

## One Less Book Guy W.H. Overend, 1919-2017



We mourn the loss of William Howard Overend, born in Toronto on Feb. 27 1919, who succumbed to an age-abetted lung infection on Mar. 2, 2017, in Mission, B.C., three days into his 99th year. He leaves behind a loving family, a circle of friends and a legion of admirers who have watched in awe as this man carved the furrows of a long life in incorrigible, passionate fashion.

Our father's earliest accolade, in tandem with his brother Bruce, was "Best Twin Babies" recognition at the Canadian National Exhibition back in 1919 (for which they received gold medals and \$15 cash). Growing up, Howard played football with his twin at Malvern Collegiate Institute, where they claimed the Toronto & District Secondary School championship before the Second World War. During the war, Howard served in Canada and overseas with the Royal Canadian Air Force, receiving three medals.

Post-war, Howard earned his B.A., attended library school at the University of Toronto, then began a librarian career that thrice traversed Canada, including stops in Abbotsford B.C. (twice), London Ont., Cranbrook B.C., Dawson Creek B.C. and Whitehorse Yukon. In Dawson Creek, he hosted a local TV show called "World of Books," initiated bookmobile service to small communities in the Peace River Block and up the Alaska Highway, and starred in the National Film Board documentary *Journey from Zero* (1962).

It was during his sojourn at Dawson (1958-72) that Howard amassed the raft of intrepid stories central to *Book Guy: A Librarian in the Peace*, which he penned during his retirement and published in 2001. The book was "an opportunity," wrote reviewer M. Wayne Cunningham, "to read about a truly dedicated, one-of-a-kind Book Guy ... and his lifetime crusade on behalf of great reading and good writing."

But our Dad wasn't all about books. He married Clara Johanna Spall of Kelowna B.C. in 1948; together they raised four children: Alan (1951), Tom (1953), Laura (1955) and Bill (1959). The sport of speed skating was strong in Dawson Creek and the kids were signed up. Howard assisted with the wintertime firehose flooding of the outdoor track, served on successive club, provincial and national executives, and ultimately became founding editor of *The Racer*, award-winning national association newsletter. He and Clara were named Dawson Creek "Citizens of the Year" in 1971, and they are both now members of the Speed Skating Canada Hall of Fame.

The last stop on Howard's career was as Yukon's territorial librarian; his defiant first act of retirement, at age 65, was to hike, solo, the historic 50-km gold rush Chilkoot Trail. After a move to Salmon Arm B.C., Howard continued his "golden years" by competing in successive B.C. Senior Games and medaling in multiple events. In his 70s, Howard would glean perhaps his deepest weekly enjoyment from a solo 14-km early Sunday morning run to and from the nearby village of Canoe. He, along with wife Clara, made a point of participating in every annual Terry Fox Run; they were recognized by the Foundation. Later in retirement, Howard became primary caregiver to his beloved wife as the effects of dementia overtook her. Shortly after Clara's passing in 2012, Howard relocated to Mission B.C. where he threw his final energies back to his other abiding love: reading and writing. He entered his final Terry Fox Run in September 2016.

Howard enjoyed his more public accomplishments, but he will perhaps be most fondly remembered for his smaller acts: for how he read us books at bedtime, for the time he took to throw the football, for the corny gag gifts under the tree, for the walks and play wrestling with his grandkids, for the annual renditions of "Happy Birthday" sung over the phone, for his relish of the swim to the buoys at Kalamalka Lake, for his incredible recitation of poems during annual family talent night at Silver Star, B.C. And for how he determined to finish whatever he started, be it building a model sailboat, or refinishing the dining room chairs, or perfecting his prized fudge, or caring for Clara.

A man who passes at 98 is pre-deceased by many; those from Howard's exceptional generation who survive him include sister Dorothea (Cobourg), sister-in-law Beth Spall (Penticton) and brother-in-law Stan Leaming (Penticton). Howard will be sorely missed by his children: Alan and wife Shirley in Calgary; Tom and wife Leslie in London; Laura and husband Armin in Abbotsford; and Bill and wife Patti in Calgary. Our Dad will be held up, hopefully, as a model of living by grandchildren Chris (wife Victoria) and Andrew; Hailey and Greg; Jennifer, Joanna, Katrina and Emma; and Sam and Alex; by great granddaughter Hannah and other grandkids yet to come; and by his many nieces and nephews and their children on both sides of the family. As a final act of generosity, Dad has donated his body to teaching and research. In good time, his remains will be cremated and his ashes spread in the place that so agreed with him: the B.C. Peace Country. A celebration of Howard's life will be held in Salmon Arm this August. In honour of our Dad, please direct a healthy donation to a reputable charity near to your heart. We extend our thanks and gratitude to the hospital staff at Mission Memorial and the fine people at Carrington House in Mission.