



Memories of
Dan Williams
1949 - 1998

Memories of Dan Williams

By Lee MacIsaac and Danny Wilks



On June 30, 1998 came the news that shocked the Humber Valley Oldtimers, the Father John Redmond community, the Toronto jazz world and a host of other groups. Dan Williams was diagnosed with terminal lung cancer. We were all so stunned to hear this not only because Dan was so close to many of us but because Dan would be the last individual one would expect to be stricken with cancer. He lived a very healthy lifestyle. He had no bad habits. It was only a short while later that he died on August 21, 1998.

Eight years have since passed, yet many of us in the Humber Valley Oldtimers remember Dan

quite fondly. Perhaps the most visible reminder we have is the Dan Williams Memorial Trophy. This honour is bestowed on the player who best reflects the outstanding qualities of sportsmanship that Dan was well known and loved for. Jim Buchanan was the first winner of this trophy. When asked about his memories of Dan Williams, Jim described him as "a true gentleman and successful at everything he did". These words ring so true. Dan was indeed very accomplished. He played varsity volleyball at U of T. He was a provincial champion in canoeing. He was an outstanding musician, educator, swimmer, baseball player and golfer.

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Dan Williams Memorial Trophy Humber Valley Oldtimers



Awarded annually to "the player showing good sportsmanship, concern for his fellow players and our league and/or contribution to his community".

Past Recipients:

1998/99	Jim Buchanan
1999/00	Danny Wilks
2000/01	John Clow
2001/02	Lee MacIsaac
2002/03	Bruce Parrack
2003/04	Orest Jakymyc
2004/05	John Bright
2005/06	Tony Klemencic

Dan Williams

Hockey was actually his worst sport but no one who ever saw him speeding around the ice would ever think that. Although he did score his share of goals, passing was his strength. To Dan, the pass was more important than the goal. It was great to have him on your line because you knew he would get you the puck.

John Clow, another winner of the trophy wrote that "its not one story that stands out as much as the memory of a genuine good guy. I remember his wit, his kindness, his music and his considerable hockey skills". John also went on to add, "I have never been as proud of any award as I am of having received the Danny Williams trophy a few years back." Well-said John.

In November of 1998, three months after Dan died, Reg Berry and Lee MacIsaac wrote an article titled "Remembering Dan Williams." Reg commented on how Dan had never played organized hockey in his youth because his parents pressured him into learning the violin (and later the trombone in High School because they never had a string program at Malvern Collegiate). When Reg first saw Dan skate, he muttered, "Why can't I skate like that?" His skating was smooth and effortless. Obviously he had made up for the missed opportunity to play organized hockey. Reg also wrote in the article that nobody ever saw Dan lose his cool, on or off the ice. As a matter of fact, Dan was well known for his quick-witted remarks to relax the rest of the team after another third- period collapse.

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Danny...

In April of 1999, some of us organized the first annual Dan Williams Memorial Hockey Tournament at Beatrice Ice Gardens. It was a huge success. Teams were formed from the many areas of Dan's life. Humber Valley entered three teams. Father John Redmond entered a team of friends who taught with Dan. The "Wednesday" boys called the Emery Group entered a team. Dan's Baseball buddies entered a team. Dan's brothers Rob and Dave entered a team. Some of the musicians in the Advocats Big Band (Dan was in this band) wanted to enter a team, but there weren't enough of them to form a team, so they played for one of the above mentioned teams. Aside from being a fun weekend of hockey and entertainment by the Advocats, we raised over \$3,000 for the Sick Children's Hospital Foundation (Dan's favourite charity). Al Rose was the main organizer of this tournament. Al wrote an article for this first event.

In the article he called Dan a "champion." Al also used the word "class" in his article when describing Dan. All of us who remember him could not agree more. One of Al's stories recalls a major baseball tournament in Barrie. Dan had to miss some of the early games because he had to play the violin at a wedding. His team made it to the finals. Dan was able to play the final game and he hit two home runs to lead his team to victory. The opposing team protested that he was a "ringer." (The protest was disallowed). Dan handled the situation beautifully. While having beers after the game, Dan walked up to the opposing team's table and said (in the best sissified voice I have ever heard from a straight guy) "I'm sorry I missed



the semi-final game against you boys. I had to play the violin for a wedding." Then he insisted he buy them all a beer. They didn't know what to make of him! Eventually they all had a good laugh about the whole situation. Thanks for a great story Al.

