

Yorkton Stories

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The many sides of Stan Obodiac

Published 26 September 2023

Dick DeRyk

To the people of Yorkton back in the late 1940s and '50s, a young man who was born and grew up here, Stan Obodiac, was a bit of a puzzle. He was a really good athlete, sure. He was a freelance writer for the Yorkton Enterprise weekly newspaper, that too. Locally, he played hockey, baseball, golf, softball, bowling, soccer. Later in life he would play tennis with his daughters almost daily in summer. He wrote at least 10 books, several of them bestsellers, including an early one printed by Redeemer's Voice Press here in Yorkton, others self-published, and later ones picked up by major book publishers in Canada.

He had served as a fighter pilot in World War II and come back home when the war ended. But as coffee row at the Broadway Cafe would have it back then, except his stint in the Royal Canadian Air Force, had he had any real jobs? Who exactly was this young guy? And what did he really do?

There's a lot to tell about Stan Obodiac, born here in February of 1922, Yorkton -- not Moose Jaw as Wikipedia will tell you. Online sources, including his obituary published in Toronto on his death in 1984, it turns out, have pretty incomplete information about Stan. According to Wikipedia, he was, "A Canadian ice hockey player with the Lethbridge Maple Leafs. He won a gold medal at the 1951 World Ice Hockey Championships in Paris, France. The 1951 Lethbridge Maple Leafs team was inducted into the Alberta Sports Hall of Fame in 1974. He was the leading scorer of the 1951 World Championship Tournament.

"Following his career as a hockey player, he remained employed in hockey as public relations director for the Toronto Maple Leafs and Maple Leaf Gardens. In this capacity, he wrote and published the history book *The Leafs, the First 50 Years*, which was a finalist for the Toronto Book Awards in 1977."

That's it. It barely scratches the surface.

But there is so much more about Stan Obodiac worth telling. There are many sides to the man and to his life. We talked to his youngest daughter, Hadley, an actor and filmmaker in Toronto. And we talked to one of the few remaining Yorkton residents who knew Stan personally, Vern Pachal, who was 10 years younger than Stan, but remembers watching him play hockey and played baseball with him. We were also provided with newspaper clippings about Stan's exploits by Grace Chorney, the wife of Peco Chorney. Peco played senior Terrier hockey with Stan, and they remained friends. Stan also stayed friends with the Prystai brothers, Metro, who played in the

NHL, and Bill and Harry, who played senior hockey together in Yorkton. Bill was a Yorkton city alderman from the late 1950s into the early '70s as well. None are still with us.

Where to begin? Well, the clippings Mrs. Chorney had included a half-page reminiscence by Stan Obodiac, written in 1980 for Yorkton This Week on the occasion of his induction into the Saskatchewan Sports Hall of Fame. Shame on me. I was the editor of that newspaper at the time. That story can be seen on YorktonStories.ca, our website. But I had no memory of that story, or of many details about Stan, other than my mind, 40 plus years later, was familiar with his name and some of his work.

I personally don't remember ever having met him, but my interest in him was definitely piqued when I ran across a faded photo of a clipping from the Regina Leader newspaper. It was a letter to the editor written by Stan in 1955. This is what he said.

"This business of naming sports teams Indians or many of its derivatives shows lack of taste and a certain amount of discrimination. Teams like Swift Current Indians, Humboldt Indians, Wapella Blackhawks are this province's worst offenders. Usually the jackets of these players have exaggerated, grinning Indians. Usually fans bolster these players by saying something like, Go out and scalp those guys. I'm sure a great many people would kick if Lebrecht named their hockey team Labret Palefaces. I admire Fred Sasakamoose for putting that NHL player in his place when he said 'how' to him, quickly snapping back, I'm not how. He plays for Detroit." The letter was signed by Stan Obodiac, Yorkton.

Fred Sasakamoose, in case the name is not familiar, was from Saskatchewan and was the first Indigenous treaty person, Cree, to play in the National Hockey League in 1953. And the word "how", of course, was long a stereotype of an Indigenous greeting, perpetuated by so-called cowboy and Indian movies in the 1950s and later, many starring John Wayne.

I read that letter, and my immediate thought was this man was 60 years ahead of his time. It's only in the last 10 years that this became a public issue, leading the Washington football team, the Redskins, and the Cleveland baseball team, the Indians, to change their name, and closer to home two years ago, the Edmonton Eskimos football team doing the same.

I decided it was time to find out more about this man Stan Obodiac, this Yorkton enigma, who is in Yorkton's and Saskatchewan's Sports Halls of Fame, and who was also, it turns out, a prolific author among his many accomplishments. He was a wartime fighter pilot and pilot trainer. He was a devoted family man. He was a mentor to young sports reporters. He was a personal friend of some of the great names in sports history. He was far ahead of his time in recruiting minority players into the higher levels of sports. He was a lover of the arts and cultural events. But let's start at the beginning, in Yorkton. The man with a Polish heritage who grew up on Maple Avenue.

