

Yorkton Stories

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Metro Prystai: his life in his words

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Dick DeRyk

The hockey career of Yorkton's Metro Prystai has been well documented. He had a storied career with the Chicago Blackhawks and Detroit Red Wings over a span of 12 years in the 1940s and 1950s, scoring the Stanley Cup winning goal for the Red Wings in the 1952 finals, back when there were only six teams and only the very best made it to the top, let alone the Stanley Cup playoffs. He won two Stanley Cups with Detroit and was named to the NHL All-Star team three times.

He was not the first with a Yorkton connection to make it to the NHL. Back in 1932, Andy Akenhead, who was born in Scotland and grew up in Yorkton, joined the New York Rangers. Ten years before, he had played one season for the Yorkton Terriers. He played all 48 regular season games for the Rangers in 1932-33 and the next season, and part of 34-35. In his rookie season, he backstopped the team's eight playoff games on their way to the Stanley Cup, posting a shutout in the clinching overtime game against the Toronto Maple Leafs. In the early 1940s, there were the brothers Archie and Harvey Fraser. Archie played three games with the New York Rangers in 1943-44, and Harvey played 21 games with the Blackhawks in 1944-45. But while they both played with the Yorkton Terriers in the 1930s and 1940s, they were born and raised in Souris, Manitoba. Others have followed. Kelvington produced Wendell Clark, who played minor hockey in Yorkton and went on to a career with the Leafs, Quebec Nordiques, New York Islanders, Tampa Bay Lightning, Red Wings, and Blackhawks over 18 seasons, ending in the year 2000. His cousin, Joe Kosur, also from Kelvington, was with the Terriers for two seasons before going on to play with the Detroit Red Wings, New York Rangers, and Vancouver Canucks from 1984 to 1999.

There were plenty more from the area who were born in the Yorkton hospital or who passed through Yorkton in their hockey careers. Dave Brown, born in Saskatoon, played for the Terriers before a career with the Philadelphia Flyers and Edmonton Oilers. Larry Popein spent seven seasons with the New York Rangers. Mike Chernoff, son of Yorkton hockey legend Shiner Chernoff, played one game in the NHL for the Minnesota North Stars. Goalie Matt Zaba played one game for the New York Rangers in 2009-2010 before a career in Europe. Clayton Pachal played 35 games with the Boston Bruins and New Jersey Devils in the late 1970s. Brent Fedyk, drafted eighth overall in the 1985 entry draft, played 11 seasons with Detroit, Philadelphia, Dallas, and New York Rangers, retiring in 2000. Jayce Hawryluk played for the Florida Panthers, Ottawa Senators, and Vancouver Canucks in the 2010s and is now playing in Europe. Jared Bednar didn't play in the NHL, but he has been the head coach of the Colorado Avalanche from 2016 to the present. And Jarret Stoll, born and raised in Melville, played bantam hockey and attended school in Yorkton. He played for the Edmonton Oilers, LA Kings, New York Rangers, and Minnesota Wild from 2002 to 2016.

No, Metro wasn't the first, but he was Yorkton's own, born and raised in a house on Ontario Avenue, close to St. Mary's Church, the second youngest of seven children, born to Harold and Annie Prystai, Ukrainian immigrants who arrived in the very early 1900s by way of Austria.

Back in 2003, he sat down with Terry Lefabvre Prince, then the city archivist, and they recorded two hours of conversation during which Metro reflected on his life. The city of Yorkton has kindly made those tapes available to us, along with others from that era.

As well, Frank Block, who worked in banking, arena announcing, and radio in Alberta and Saskatchewan, spoke with Metro, his siblings, his children, and others for his audiobook, *The Metro Prystai Story*, published in 2015 and still available online at gumroad.com. He now works as a voice actor who has done numerous commercials and more than 450 audiobooks, lives in Salmon Arm, BC, and with his generous permission, we have also included excerpts from his book in this podcast. The cooperation of the city of Yorkton and Frank Block is greatly appreciated. And I might add, Frank's book is critical to telling the complete story of Metro Prystai. You see, Metro was not one to talk about his accomplishments as an athlete, as a family man, as the son of a mother who raised a family while her husband worked away on the railroad and was seldom home. He was and is remembered as a gentleman who downplayed his own success on the ice, crediting others and his teammates.