We continued to have a Memorial Tournament for three more years. In the process, we raised over \$10,000 towards the Sick Children's Hospital Foundation. Dan's family was invited to an unveiling of a plaque in the hospital acknowledging this.

While reminiscing about Dan, many of us tried to figure out how long we had known him. Bruce Parrack and Lee MacIsaac knew Dan at

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Dan Williams con't

Emery Collegiate in the early Seventies. Danny Wilks knew him at the Faculty of Music at U of T. John Bright knew him in High School at Malvern. But the longest goes to Frank Distasi. Here's what Frank had to say about it.

"When I first joined the HVHA Oldtimers at Albion Arena I was meeting new players each week. When I was traded to the Aces from the Hornets, I was greeted by this likeable bearded guy who introduced himself as Danny Williams. There was something about him that I recognized, the impressionable smile, and the warm personality. As we got to know each other more and talk, we made the connection. I had met Danny in 1964 at the Sparrow Lake United Church Camp. The minute we made the connection he said out loud with a huge smile, 'Poncho! You're Poncho!' I was his cabin councillor and that was my nickname at the time (I think was about 18, and he was about 13). I remembered that he was awarded 'Honour Camper.' This award was only granted to special campers who achieve excellence in leadership, sport, and participation. This was truly Danny's profile even when I got to know him again in HVHA Oldtimers. He died before his time, but he has left me many wonderful memories. And because I got to know him twice in a lifetime, I feel as though I will remember and miss him twice as much." Thanks for you comments Frank.

The most recent winner of the Dan Williams Memorial trophy was Tony Klemencic. We asked Tony to reflect and comment on his

memories of Dan. Here is what he said, "Dan was a quiet, cool guy. I never saw him lose his temper. He kept everyone on his team loose, often with a colourful joke or two. This was early on in the HVHA Oldtimers league and I think his attitude forged the philosophy that our league follows today. Dan always had time for everyone, home, school, hockey, or the greater community. It still remains a shock to me that he's no longer here."

Some of us knew him very well outside of hockey too, as a teacher, and as a musician who performed in Bands, and Broadway Musicals. But I don't think any of us in HVHA knew him as long and as well as his brother Rob. Here are some of his comments, "On this day as I talk to you (Sunday Dec 3, 2006) it is Dan's 57th birthday. I find myself reflecting on his life, his example, and his love of family, music, and sports. In spite of our age difference (6 years), we were very close. We shared a bedroom until he moved out of the house, so I got to hear a lot of interesting stories from Dan as he went through High School and University. That closeness continued into our adulthood. His gift of music inspired me to play the trombone at Malvern Collegiate. One thing that not too many people knew was that he was a very quiet person in his private home life. But with his friends, or in family gatherings he could really 'turn on' the humour and charm. More than anything else, our family still misses him something awful. You never really recover after losing such a quality, lively, funny, 'class act' that Dan was."

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As many of you know, Dan was the Head of Music at Father John Redmond Catholic Secondary School. He was given his own key to the front door of the school because he was there every morning before the custodians. In addition to all the co-curricular duties that come with being the band and orchestra leader, Dan coached the Volleyball team. In 1991 he faced a tough decision. The teacher's union voted to go on a "work-to-rule" job action. Dan did not agree with the justification for the withholding of co-curricular activities so he continued to play in the orchestra for the school play. Union officials came to the school to speak to the staff and suggest possible consequences. The situation was beginning to become quite tense. Dan showed the true courage of his convictions and stood up to tell the leaders his reasons for "crossing the line" and his intention to continue with the school play. In typical Dan Williams wit, he ended his comments by saying, "Does this mean I'm going to lose my teacher's 10% discount card at Cadet Cleaners?"

Today Dan's picture hangs on the wall in the Atrium of the new school. It is positioned beside the portrait of Father John Redmond himself. Sadly, none of the kids in the school know who he is. Even the staff has turned over by more than 50% since his death. Dan was very proud of his family, his school and the HVHA Oldtimers. He often remarked, "what a fine bunch of men they are". To those of us who knew him, it is very important that he is remembered. His friends and family are extremely appreciative that our organization has chosen to keep his memory alive in the Dan Williams Memorial Trophy.

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