

DAWSON CREEK
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SINCE 1930

Calvin Kruk remembered

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October 19 will forever be known in Dawson Creek as the day municipal politics stopped.

Talk of multiplex price overruns, post office revamps and green initiatives were all caught in mid-sentence as news of Calvin Kruk's death spread through a kingdom that had truly lost its king.

What's not lost is Kruk's legacy; the path of environmental responsibility in the small northern city he led, a legacy of community participation, but most of all, the legacy of family, friendship and connections he was able to make during his time in Dawson Creek.

It's never Calvin or Mayor Kruk when Grant Mitton speaks about his friend, but always "Cal."

"He was good fellow, a bloody good man," said Mitton, who worked alongside Kruk in the 1990s at CJDJ. "I know it's always apropos to speak well of people who have passed on, but he really was a good fellow."

There are sides to Kruk's personality that not everyone had a chance to see. The occasional quip during traditionally dry mayoral addresses were often the extent the public knew of his humorous side, but this was hardly the case in more relaxed settings, revealed Mitton.

"At the radio station he was quite the card. Neil Miller and Cal and I especially. My god, I think we spent half of our time in stitches," he said.

"A real quick wit. You could say something to Cal that on the surface was quite innocuous and he would turn it in a heart beat into some outrageous, but always hilarious comment."

Neil Miller is another former CJDC coworker who speaks about Kruk's sense of humour as one of his more standout characteristics. It's almost possible to feel the laughter building inside Miller as he describes a trip the radio station crew took to the Peace Country Ag Show.

"I can remember him, a city guy from down south, and then we had to go ride horses around the thing and he was basically falling off the thing, and hanging off the neck..."

Former CJDC employees seem to be the source of Kruk's longest running friendships. Miller explained how most of the people who work at the station come from other parts of the country (Kruk came from Maple Ridge) so they were almost like family, giving all the support and encouragement that usually comes with it.

"I remember when he first decided to run for council. We kind of all got together, myself, Adam Moore, my wife and Adam's wife at the time, and just decided we were going to pull together and make signs and see if we could get him into council," Miller said. "When he won it was kind of like we all, sort of, got in there."

He added the decision to back Kruk as a municipal power wasn't solely because of their friendship.

"I just thought he was an intelligent guy and he would bring a youthful perspective in at that time," Miller said. "It's something everyone was looking for and we shared a lot of the same ideas and the same things we'd like to see happen in the community. Obviously it worked out well because next step they voted him in for mayor."

Adam Moore's first impressions of Kruk were of a person who wouldn't be found spending the weekend alone on the couch.

"Here's a guy that's just so full of life," Moore said. "He always wanted to have something going on, whether it be 'hey what are you doing, lets go watch the hockey game. Hey what are you doing, lets go take the kids bowling. Hey what are you doing, it's a good day to do nothing - let's do it together.' "

One of Moore's most recent experiences with Kruk's all-inclusive life-style took place when a group from the provincial initiative called Act Now BC stopped in Dawson Creek to assess community health.

"I remember getting a call on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon saying 'why don't you come over to my place and let's cook up some food.' Upon showing up I remember looking and saying 'gee that seems to be a lot of food for two families.' He said 'oh no, we've got the Act Now people stopping on by later.' His attitude was you've got a group of young adults travelling B.C., staying in hotels from town to town, and he said 'I bet they would like nothing more than to sit around somebody's house and have a good meal,' " Moore said.

Dave Lewis continues to work at CJDC where he met Kruk and spoke of his friend's determination; that when he put his mind to something, nothing would get in the way.

When Lewis was married 10 years ago, it was assumed the Saskatchewan wedding would be void of a Dawson Creek contingent simply because of the distance. He said Kruk had been invited as a courtesy but they never expected him to show.

"He drove all night to Saskatchewan, to where we were getting married. It's like a 14-hour drive, so he drove all day and all night to get there the afternoon before the wedding, stayed overnight, went to the wedding then the reception, jumped back into his little '84 rusted-out 4-Runner and drove all the way back," he said. "Along the way he got a bee sting on his foot and hallucinated that an old lady was sitting beside him and that he was talking to her."

Before his political career, Kruk was working at the framing store, Picture It, and spending his spare time in front of an easel in an attempt to eke a career as an artist. This put him in touch with Dawson Creek's Art Community, which remained one of his biggest supporters.

"He's definitely been a friend of mine for a long time," said the South Peace Community Arts Council president Ellen Corea. "I remember first meeting him when I ran tourism in the late '80s. Calvin was working at the radio station and used to come and do on-site locations at tourism information. They'd be there all summer and it was really fun."

Kruk would later be hired to manage the Kiwanis Performing Arts Centre, and he continued to work with the arts council on various projects after his ascension to city hall.

"Not only was he a champion for us, he was also an incredibly visionary person," Corea said, adding the Written In Stone Project, along the Rotary Walking Path, was his idea. "Calvin was so used to throwing those ideas out there and they sparked our imagination and we would go with it."

While working at KPAC, Kruk became somewhat of a mentor for Corea's son, who got a position as KPAC's evening student while in high school. Corea discovered Kruk was able to bridge the gap between generations even before he started bridging the perceived gap between the arts and politics.

"They used to have these wonderful philosophical talks about politics and how to look at different situations in the world, how do deal with people and how to make everyone feel that their voice is heard," she said. "I really think he made a big difference on how my son looks at the world. He's graduated from university and has his own career, but I think those years are very important to him."

During the summer months, Kruk could be seen cruising the city on a small red motorcycle, in sharp contrast to South Peace MLA Blair Lekstrom's Harley Davidson preference.

"Did I give him a bad time about his little motorcycle? Yeah, I did," he joked. "Actually he gave himself more of a bad time. We'd talk about going for a ride and he wasn't sure his bike could make it up the highway."

Lekstrom's political success, now as the minister of community development, might be an indicator of how far Kruk could have taken his career. Kruk was encouraged by Lekstrom to get involved in municipal politics when Lekstrom was still a city councillor.

Despite positions of importance, Lekstrom said Kruk never lost sight of the lighter side of life.

"We both have serious jobs that we deal with, but you also have to be able to bring a smile to your face when you're dealing with some tough issues. Calvin always managed to be able to do that," he said. "When we're sitting down for business, or just sitting down as friends discussing things, he had a sense of humour I think anyone that knew him could recognize and at the same time... when things had to be dealt with, he got them done."

Most people are happy to leave a job with a good reference, but following his time as a CJDC DJ Kruk retained the friendship of former CJDC co-owners Mike and Verna Michaud.

Verna Michaud made visits to Kruk while he was at the Dawson Creek and District Hospital and spoke about some of his last moments.

"He was very upbeat. Calvin was always upbeat," Michaud said about her visit with Kruk Saturday night. "Calvin was a devout Christian. He believed things happen for a reason. He definitely had a strong belief in God and obviously that helped him a lot. He wasn't morose, he wasn't depressed, he was still the mayor of Dawson Creek."

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Illustration:

- Colour Photo: Calvin Kruk Painting / Calvin Kruk's painting, "Sentinels" was painted in 2000. Kruk was known throughout the arts community in Dawson Creek as an artist and art enthusiast. He participated in exhibits and recently painted a canvas for the Dawson Creek Art Gallery's Pick-a-Painting event taking place this month. Kruk's painting will be donated to his family in his memory.
- Colour Photo: File photo / Kruk wins the mayoral race in November 2005.

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