Verne Pachal:

Vern Pachal

When I was 10 to 12 years old, he would talk to all of us, all the young punks, and everybody liked him fine. We found him a different sort of a chap. So when I became 14, I was into the minor hockey league, and he played for the Yorkton Terrier seniors. So I used to go to all the games and

watch him play and all that, so he was a very good athlete and he was a very good hockey player. And for Yorkton, he played center ice, as a matter of fact, and he pretty well led the scoring every single year. He was a very gentlemanly hockey player, but he also played tough, you know. He felt that was part of the game too. But he mostly played as a gentleman. No elbows in the corner, no fights or that. He didn't do that.

Dick DeRyk

You were not particularly gentlemanly when you were playing.

Vern Pachal

No, I couldn't be because I was owned by Eddie Shore, and he was one of the toughest in the world. And he tried to toughen me up. He left, as you know, and he went to Lethbridge and he played for the Lethbridge world champions. They would score 18 goals, you know, in those days. Stan and I met in Lethbridge at the time, and we've always been very good friends.

Dick DeRyk

He also played baseball?

Vern Pachal

Yeah, he was a very good baseball player, played in the infield, and we could move him anywhere, and he could hit. Put everything he had into the game, he was really a hardworking athlete. He took a lot of criticism in Yorkton because he liked to write articles and he liked to get things done. And you know, people are jealous.

Dick DeRyk

Because of his success, they were jealous.

Vern Pachal

They didn't think he was a successful fellow because in say 1940s, after he got finished with the war, he was a freelance writer. You know, some of us are just sport nuts. Yeah. He was a sport fiend, but he had other things that he was very interested in, a very outspoken man about many projects of the world.

Dick DeRyk

I have a clipping from 1955 when he was in Yorkton of a letter to the editor to the Regina Leader, where he said using Indian names for hockey teams is not appropriate.

Vern Pachal

He would have many things like that to say. And he said them, told a lot of things properly, and people don't like to change.

Dick DeRyk

The letter about the team names was not the only letter that Stan wrote that is memorable. In May of 1956, Time magazine, then the pre-eminent source of weekly in-depth news for most of North America, if not the world, had an article about Sardinia and the war against malaria there. The following month, in June, Time magazine published a letter from Stan Obodiac in Yorkton, Saskatchewan, that said, "In a fine story about Sardinia, you state the Anopheles mosquito was

driven out of the island and the war against malaria was successful, but you do not name the man who did this. In charge was Dr. John Logan, working with the Rockefeller Foundation. Here in his hometown of Yorkton, Saskatchewan, we are rather proud of him, for at one time he was mentioned as Noble Health Award winner for his great work in Sardinia."

And then in 1969, Stan wrote another letter that was published in the Leader-Post in Regina about Saskatchewan's homecoming of 1970, and he writes, "I will be going back for a visit to Yorkton from Toronto. You have asked me to come back to see the advances Saskatchewan has made. Of the many things you have asked me to see, which will be attractive to all people of the world, I am sorry you have not mentioned some of the things I yearn to see again, taste, hear, experience once more.

"Recently I read the book Saskatchewan by Professor Edward McCourt, and it made vivid for me the new Saskatchewan, of which the homecoming is undoubtedly proud. But when I saw Mr. McCourt demean the Saskatchewan wild berry, the Saskatoon on pages 126-127, I thought that was sacrilege. What a heresy for a Saskatchewan writer, for it cannot be denied, even though the new things of Saskatchewan may awe me, that when I return in 1970, one of the most nostalgic things I will want to do is pick and taste those delicious Saskatoons I knew as a boy. To think of them and picture them from here in Toronto makes my mouth water.

"I cannot think of anything in the big hotels in Toronto or the gourmet cafes in Yorkville that would make my taste buds applaud as much as Saskatoon pie, or Saskatoons preserved in a sealer in summer to be consumed in winter, or best of all, to find a patch after a dry walk on a hot day and see the biggest, juiciest Saskatoons you ever saw, then slip them into the mouth by the handful. I don't think there is any fruit in the world quite like the Saskatoon, that no one apparently tries to domesticate, that just wants to be left in its wild state, that no one tries to export. Wheat, potash and oil, other countries have. But you must go to Saskatchewan for Saskatoons. I remember the many times I picked them as a boy in Yorkton. Quite often it was an economic necessity for sale. Often it was for survival at home. Saskatoons and rhubarb were about our only desserts in the fruit line. Often it was for a social outing, often it was for personal pleasure."

A most eloquent piece about the pleasures of Saskatchewan's Saskatoon berries, I must say.

