



CCPA-MB

FAST FACTS



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Thin Ice Remembers Carl Ridd

Carl Ridd was a member of Thin Ice—the small group of citizen activists who, in the mid-1990s, successfully opposed the expenditure of many tens of millions of scarce public dollars to subsidize the Winnipeg Jets.

Carl was much, much more, of course.

He was a much-beloved university teacher; a founder of Project Peacemakers and an indefatigable opponent of military violence; an active and very knowledgeable environmentalist; a United Church minister—at his memorial service numerous people came forward to describe how Carl had helped them through personal crises. It is truly remarkable how many lives Carl Ridd touched, and in how many different ways.

We knew Carl in each of these ways, but we knew him best as our fellow member of Thin Ice. It was the view of Thin Ice that the many tens of millions of public dollars needed to subsidize Winnipeg's NHL team could

be better spent elsewhere. We weren't opposed to sport—how could we be with Carl in our midst? Carl is a member of Canada's Basketball Hall of Fame, known first and foremost to many Winnipeggers of his generation as 'King

Carl', whose heart and determination—not to mention well-placed elbows—made him a powerhouse on basketball courts across Canada and beyond. And to the end of his life Carl coached in a kids' basketball league at the inner city's Rossbrook House, melding his commitment to social justice with his love of sport, just as he did with us in Thin Ice.

So not surprisingly, Carl and Thin Ice pointed out the irony in Winnipeg's then-Mayor cutting the budget for kids' hockey rinks at the very moment that the City and Province were paying for the ever-

growing losses of the Jets. It simply missed the point, which was, as Carl believed so passionately, to build strong and self-confident young people through the sheer fun and joy and challenge of active involvement in sport. In fact,

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as one of our members said, only half-jokingly when Thin Ice met over beer and pizza to talk about and remember Carl: “I always wanted Thin Ice to challenge the Tories to a game of pick-up hockey or basketball— we win, they don’t build the arena. I’m sure we would have won.” I think he’s right—and I *know* Carl would have suited up for that one.

Thin Ice was a small group—a “motley little crew” as Carl lovingly called us. How could our vision of social justice prevail over the corporate vision of the city’s most wealthy and powerful businesspeople? Well, we did, and in no small measure due to Carl. We met early every Tuesday morning at the University of Winnipeg—“those insane early morning meetings”, as one of us recalled—to plan our strategy. Carl was usually a bit late maybe because he had misplaced that little scrap of paper that he wrote all his appointments on!— and invariably arrived with an article that he had photocopied and that we all *had* to read. But no article that Carl passed along came simply as it was written. Carl underlined the important points, double-underlined what he considered to be the outrageous claims—of which he usually found many— and added his own running commentary in small handwriting that started in the margin and worked its way around the corner and up the other margin of the page. Carl never did anything passively— even while reading he was passionately active in the search and the struggle for truth and justice.

Carl Ridd was one of a kind. He was generous, thoughtful, optimistic. Oh, how he was optimistic! Early in our efforts Thin Ice called what we hoped would be a large public meeting. Only one person came. The rest of us were deflated. Carl was elated. He talked to that single brave soul at length and then reported joyfully to us that the man was a fountain of knowledge and the evening was obviously an overwhelming success! We rolled our eyes, and wearily returned the chairs. But Carl was right. That solitary soul became Thin Ice’s “Deep Throat”, calling Carl constantly to provide us with invaluable inside information about the many nefarious deals and schemes being hatched by our well-heeled but increasingly desperate corporate and government opponents.

We are struck particularly by Carl’s tenacity, by his sheer doggedness in pursuit of social justice. He just never

gave up, never even slowed down, literally to the end of his life. Nor was he dour and sour about the injustices of life. Carl lived joyously, and passionately. It’s an admirable way to live a life. As Carl would have wanted and expected, every single one of the members of Thin Ice continues to work, each in our own way, for social justice. We know how exhausting this struggle can be. We know the feelings of futility that can come with siding, as Carl so often did, against the rich and powerful. Sometimes it’s hard to go on. Carl always went on. He never gave up. Retirement was scarcely a blip in his struggle for social justice. Even in his last days he actively opposed the attack on Iraq from his hospital bed.

Thin Ice was an important and happy part of our lives, and, we believe, of Carl’s. We “spoke truth to power”, as Carl liked to put it, and we—and the citizens of the city and the province— won, as Carl so often did. He was an inspiration to all of us, he inspired us to carry on the fight, and like so many in this city, none of us will ever forget him.

—Jim Silver

Jim Silver is a professor of Politics at the University of Winnipeg, Past-Chair of the CCPA-MB, and a member of Thin Ice. This article is based on the discussion that took place by the members of Thin Ice when they met over beers to remember Carl Ridd.

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