

CANADIAN ICON JOURNALIST JIM TAYLOR PASSES AWAY

An iconic Canadian sports journalist and humourist I was privileged to call a friend, Jim Taylor, died Monday morning, Jan. 7, at his Shawnigan Lake home. He was 82.

Although he was journalistically dozens of stratospheres above me, Jim and I had a somewhat parallel career which started at Victoria High School. He attended for two school years, graduating in 1955, while I attended from the fall of 1955 and graduated in 1958. We never crossed paths in the hallways.

However, we shared a journalism teacher, Stan Murphy, whom Jim credited with launching his hall-of-fame career in newspapers.

Incredibly, Mr. Murphy spotted Jim's writing talent when he was in Grade 11 and recommended him to *The Daily Colonist* sports editor Jim Tang when there was an opening for a full-time sports writer at the Victoria morning newspaper.

So, as a teenager in Grade 12, Jim's Mondays to Fridays (except for holidays) consisted of getting up pre-dawn to deliver his Colonist newspaper route (which he said he would not give up in case this "writing thing" didn't work out), attending classes and hustling down to the Victoria Press building to work at *The Daily Colonist* sports department until about 1:00 a.m. The truth of the matter was that Jim financially helped his widowed mom.

In my Grade 12 year and my second in Mr. Murphy's journalism class, I was assigned to be a high school "stringer" for the Colonist sports department. A stringer is someone who collects all the scores, statistics and details from Greater Victoria high school sports and phones or brings them to the newspaper office.

That is how I first met Jim, who took all my information and wrote the story from it.

I never got hired by Colonist sports editor Tang until a decade or so later and by that time, Jim had established himself as one of the top sports columnists in Vancouver and gained nation-wide attention.

In total, Jim worked one year at the ill-fated *Vancouver Times*, 13 years with the *Vancouver Sun*, 17 years with the *Vancouver Province* and six years as a

nationally-syndicated sports columnist with the *Calgary Sun* before retiring in 2001.

Along the way, Jim married his (Oak Bay High) sweetheart Deb and had two children, Chris and Teresa.

His daughter received a life-altering head injury as a teenager. She was standing on a ski slope when the accident occurred.

Jim filed a civil lawsuit on behalf of his daughter, but the court ruled that she was standing in the wrong spot when the skier plowed into her and denied the claim for damages.

Because Jim was strapped with the medical bills, he had to get second and third jobs on Vancouver radio and television.

The question is, how could Jim Taylor write such brilliant and humorous sports columns while dealing with such a devastating situation and working from dawn to dusk? I asked him some time ago. He simply shrugged his shoulders and said he had to do it to support his family.

Jim was considered one of Canada's top sports columnists and humourists and he has the trophies to prove it. He was installed in the Canadian Football League, British Columbia and Greater Victoria sports halls of fame, was given a lifetime achievement award by Sports Media Canada and was most proud of his Bruce Hutchison (another Vic High journalist) lifetime achievement award given to him by the Jack Webster Foundation in 2010.

As if life wasn't busy enough for him, Jim also found time to write 19 (at last count) books, the one gaining the most attention being the biography on hockey legend Wayne Gretzky. Jim's favourite memory is walking to Gretzky's last National Hockey League game at Madison Square Gardens, with Gretzky's father, Walter, and Wayne, who was with the New York Rangers. Jim and the Gretzkys remained friends.

Jim's other books profiled the lives of CFL players Jim Young (*Dirty 30*, Jim's first book), Dan Kepley and Matt Dunigan, hockey's Igor Larianov, soccer's Bob Lenarduzzi, auto-racer Greg Moore, Vancouver bandleader Dal Richards and Man-in-Motion Rick Hansen. Jim traveled on Hansen's world tour prior to writing the

book. In addition, three of his books were collections of his approximate 7,500 columns.

Among his many sports assignments were the 1972 Canada-Russia hockey series and a Muhammad Ali boxing match.

In the last few years, Jim and I had many enjoyable lunches near his Shawnigan Lake home, lunches that lasted much more than an hour because of the many wonderful stories he told.

When his wife, Deb, died on Jan. 5, 2016, I tried to console Jim as best I could. But I could tell that I failed. Deb was his rock and the only person who could challenge him and get away with it. Jim could be feisty as well as caustic at times but was the most gracious and kind host to his friends.

What I liked most about Jim was that he spoke the way he wrote, with wit, humour and understanding.

What a privilege to have known him and to have him introduce me as a friend.

Another Jim Taylor might come along some day.

But I really doubt it.