As was previously mentioned, Stan was a member of the Lethbridge Maple Leafs hockey team, which won the World Ice Hockey Championship in 1951. He was the leading scorer, not just for his team, but for the entire championship. After winning that title, the team traveled to England to take part in the Sir Winston Churchill Cup, a tournament at Wembley Arena in London, where they also won, completing a 44-game unbeaten streak, including exhibition games across Europe. Throughout that long journey -- well, they traveled 30,000 miles by bus, train, ship, airplane, and car, and played in 14 countries -- Stan kept a detailed diary of everything that happened. If he didn't write it down when it happened, he would never remember it all, he said. Stan turned that diary into a book, No Substitute for Victory, which was published in 1952 by Redeemer's Voice Press in Yorkton, the publishing arm of the Ukrainian Catholic Church here. It is 150 pages of memories, which can still be read online in its entirety on the University of Alberta Peel Library website. The link can be found on our website, www.yorktonstories.ca, along with other links and photos related to Stan Obodiac.

In 2017, the British sportswriter Mike Rowbottom wrote about the Lethbridge team and Stan's book on the website insidethegames.biz. Since professional hockey players were not allowed to compete in the World Championships until 1977, an amateur team had to be picked to represent Canada. Rowbottom writes, "There were hundreds of very good amateur teams in Canada and even though the Maple Leafs had won the Western Canada Championship the season before, there was a strong body of opinion that felt other contenders would better represent the nation. What may have bolstered that argument was the fact that the Maple Leafs of Lethbridge were only a year old."

He then quotes Stan's book. "It is undoubtedly the Cinderella hockey club of all time. Imagine, here we are representing the Dominion of Canada and on our way to the World Hockey Championships in Paris. And just last year the hockey players themselves organized this club chiefly for exercise and to play in the Lethbridge District. They sharpened their own skates, used their own equipment, practiced at hours only the night watchmen knew. It is now history that this band of hockey ragamuffins swept to the Western Canada Championship. Then to the beggars fell the plum.

"Dr. W.H. Hardy (note: should be W.G.), president of the International Hockey Association, mused over the possibility of sending the Lethbridge team to Europe to represent Canada. And here we are on our way."

Rowbottom notes that one of the team members told the reporter, I believe it is one of the most unique stories of the history of Canadian amateur hockey. We played for the love of the game, the fellowship, and the occasional beer. In the foreword of his book, Stan writes, "I wrote everywhere, on board ships, planes, trains, buses, in hotels, rinks, and just anywhere where the typewriter would sit for an hour before fatiguing me and agonizing the rest of the team. Whitey Rimstad, with whom I roomed most of the trip, would say, There goes that woodpecker again."

Rowbottom noted, "The woodpecker allowed Obodiac to fashion for himself and the wider world an enduring tribute to the 18 men who set out in that post-war era to represent 14 million Canadian people." A link to Mike Rowbottom's full story and photos from 1951, which accompany it, can be found on our website.

But while living in Yorkton after the war, Stan wrote a book about his World War II experience, and in 1955 he wrote a novel set in wartime. No doubt that took time and perhaps earned him some income, and might well have provided an answer to the locals who wondered what it was he actually did.

The book *Penfield Ridge* was about his experiences at Penfield Ridge Air Station in New Brunswick. It was self-published in 1949, 100 pages long, and illustrated. Stan, by then a pilot officer, received his advanced training there from January to April of 1944. The official log lists him as Obodiac, Stanley Paul, and quotation marks after that, "Stan", RCAF, service number J/ 39620, rank pilot officer. Pilots were trained to fly Venturas, a modification of the old trustworthy Hudson bomber and reconnaissance aircraft. The book has portraits of the author and group pictures with his Air Force buddies.

His novel, *Cashmir of the RCAF*, was published in 1955 by Pageant Press of New York. It is a fictional story about Rudy Cashmir. The jacket cover of the book states this. "Cashmir of the RCAF is surely one of the most unusual novels to come out of World War Two. For in this fascinating war story, the decisive enemy with which the protagonist daily comes to grips is not an outside foe. His enemy lurks within himself. Rudy Cashmir is the rugged, handsome type of young Canadian who, in a pilot's uniform, is an adulterated bait for hungry females. Born and bred in the provincial city of Saskatoon, on the banks of the Saskatchewan River, he brings the faith and idealism of the wide open spaces to the compressed, cynical, and often body life of the Royal Canadian Air Force in action. It is the personal war of Rudy Cashmir against the powerful forces of this baffling alien world that furnishes the poignant drama, conflict, and taut suspense of this engrossing novel." One can only wonder if perhaps there was a dash of the handsome wartime pilot Stan Obodiac reflected in the book's hero.

Stan spent several years in the early 1950s playing hockey and coaching in Europe, Switzerland and Scotland in particular, playing with the Ayr Rangers on the west coast of Scotland. By 1958, he was back in Canada, in Toronto, where he apparently did some writing and was invited by the noted Winnipeg and Toronto sportswriter and author Scott Young (father of Neil Young, by the way) to do some writing for the Toronto Maple Leafs and Maple Leaf Gardens. That turned into a 26-year career as publicity director for the Leafs and the Gardens under Harold Ballard, until Stan's death of cancer in 1984 at the age of 62. But a lot happened in those years, as his daughter Hadley tells us about.