When he died in 2013, Frank Block wrote a piece for *Yorkton This Week* and *SaskToday*. Referring to the 1952 Stanley Cup playoffs, he wrote, "The Red Wings defeated the reigning Stanley Cup champion Toronto Maple Leafs in four straight games, and then likewise defeated the Montreal Canadians four straight in the final game, a three to nothing victory, Metro scored the first goal, assisted on the second, and he scored the final goal for Detroit. When I asked him what that was like winning the Stanley Cup that year, he said, Oh, terrific, you know. Sawchuk got four shutouts. They never scored a goal on us at home. That's just the kind of guy Metro was." Credit to goalie Terry Sawchuk. No mention of his own contributions.

Here then, Metro's reflections and recollections in his own words from the city tapes, complemented by the words of others in his life, thanks to Frank Block, whose voice you will hear in the selections from his audiobook.

Metro Prystai

I was born in York in the year 1927, November the 7th, 1927. And I think I was born on Ontario Avenue, where we lived for many, many, many years. 140 Ontario, just a block this side of the Regional High School. It's an old log house. And my mother and dad came over here in about 1904, I think it was. They came over from Austria, and they were of Ukrainian descent. And when I was a young fellow, all that I spoke was Ukrainian up until I started going to school.

My father was Harold Walter Prystai, and he married a girl that came from the old country, and her name was Annie Klomow, and there were eight in our family, and the oldest one died just before the flu influenza, and then there was seven others of us with a sibling that passed away. There would have been three girls and five boys, and I had twin brothers in my family who played a lot of hockey in Yorkton with the Terriers and the Legionnaires, and they lived in Yorkton for many years, and they both finally ended up in Regina with their jobs.

Frank Block

The Prystais ran a very strict household. Harold worked very hard to feed his growing family. His job with a railroad kept him away from home for long periods of time, so Annie became the disciplinarian. Metro's sister Mary said,

Mary (sister)

Well, there were seven of us. So we had to toe the line, you know.

Frank Block

Harold was usually stationed in Saskatoon, and would make the 200-mile trip by train to Yorkton, and it wasn't always easy to connect. Metro's younger sister Dolly said,

Dolly (sister)

I didn't know my father till I was 16 years old. That's when he retired from the railroad. Prior to that he would have seven days a year off. Seven days, seven days a year, isn't that dreadful? You miss a lot of life that way.

Frank Block

Somehow Metro's mother seemed to keep things together and raised this large family. However, it wasn't always easy. Every family member helped to get things done around the Prystai home, whether that meant working in the large garden or taking care of the family cow. Mary recalled a story about her paternal grandparents.

Mary (sister)

My grandfather lived in Canora I think, was out that way. That's my dad's family. They had cows and whatever, a farm. And they always promised my mother that he would give us a cow one of these times. So my brother George walked all the way to Canora to get a cow, and he brought the cow home, It'd take you maybe four or five days to walk. I don't know.

Frank Block

Once the cow got home, Mrs. Prystai got permission from some dairy farmers to keep the cow in their pasture near York Lake. And Metro was quite fond of bringing the cow home from the pasture. Mary remembers that Metro was always quick to volunteer.

Mary (sister)

And Metro would go, I want to go get the cow. He'd ride the damn cow all the way home. I don't know how he sat on the cow, you know. He was very good. And he never fell off or anything.

Dick DeRyk

Hockey was big in the Prystai household from the early years, especially for the boys. And especially Metro and his older twin brothers, Bill and Harry.

Mary (sister)

They used to build a rink at the back of the house. And they would play hockey from after supper till about nine, ten o'clock. The twins against Metro. And Metro would get the puck away from them, whoever, and he'd be skating down the ice and he's doing his own commentating like Foster Hewett, as he's skating he's commentating, Here comes Charlie Conacher down the ice,

whatever whatever whatever oh he shoots and he scores! The boys would be so mad you know, and he was a tease too and he'd say, Loser loser loser. Honest. They'd carry it on into the house. And it was every night during the wintertime.

Frank Block

Harry remembers it well.

Harry Prystai

Oh, yeah, he outplayed us. Even though he was a couple of years younger.

Frank Block

Just as it started for many kids that develop a love for the game of hockey, for Metro, it began on an outdoor rink pretending to be one of his hockey heroes, Charlie Conacher.

