

Russell Opper

NOVEMBER 8, 2021

We are very sad to announce the passing of Russell (Russ) Opper in November, 2021, in Langley, BC. Dad will be lovingly remembered and missed by: his wife of 66 years, Velda, daughter Kelly (Doug), son Tim (Lori), Grandkids Jordan (Deanna), Hayley (Rasmus), MacIntyre, and Jemma, and Great-Grandkids Nora, Stella, Viggo, and Ewan.



Dad was born in Smoky Lake, Alberta, in 1933, and his birth certificate indicates his official name as Slawko Opper. He had two brothers and three sisters, and is survived by Bill and June. As a kid, Dad remembered spending a lot of time with his Dad on his ranch, sometimes with his older brother Bill, and hauling pails of water for their Dad's moonshine still. Dad played hockey in Smoky Lake, had a part-time job at White Rose Service Station and eventually, worked at Ross Motors in Edmonton after leaving school. Dad lived with his brother, Bill, in Edmonton around 1950-1952, before he found work in the mining industry for six months in 1952 in Uranium City, Saskatchewan.

Dad dreamed of playing in the NHL, but he really wanted to be a police officer in the RCMP. He didn't meet the height requirements to join the RCMP in the 1950s and the organization lost the best cop it would have ever had. He would have been fair and compassionate, but back then, as throughout his life, he believed in following rules/laws and that there should be real consequences for not following them.

In 1954, Dad made a bold move to BC, for which he deserves a lot of respect for undertaking. He got a job at Pacific GMC in Vancouver and worked his way up to Secretary/Treasurer. He later went into truck sales there and he was great at this job, too. He was an award winning salesman who was fair and honest and took great pride in looking after his customers by selling them pick-ups, delivery vans, and big-rigs that were key to running their businesses.

Dad worked at Pacific GMC for nearly 30 years. Best of all, here he met his fellow employee and future wife, Velda! They eventually bought a house in Vancouver and lived in it for 60 years before moving to independent/assisted living in Langley in April 2019. Dad loved his home in East Van and he and Mom took great care in looking after it, and family and friends who visited. It was always a welcoming place for coffee, snacks, dinner, and a visit. For many years, Dad's lawn was a particular point of satisfaction. Kelly joked that Dad got on his hands and knees and nibbled blades of grass to make sure they were all even! This speaks to Dad's perfectionism and precision in all things in life.

Dad maintained his car himself, doing his own oil changes and other repairs. Eventually, he started taking his cars to dealerships and the service department often commented on their mint condition. That was his mindset; Look after things and they should last you a long time. He wasn't about acquiring material possessions.

Dad was the neighborhood ambassador to people of many different races, ethnicities, and languages who lived nearby. He and neighbors worked together on each other's home improvement projects and he helped other folks with things like city hall or by-law problems. Many of these folks' kids counted on Dad to have their soccer and basketballs filled with air and their bike tires re-inflated. Long before it became fashionable as political slogans and personal badges of honor, Dad walked-the-walk and helped people because it was the kind, and right thing to do.

After he left Pacific GMC, another job that was important and enjoyable to Dad was his roles at Marpole Curling Club in Vancouver. With his ever out-going personality, he enjoyed interacting with club members and they enjoyed his good natured joking around.

Dad was a curler in the 70's and was a Marpole member, too. He had to give it up though, as his job in truck sales prevented him from making a full commitment to a team. This demonstrated Dad's general work ethic and responsibility. Sports were an ongoing theme in his youth and into early adult life. In the late 1960s, Dad and his neighbor coached house-league hockey in East Van. They followed the rules and were fair, and every kid got the same amount of ice-time, regardless of skill-level.

He was an enthusiastic supporter of Tim and his youth football teams in the 1980s. Maybe too much so, as Dad got banned from parks due to his colorful comments/feedback to referees. It was a different time in youth sports, but Dad wore his heart on his sleeve, and it was his way of expressing it out loud.

Dad enjoyed being a Geedo when grandkids came along at different points in time. This allowed him to be silly and fun, often joking with the grandkids using a Ukrainian word or phrase. A walk to the park and playground with the grandkids were often part of their visit to the house in Vancouver. Dad loved ice-cream and kept the freezer downstairs well-stocked. When it got a bit quieter in the basement, we knew that Jordan and Hayley, and later MacIntyre and Jemma, had easily convinced Geedo that it was ice-cream cone time. The arrival of great-grandkids later in his life provided Dad another opportunity to show the fun-loving and silly side of himself. Sadly, some of the littler ones will not get to experience this part of their Great-Geedo.