Hadley Obodiac

My mother was from Kilmarnock, Scotland, which is the home of Johnny Walker. We visited several times growing up. She did, I believe, the story is that she did come and watch my father, who is a bit of a star and you know, very handsome. She would come and see when he played in for the Ayr Raiders because Ayrshire is like right where my mother was. She could have been 17 or 18 at the time. I don't know when they started dating, but they had a long-distance kind of relationship after he returned to Canada. And then she came to Toronto through Montreal by boat down the St. Lawrence and to Toronto in the early 60s. I visited my grandma in Yorkton on Maple Avenue. The house is still standing. They came, I think it was there after they got married. They did a cross-Canada trip. They ended up in beautiful Lake Louise with the iconic shot of my mom in hot pants and a fur coat with the mountains in the background. I would have been four or so, maybe three or four, my sister five or six, when we took a family trip in the car out to Yorkton to visit my grandmother. So we did stay there. I remember the house and the garden. It's quite a large house, actually. We used to go for ice cream in the streets with the ice cream truck and the dipped, you know, chocolate. I know my dad's friends that were there were the Sokoloski's, I believe he was a doctor, and Metro Prystai, Bill Prystai. I saw both of them as children in Toronto.

I have not been to Yorkton since I was a child. My mother returned there in 1984 to bury my father. He had his services in Toronto and then she took his remains to Saskatchewan a few months later. I did, as in the '90s when I was an actor, I did make a film in Chicago that took a train from Washington to Chicago to Billings, Montana, I think. And then we crossed the border and it ended up, the last third of the story takes place in Regina. So I was there I think it was '94. That's the last time I was officially in Saskatchewan was, and I met with Bill Prystai, I believe, whose son was in the US Air Force.

The other interesting connection, as a director, producer, I have been nominated for many Golden Sheaves, and I've never officially gone to the festival. Especially with my David Suzuki and the Nature of Things shows, I would be invited, and it's an odd thing, but I've never gone.

Dick DeRyk

I asked Hadley about her dad working for Harold Ballard, because Harold Ballard had a reputation as not being an easy fellow to get along with.

Hadley Obodiac

People might have thought that he too much embraced protecting certain people at Maple Leaf Gardens. But that was his job, you know. It's like working for a politician, you know, it's like working for the government of a country. If you're doing your job right, you have to make sure that the best face is put forward. And he was very proud of doing that. It wasn't being sycophantish or afraid or quiet. It was an honor for him to be part of that organization and to be within the most storied building of hockey internationally.

He originally got that job from his good friend Scott Young, who said, you know, can you do some writing for Maple Leaf Gardens? Can you do that? And it was a delight for my father in all ways of his background to embrace that organization and that building. So he was not shy or cowering or sycophantish, as I said, about anything. He was just privileged to have that as part of his life.

If you think of people in the context now of developing media personas, talk show hosts, shock jockeys, conservative talk show hosts, I'm not going to name them, it's in their best interest to develop a certain kind of persona. They do very well with it. It also might be protecting them from things that are hard. Like Harold had flowers sent to his wife's grave every week for decades after she died.

Because I was around Maple Leaf Gardens so much, and you know, as a toddler and a child, he loved that I was walking around there. And I used to sit in the special ticket office, old school, where the switchboard lady would look at me and say, Are you waiting for your dad? And then they would call up Harold and say, Hadley's here. And he said, Okay, get someone to bring her up. Because he had an apartment in Maple Leaf Gardens. It was on, I think, the fourth floor. It had a full front door that he put like a wreath for Christmas. And then you went in and it was all blue and white. I was very precocious. I used to call him as an eight, nine, 10-year-old, talk to the women at the switchboard and say, This is Hadley. Can I speak to Harold Ballard? And they're like, Okay, we'll see. And he would get on the phone and said, Okay, what's up? And I would say, Well, my parents won't allow me to get my ears pierced. And he said, Okay, well, we can go to Eaton's College Street and have a sundae, and I'll take you to get your ears pierced. And they're gonna think I'm just your grandfather, so we can do it legally. Like, who cares? When do you want to do it?

I never did do that, okay? But that's a kind of weird thing. He used to, like, you know, at Christmas, send a check to put in my stocking. There were sad negative things too, especially around when my father was dying, but a lot of it was also conjecture of things not necessarily coming from him, but coming from other people.

I remember as a 17-year-old or maybe 18-year-old, there was a Maclean's article on Harold Ballard, and they mentioned that Harold didn't go to my dad's funeral. I said, Well, that's funny because he was a pallbearer at my dad's funeral. Like, so there are, you know, things that people have been inaccurate about. He was a tough man, he was a businessman. We used to go to the Timmy Tyke tournament, which is a young, the final games for young players. And there was a Timmy and a Tammy Tyke for the Easter Seals Foundation, and they would have their final games in the different categories at Maple Leaf Gardens.