Dick DeRyk

Metro remembers other aspects of his youth.

Metro Prystai

Hunting gophers, shooting lots of gophers because you got a penny for every tail. Trap all day and maybe catch ten gophers and maybe get ten cents. And if you had ten cents, you were rich man. We had a lot of fun. We used to play all kinds of games, you know, like in the summer we'd play tin can, you know. That was a game that we invented, I think, some way, and played ball. We spent a lot of time out at Hopkins Lake swimming and then building, you know, having bonfires, potato roasts, and stuff like that. You know, when that froze over, there was no other, no artificial ice in town, and we used to go out there skating a lot. In fact, the Yorkton Terriers, the senior team, had started their training camp out there.S

Dick DeRyk

St. Joseph's College, a Catholic school then run by the Christian Brothers, was a block up the street from the Prystai home.

Metro Prystai

I went to St. Joe's. I spent a lot of time as a kid over there because they always had a rink there. A lot of times we meet there in the evenings, a bunch of us kids, you know, we play pump pump pull away and cops and robbers, you know, and stuff like that. Until you could hear somebody, hey, get home to bed. Forgot what time it was. But we did a lot of work around there. We used to clean off the ice, you know, and just loved it, you know. There was a season sort of, you know, in the winter you played hockey. And they had a gymnasium there at one time at the St. Joe's. We did tumbling and all that, and then we played quite a bit of basketball, and then in the spring we played softball and baseball. In the fall we played soccer, and then once it froze over, we went into hockey.

Dick DeRyk

Outside of school, there was a higher level of baseball in Yorkton at the time, and it was the main summer sport for youth and men in the community, and there was also golf.

Metro Prystai

At that time, some of the teams they didn't play too much league ball, they were playing tournament ball. We played a lot of tournaments, and I played with the local team in Yorkton because at that time it was still during the war, and a lot of the guys were away in the army, you know. I was just a young guy, I was just about 15 years old, and I played with the Yorkton team here. The Yorkton All-Stars. And then the Cardinals got started. There was a fellow by the name of Ed Wilson, and I only played when they needed somebody, you know, and then when the guys came back and that they were they took over, more or less. This guy by the name of Ed Wilson was the fellow, he was the manager of McDonald's Consolidated here, and he was very interested in ball, and he started up, and there was a bunch of ball players around here, good ball players, and just looking for something to play. So I started out playing with them.

One guy here is Bob Winters, and then there's myself, and there's Stan Obodiac here. He was a second baseman, and Dr. Steve Yaholnitsky is a very good ball player. He played pro ball, in fact, for a while out west. And this guy here, Vern Pachal, he was an excellent ball player. He was kind of a guy that could play all kinds of position and that. And, you know, we're all from Yorkton. And all of our guys were pretty well from around here.

We finally got into a league, started the Garry League. There was Willowbrook, they were in the league. There was a place like Jedburgh, they were in the league here. Springside, Theodore, Sheho, and Yorkton. We played a lot of tournaments in Salcoats July the 1st, but there were a lot of tournaments going on, like people were just starving for some entertainment such as that. And every little town had a sports day, and they're all putting up two or three or four hundred dollars, and so we went out there and tried to make some money, you know. Later on, the league kind of fizzled out, and we went to the what they call the Manitoba Saskatchewan League. And that was at Yorkton, Kamsack, Bowsman, then there was Roblin, Grandview, Gilbert Plains, and Dauphin. And it was a tough league. A lot of those smaller places they brought in players, like the Grandview team had I'd say 60, 70% of their players were from the States. They brought them in to play ball for them. We didn't bring in very many players. We brought in one or two the odd time, but we had a lot of good players, so we just went with our own.

I was probably 16 years old when I started playing golf, which was always Deer Park. In fact, the other course was a little too far, you know, and at that time we just had a bike and it was too far to go out there. We started out making them out of tree roots, you know. And then the odd one, we'd, the old guy out there, he'd sell us some old clubs, you know. Old Bill Kerr, he used to look after the golf course out there for many years. He'd sell you a club. You know, we didn't have whole sets, we had two or three clubs, and that was about it. But it was good exercise in that, you know. There's always time for golf, golf and fishing, yeah. I was never that good at it, but I just enjoy going out with the guys

Dick DeRyk

But Metro's destiny was hockey.

