RCAF, taught in Chemainus and Britannia Mines before joining the Vic High teaching staff under legendary principal Harry Smith.

During his time at Vic High, Mr. Murphy became interested in politics and was elected as a Saanich alderman (now councillor) in 1958.

"I think he just needed some more stimulation," Mrs. Norton said of the foray into politics.

He subsequently ran for reeve (now mayor) of Saanich and was elected in 1962, serving two full terms and part of a third (until August 1964). He was succeeded by the late Hugh Curtis, another Vic High grad.

Mrs. Norton recalled that Mr. Murphy was "a very good teacher" and that his brother Art taught in the Saanich school district. Mrs. Norton also taught, at Macaulay elementary school in Esquimalt from 1967 to 1983.

"He was a wonderful father, too," added daughter Thirell Trottier, who followed her father's footsteps into teaching.

But in 1964, Mr. Murphy wanted a change and took his wife and five children (three sons and two daughters) to live in Southern Rhodesia, where he taught at a teachers' training college in Gwelo (since renamed Gweru) before moving on to Ghana.

The family eventually came back to B.C. in 1966, but the couple separated just prior to the return. Mrs. Norton and the children returned to Victoria and Mr. Murphy taught in Vancouver for about two years before taking a teaching/counselling job at Camosun College in 1968.

Mr. Murphy was known not only for his teaching abilities but also for his humour.

His students remember Mr. Murphy introducing himself at the start of the school year as “S.A. Murphy” and said the “S. A.” stood for sex appeal.

Political correctness had not been invented, but his joke was taken by his students in the spirit given. Everyone laughed. No one complained.

“He had a lovely sense of humour,” Mrs. Norton recalled.

Mrs. Norton said Mr. Murphy was also a very good bridge player, played the harmonica, took singing lessons, joined a choir and enjoyed badminton.

She said he thought about provincial and federal politics, but decided against it because of the low pay (in those days).

One of their political highlights occurred in 1962 when Reeve Murphy and his wife officially launched B.C. Ferries’ *Queen of Saanich* at a Victoria Machinery Depot ceremony.

Louise LeBel, a former daughter-in-law (VHS 1974), has ordered a seat plaque to be placed in the Lawrie Wallace Auditorium on behalf of her former husband, Kevin, and their three sons (the only grandchildren with the Murphy surname) in remembrance of one of Victoria High School’s most beloved teachers.

To see the 1971 Times Colonist obituary for Stan Murphy, go back to the Alumni website and click on News, then In Memoriam.