And can you imagine being an eight-year-old or a 12-year-old and playing there? Harold gave them access to that building for that tournament, and he used to sit in the stands and watch the kids. When he passed away, the next donors did not allow them to have that place for free. So there are some things that are difficult, but I do have some warm memories. But you know, I'm not also going to sugarcoat other things that are not necessarily great.

Dick DeRyk

There are many stories about Stan during his time at Maple Leaf Gardens helping young reporters or would-be reporters get their foot in the door and a helping hand. One such was Bruce Archer, a former CBC journalist in British Columbia, who posted a tribute to Stan on Facebook on the passing of Borje Salming, who played for the Leafs and was a pallbearer at Stan's funeral. Some of what Bruce said: "Salming's passing prompted a zamboni flood of memories of my years at Maple Leaf Gardens from 1977 to 1981. I was a journalism student at Ryerson, impoverished, starving, but practical. I tricked my way into having exclusive rights to cover anything and everything that happened at Maple Leaf Gardens, including concerts, political assemblies, and of course, Maple Leafs hockey. I attended every home game for two seasons, and even if I didn't actually cover the game, I would still avail myself to the selection of sandwiches and beverages available to the press corps between intermissions. It was nothing fancy. Harold Ballard saw to that, but it was free food at a time when I had an empty refrigerator at my shared cellar apartment and was in the habit of making tomato soup from pilfered ketchup packs.

"It was then that I met Stan Obodiac, the PR person for the Leafs. Stan was an absolutely wonderful man, just a few years younger than my dad, a salt of the earth Saskatchewan boy. I had many conversations with Stan and admired him for his ability to work under the most stressful conditions. I'm thinking Ballard and Company. But Stan did his job. In November 1984, I heard word that Stan had passed away at age 62 from cancer. I was saddened. Such a good man, taken away so young, a rock star in his own right. But you'd never know what to talk to him. He was truly a wonderful man."

Gord Stellick was hired by Stan to work for the Leafs as a member of the press box staff in 1975 when he was still in high school. He did all right for himself after that, becoming at age 30 the youngest general manager in NHL history, but lasting little more than a year in that position with the Leafs. From there, he went on to a broadcasting career.

Then there were Toronto sportscasters Mark Hebscher and Fred Patterson, who remembered Stan on a vodcast as recently as January of 2022. Here are their memories.

Mark Hebscher

Back in Seneca College, you know in the in the broadcasting course there, we decide, because we're close to North Toronto Arena, wherever it was the Leafs were holding training camp. We go over there and we meet Stan Obodiac, the PR director of the Toronto Maple Leafs. We asked him, could we have press passes for the Leaf training camp? And we're thinking he's gonna say no. You know what? He writes us out these press passes. So for the rest of training camp, we're whipping up, we're whipping. And you know what I loved? Lanny McDonald. I had the feeling we would ask him for interviews, and he would always give us an interview and sometimes say no to the regular beat guys. Was he not the best? I got the impression that he was trying to piss off the regular beat guys by always answering the questions from the goofy little college kids. It was great. Yeah.

"Freddie, before you go, now let me tell you that, and I've told this before, I bet I don't recall if on this show, but Lanny McDonald once called my home. I had asked Stan Obodiac if I could do an interview with Lanny McDonald. And Stan said, Well, I'll tell you what, give me your phone number. Give me my phone number at home. Okay, 222-4468. My phone number for years growing up in North York. Here's my number, 222-4468. You didn't even have to put the area code in those days. It's easy, Stan. Stan, it's easy. And like Stan sometimes would phone me to say, Mark, we're gonna have a press conference tomorrow morning at 10:30 because I was working at CKFH. So I'll never forget this. So I asked him, can I do Lanny McDonald and he goes, sure, give me your number. Okay, great. So I give him the phone. I don't think about it. A couple days later, I get home and my mom says to me, says, somebody called for you, says he was Lanny McDonald.

"You know how that went. What? Yeah, left his number. So my mother says he left his number. And I'm like, come on, this is a joke. It has to be a joke. Right. And I phoned the number and I hear, and Lanny's voice very distinctive. Very distinctive voice. You know. Hello. Hello? Like, hello. Hi, I'm looking for Lanny McDonald. Yeah, speaking. This is Mark Hebscher. Hey, yeah, Mark, yeah, I came earlier. Did you want to arrange an interview? You want to meet me at the Gardens tomorrow morning at 10:30. I'm like, okay Mr. McDonald. Call me Lanny. Like that kind of thing. And I was like the new guy. Same thing, Freddie. I was the new guy. And he was he was so accommodating that the next day when I went to meet him, he introduced me to Darryl Sittler. He said, This is Darryl. You know, because he's seen me hanging around. Oh, you're the new guy at CKFH. I mean, come on. Lanny McDonald and Darryl Sittler in their prime. 22-year-old kid.