In many admirable ways, Dad looked after his health: He was an avid walker until knee pain curtailed his lengthy excursions and he did word search books to keep

his mind sharp. Much to our displeasure, he really enjoyed cranking his Ukrainian music (Metro Radomsky and The Emeralds) and was a connoisseur of authentic/homemade Ukrainian food, particularly garlic sausage.

Dogs were a part of Dad's life which showed he was a big, soft-hearted guy. Kelly "helped" a stray cross a couple busy roads on the way home from high-school one day. Tiger ended up with us for 14 years and he and Dad were best pals. Tiger could tell whether or not he was going for rides in the pick-up that day by what clothes Dad put on in the morning. Later in life, Dad's kids' dogs (Ike, Roxie, Wesley, Callahan, Zoey) got excited when seeing him because they knew he had biscuits in his pocket. He always thought of them, too.

For years, until the last few, Dad was an avid reader of the whole newspaper and follower of local and national politics on the TV. He even joined a BC provincial party in the 1980s. Dad felt strongly about what was right and what was wrong, and why, and he passionately expressed his views about issues that he felt were important.

As Dad and Mom moved to an independent assisted living residence in Langley in 2019, he continued with same the tasks/themes/hallmarks of his life. Dad kept the grocery lists and relished shopping for a deal, he washed and dried the dishes, took out the garbage, managed the recycling, and did all the laundry. He was affectionately known by many of the lady residents as the "laundry-room guy" because he helped and taught so many people to operate one of the communal washers and dryers. He could never stand watching anyone struggle or be frustrated. But again, as Mom has heard from so many staff and residents since his passing, people enjoyed interacting with Dad and his playful joking and personality. It is a significant quality about Dad that he could make a person smile and laugh, for a moment in the course of that person's day. Not a bad thing to be known and remembered for.

Dad was infamous for giving himself aliases. The neighborhood kids around their East Van home thought his name was Henry and his dry-cleaner knew him as Bob Smith, which was indicated in the computer and on receipts. After Dad's passing, a staff member at his independent assisted living residence, who always referred to him as Mr Opper, was surprised that his name was Russell, and not Sylvester as he had told her. What a character Dad was!

Dad was a great Canadian and this country sure needs more people with his traits. He was an especially, and unabashed proud Western Canadian. Although he was thoroughly a BCer, Dad remained attached to his Alberta roots, and he also continued to root for the Edmonton sports teams. Dad understood that Westerners put the bread on the table, figuratively and literally, and generate much of the wealth that allows this country its high standard of living.

If one wants to do something to honor Dad and his life then take time to: Help others and be pleasant with them, be aware of, follow, and care about what's going on in your country, be passionate about something, take care of your health for your own sake and that of your family, stay active, follow rules and laws, be a fair player in life, and finally, respect and value real hard-work.

As per Dad's wishes, there is no service. Cremation arrangements have been entrusted to Alternatives Funeral and Cremation Services - Aldergrove, BC, 604-857-5779.

Messages of Condolence

I'm his granddaughter Jemma, Geedo always found a way to put a smile on my face and make me happy. Me and him share a special day! I love you Geedo and I miss you. You were my guy☐

— Jemma

The Opper's were our neighbours, friends and family members for so many years I can't remember. Tim was the neighbourhood little brother after he was born.

Russell was our other Dad.

Russell was indeed the jolly jokester and had an infectious laugh. So many evenings my Mom and Dad, Russell and Velda playing cards at our kitchen table or there's. Laughter was always the constant. Drinks did not flow till after the kids went to bed. At least until we were old enough to be up past 8:30.

Russell was always the instigator of laughter. Everyone had a nickname with Russ. "GregORY!" I think he was the first to my sister "Shansie". Doug became "Ruddly". Tiger was "Jiggsie". It's just how we all rolled. I had an idilic childhood, and Russell is a part of that.

A fine fine man Russell Opper.

You will be missed. RIP kind soul.

— Greg Steeden

I didn't know Russell well but I enjoyed a wonderful childhood relationship with my uncle Bill who turns 91 in December, uncle Russell we will meet in heaven where I can finally get to know you better at the feet of God. You were a wonderful family man who will be missed but not forgotten.

— Darrell Opper



<https://www.myalternatives.ca/obituaries/opper-russell>

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