Dick DeRyk

Stan wrote 10 books, or maybe more. And he wrote for newspapers in the Toronto area on a variety of topics. His list of books includes a biography of NHL star Red Kelly, a history of the first 50 years of the Maple Leafs hockey team, 50 years of history of Maple Leaf Gardens, a book of poetry, a book about his experiences at a Canadian author's convention, and a book about a rather obscure peer in England, Lord Courtauld Thomson, published in 1953. That gentleman may have caught Stan's attention because during the Second World War, Lord Courtauld Thomson turned his 18th-century house into a hostel for officers of the Allied Air Forces.

In 1978, Stan wrote an article published in The Reporter, local community newspaper, titled Hockey Explained to Other Nations. He gives credit to Canadian winters for the passionate interest in hockey. It was not so much the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway from east to west that bound the country together, he argued, but the voice of hockey on the radio and later since 1952, on television. He notes that hockey players who take to the ice before they can

properly walk or swim progress to Tykes, Atoms, Peewees, Midgets, Juveniles, Juniors, Seniors, Professionals, and Old Time Hockey. On retirement, he says it is just as much an honor for a hockey player to be elected to the Hockey Hall of Fame as it is to become a senator or receive the Order of Merit from the country. His last book was *The Polish Pope and North America*, published in 1979. And it's still listed on Amazon, but currently unavailable.

Hadley Obodiac

It's an interesting trajectory of a young man kind of discovering and embracing his heritage, later in life. When my father grew up with you know serious global ambitions and hockey was one of them, and writing, and then he went to war and was exposed to some very interesting people in Europe and the UK. Being from Yorkton, Saskatchewan, and possibly having, you know, a partial Polish identity was not necessarily something he embraced as a young man. It was not until later in life, and perhaps with the passing of his mother, that in the '70s, that he was, I would say, confident enough to embrace that again. So I think that was something that he embraced later. I mean, in my upbringing, that's how I remember things.

He was part of a contingent with people like Zena Cherry and some other dignitaries to go to Poland in the '70s, and they visited the concentration camps for the first time before they were publicly open. I think in 1979, Auschwitz was dedicated as a World Heritage Site, and previous to that not necessarily fully open to the public, but my dad did do some soul searching, as it were, and some lineage searching at that time.

He did go to the house on Maple and bring back a lot of records, and probably the greatest thing was my grandmother's cookbook, which was a handwritten book with you know Polish sausage and latkes and cabbage rolls and things like that, that we tried to follow. Occasionally he would order food for special occasions from Sir Nicholas Tavern, which was quite a high-end restaurant in the Polish area near Mimico, Roncesvalles area of Toronto. And when the Pope, John Paul II became the Pope from Poland, my dad did write a book called *The Pope from Poland and North America*. And it was about really the history of John Paul coming to Toronto prior to when he was a Pope. And he had been at Maple Leaf Gardens and he had, you know, been in other places. Unfortunately, when the year that he passed, he passed in November 3rd, 1984. That fall was the year that the Pope visited Toronto, had a number of very large attendance events. One was at Downsview Park. He went up and stayed in Manitoulin or in a native community on reserve. He was fortunate to be asked to have his communion by the Pope. So, in a way, without overreaching, his last rites were done by the Pope. Because I believe that was September or October of the same year, and he already was quite full into his decline at that point. I think it was two weeks before he passed away, or three weeks.

Dick DeRyk

Stan had a connection to the Caribbean and the Caribbean community in Toronto. He wrote for *Share Newspaper*, a weekly paper which served the Black and Caribbean community in the Toronto region, and their website, sharenews.com. That connection was established years before.

Hadley Obodiac

My father was a bomber pilot with the RCAF. The last year of the war, he was 22 years old, he flew Boston Bombers, which had a crew of between four and six people, made up of people around the

globe who were Allied forces. His navigator at the time was a gentleman from Barbados called Errol Barrow. And Errol Barrow eventually, after he went to the London School of Economics, became a very learned scholar, became actually the first official Prime Minister of Barbados in the 1960s. And throughout that whole time, my father kept a connection since the war with Errol Barrow writing, and occasionally he would come to Toronto. My dad would get him on Front Page Challenge. Other people coming to Montreal and Toronto from the Caribbean would often visit with my father. Some of them were scholars and writers, politicians, students, like Austin Clarke, the famous writer who became very close with my dad. And we were fortunate in the 70s when I was a young girl, maybe seven or eight years old, to go live at Errol Barrow's beach property called Kampala, which is the same property that Pierre Trudeau's family stayed in. And I believe on Paradise Beach, it's the same area that famously John Turner rescued Diefenbaker. So my dad always had a strong connection with people here in Toronto and Montreal of Caribbean descent. I actually went and visited with Errol Barrow after my father passed away when I was there in high school, and he was so kind to have me picked up and taken to the home to see the flowers again, which was lovely.

Dick DeRyk

Also years earlier, Stan recruited a black player who was born in Winnipeg and played in the Ontario Senior League for the Sarnia Sailors in 1952-53. He was Alf Lewsey, who would have had a very difficult time in those years getting a look from the NHL teams. Stan had him come to play for the Ayr Raiders in Scotland. After a season there, he returned to North America and played for the New Haven Blades and Washington Lions of the Eastern Hockey League. In that entire league, made up of American teams, all but seven of the top 100 players were Canadian.

Hadley remembers her father was involved in the George Chuvalo-Muhammad Ali world title fight at Maple Leaf Gardens on March 29, 1966, when no United States city would stage that fight. The organizations that sanctioned professional boxing were now busily in fighting over Muhammad Ali. In 1966, the World Boxing Association stripped Ali of his title after he joined the Nation of Islam. But the World Boxing Council still called Ali the heavyweight champ. Ali was in Toronto training at Irv Ungerman's gym for over a month. Stan navigated him through the world press who followed the training. They became friends, and Ali returned often to Toronto for visits and other people's fights. And the Harlem Globetrotters were friends of the family.

Hadley Obodiac

I used to be in the vomitorium, in the foyer of Maple Leaf Gardens as a kid. I would be on the shoulders of Baby Face Page or holding hands with Curly Neal or Meadowlark Lemon but they so loved my dad that we used to get a beautiful southern, really sweet pecan Christmas cake in a tin from the deep south. And it was from the Harlem Globetrotters. And I believe they sent that to my mother for about 20 years after my dad died.

Dick DeRyk

Hanging around at Maple Leaf Gardens and meeting the sports professionals of the day was part of growing up for Hadley and her sister Erin. But so were art galleries and concerts and similar events.

Hadley Obodiac

The Obodiac family had two season tickets on the north end Maple Leaf Gardens. So that would be the away net for the first and third period. My mother's sister and I would be there almost every game, and I would be on my mom's knee. When we got a little bit older and we were in school, my dad would often give the tickets to visiting people, you know, like that wanted to visit. And then maybe from the age of 10, 11 onward, realize what a coup it was for me to go to games on Saturday night and bring the guy I liked or something. So I would then go pretty well every Saturday night, but not Wednesday. I would often, though, come after school. I went to school downtown. If I wasn't doing sports or drama after school, I would go to Maple Leaf Gardens and I would hang out at practices before games. That's where I met Wayne Gretzky when he was in his first season in the NHL. I was waiting in the hallway and everyone was kind of hovering around, like to see Wayne Gretzky.

We would often go off site to some of the other arenas in the north end of the city where the Leafs would practice and I would hang out. And so yeah, I was around all the time. Maybe I was only about 12 when my father asked me to answer fan mail. And he would bring home garbage bags full of fan mail addressed to different Leafs. And there would be a form letter that was signed by the player and an autograph, little card, like a three by five postcard. And I would sit there when I wasn't doing my homework and answer all the fan mail. And I did Darryl Sittler, Lanny McDonald, Borje Salming, and Ian Turnbull for a bit, and Mike Palmateer. And obviously Darryl Sittler and Borje Salming were the biggest.

I used to have to send people back jewelry that girls would be sending the players or money. And the funniest thing, I was in grade six, and one of the letters was from a boy in my classroom, and he was bragging about what a fantastic hockey player he was. And I remember having to kind of not mention that on Monday at school.

I did play hockey in high school. Probably the most magical thing that people could not believe, because of the way security is now at these giant arenas, is every Christmas morning after we opened presents and had breakfast, my father would take me and my sister and the young boy across the street, who happened to be the son of Kenny McMurtry, who played with my dad in Ayr, and we would go and play shinny at Maple Leaf Gardens Christmas morning. And this was something that we did for more than a decade. And to see my father and Kenny with hundreds of pucks on the ice taking shots, and you know, one or two caretakers in the building walking around, and then they would turn the spotlight on just so we had enough visual on the ice. But that was like magical to think that we would be there at a time when basically he had the keys in his pocket, he would drive into the building and we would go into the Leaf dressing room, suit up, and then go on the ice.

Dick DeRyk

Did your sister have the same interest in hockey and participation as you did?

Hadley Obodiac

She was a great athlete. I think she was like the top high jumper in Toronto. We both played tennis. She went to UTS (University of Toronto Schools). I think she was on the volleyball team, the basketball team, as was I. So we were both athletic. She was a good skater, but she actually didn't play hockey. I played hockey in high school. We often used to practice at one of the rinks at Upper

Canada College. And my father used to bring me gear from the Leaf dressing room, and I didn't need the gear. I mean, one time I had giant Jofa shin pads that were Borje Salming's, and then Borje Salming said, Oh, I hear your daughter's playing hockey. Does she want my gloves? Which actually ended up getting stolen at Upper Canada College. I would have sticks that, you know, had people's names on them. But it was a bit of an overkill situation, if you can imagine, like pads from the NHL players who were six foot four, and I was trying to strap them onto my ankles. So, I played until just before high school ended. And I was asked if I wanted to play in university, and I had been doing other sports at a higher level. So we both went to Cornell University, which my father really, even though Ken Dryden was from there, and obviously my dad and Ken were friends since the 72 Summit, my father didn't have any connection with the Ivy's at the time before my sister went. And then he was just so in awe of the campus, and he immediately became connected with the recruiting there. And that's when people like Joe Nieuwendyk, you know, went to Cornell and a lot more NHLers decided to go that route of getting a higher ed instead of coming right out of the minors.

My mother also was and still is an artistic person and a scholar. She attended briefly the Glasgow School of Art and then eventually she moved to Canada. My father was not a visual artist or a visual person. He embraced all forms of literature, culture, education. We had so much access to everything as children. So I could see a ballet at the O'Keefe Center or go see the opera or hang out with Tom Petty or go to the National Gallery in Ottawa. All forms of art he was very interested in. He was very interested in higher education, just like my mother. So it was completely a magical time in terms of me being the kid in the room. You know, I was there when we went to see Bob Hope backstage at the O'Keefe Center, and he would be talking to my dad about the 1960s, and Frank Sinatra would be doing a sound check and say, Oh, you're the little one, Hadley, Hadley Hemingway, are you named after her? And you know, I was always surrounded by not just sports and hockey figures, but cultural figures. I was speaking the other day with my mother, and we were talking about Baryshnikov, and she was there the night at O'Keefe Center when Baryshnikov actually defected. So, you know, he was always connected to all forms of art. My sister's also a filmmaker and a visual artist. I'm a filmmaker, broadcaster, and actor, but even though she is considered to be an academic and she does teach in the United States, she's actually also a brilliant painter and filmmaker. My father was also like a tremendous orator and really an easy chat. And I think that those are things with acting and broadcasting on camera that I picked up at a very young age. So I think I and my father are quite similar that way.

Dick DeRyk

Stan died on November 3rd, 1984, in Toronto. It was not unexpected. He had liver and colon cancer and wrote about his diagnosis and treatment at length for a local Toronto community paper, The Reporter. And he founded an organization called Hockey Players Against Cancer. When United Press International did a story about his passing, they talked with his wife Emma, who said that Stan loved Maple Leaf Gardens. He was doing what he liked. There was no other place he wanted to be. His last appearance at the Gardens was October 13 when he dropped the puck in the ceremonial face-off at the Leafs NHL home opener against the Buffalo Sabres.

It was a wonderful finale, Emma said. Stan had realized a boyhood goal by working at the Gardens. If you can imagine a young boy growing up in Saskatchewan, listening to Foster Hewitt on the radio, could imagine that it was quite a realization for him, Emma said.

Hadley Obodiac

When my father passed away in 1984, I was 17 and Erin was 19. I was at a private girls' school in Toronto called Bishop Strachan. And Erin was in her, I think, second year at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. Despite the fact he was in an unbelievably stressful job, you know, he worked nights, he worked summers, he worked the weekend because not only was he, you know, a Director of Public Relations and a writer and writing books and writing fact books in between seasons, he also handled all of the the concerts and things like that. It was full on, but he was full on as a father the whole time. So, you know, as I said, I used to go after school, take the streetcar subway, show up there and just hang in his office or hang at a sound check for some rock band. And in the summers, I played tennis with my father every day when I was a teenager. And he was a superstar athlete who could play any, he's like a Gordie Howe type. He could do anything golf, baseball. He took up tennis after the war, and then with us, he got interested in tennis. Instead of hanging out with hockey players over the summer and shooting, you know, a couple rounds of golf, he would prefer to be with his daughters playing tennis, and that's what he did. He, along with someone like Frank Mahovlich, were the only two parents to show up at my basketball games. Frank's daughter went to St. Clemens, and they used to chat on the sidelines. He included his family in everything, and he was never not accessible.

Dick DeRyk

Emma Obodiac, Stan's wife, still lives in Toronto.

Hadley Obodiac

She has a beautiful home and a gorgeous garden and she gardens. She's 86. I had to try to prevent her from cutting the extensive lawn a couple weeks ago. So she's here. I come to see her several times a week. I live in Toronto, and so I do try to be here when I don't physically have to be somewhere. My sister's in California right now, so she's doing well.

I mean, she's unbelievably healthy and gorgeous. But you know, COVID was a challenge on all of us, and I think the isolation, not traveling, she used to go back to Scotland every year for the last 40 years, and she has not done that, so that's a hard thing. Going out, you know, she would get on the TTC and public transit and go to art openings downtown all the time, and that kind of thing just has slowed down a bit. So we're trying to kind of re-ignite that connectivity to other people, which is hard in a big city after the lockdowns.

Dick DeRyk

Stan Obodiac is buried in the city cemetery in Yorkton, an unmarked grave in the family plot with his mother and other family members.

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