Metro Prystai

You know, I was just a kid, and my two older brothers, they'd leave their skates at home and I'd put their skates on and just skate on the road. So I'd skate in them, and then before they come back from school, I'd take their skates off and put them behind the stove so they get a little dry,

and they wouldn't know what happened. And then when I finally got my first pair of skates, I bought them from a fellow that was a fairly good hockey player, and he got a new pair, and I bought them from him for 25 cents. I played hockey, they called them I think it was the midgets here, you know, when you're about, I think it was about 13 or 14. And somebody from Moose Jaw had seen me at that time, I guess. and back, I think it was 1944, the guy came down here and asked me if I'd want to play junior hockey in Moose Jaw. I didn't know too much about what kind of hockey that was or anything. So he asked my mother. She was the boss, you know. She says, if you look after him, sure, I don't mind if he goes to Moose Jaw, but he must go to school and he must go to church, you know, and you can't pay him too much money. So when I first went to Moose Jaw, I got \$50 a month. I paid \$35 room and board and I had \$15 to spend. And I played junior hockey there in Moose Jaw. That was 1944. And then the next three years in Moose Jaw and junior hockey, we'd won the Saskatchewan title three times. We went to the Memorial Cup twice in 1945 and 1947, junior championship of Canada. We got beat by Toronto St. Michael's College when we played Maple League Garden. And there were record crowds that year. They believe Gardens held about 15,000 people, and it was full for each game.

Dick DeRyk

Metro also attended, by himself at the age of 15, a hockey camp in Detroit, thanks to a local man, Wally Markham, who he considered one of his mentors.

Metro Prystai

He sent me to my first hockey school. I went to the Cleveland Baron hockey. He was a scout for the Cleveland Barons. And he sent me in 1944, I think it was, to their training camp in Detroit, Michigan. And I had to take, there were three of us supposed to go, and I could hardly sleep at nights waiting for the day to come so I could go down there. And then Wally, this Wally Markham phoned me about a week before, and he says, the other two guys backed out, they're not going. Are you still going? I said, yes. And I went all by myself to the big city of Detroit, 15, I think I was.

Dick DeRyk

Another mentor for Metro was Clarence Drake, the principal of Burke School in the northwest part of the city, who was his coach when Metro played for the school team.

Metro Prystai

He didn't skate, but he was out on the ice there with his feet. And I could remember him telling you, he preached the gold rule of us, you know. It's not whether you win or lose, it's how you play the game. And if you did anything that, you know, that was kind of you know dirty or anything like that, he wouldn't stand for that. He'd sit you on the bench, you know. That's the way we all were.

Dick DeRyk

And then the Chicago Blackhawks called, the start of Metro's pro career in the National Hockey League.

Metro Prystai

Moose Jaw was sort of an affiliate or a farm team of the Chicago Blackhawks. In other words, Chicago Blackhawks might have given the Moose Jaw Canucks maybe some money to help operate. And for that, they had all their players on their team. They were allowed to, I think, have 15 on their list. If one was dropped, some other team could pick them up. But that's the way they

worked it at that time. And I was on that list. And I guess I must have been towards the top of it because the next year they took me as pro, and there was a couple of us that went up the next year, but I was the only one that stayed up there. It must have been 19, I guess. Just to play in that Chicago stadium. They always had sixteen thousand six hundred and forty-four, and they were just crazy about hockey. Bentleys and Bill Mosienko, and there was Emile Francis turned pro that year, and I dreamt for quite a few years of playing there. Because all the time I played in Moose Jaw, I dreamt of playing pro hockey there. My last year in Moose Jaw, which was 1946-47, they paid me \$200 a month. I signed a contract, I got a little bonus, I got \$2,500 for signing, which I give right to my mother so she could fix up the old house and that. And then I signed a contract for \$5,000 a year. It wouldn't be worth a heck of a lot now, \$5,000. But you know, I used to get my brothers to do my income tax. And in town here, there was a guy by the name of Andy Kindred, and he was a lawyer, and he later became a judge. And I thought, well, he belonged to our church, so I knew him a little bit, so I thought I'd better take my income tax for him to do because I'm making a little money now. And I'll never forget it. When I went up to see Andy, he says, You made \$5,000 last year? Yes. Just for playing hockey?

I hated to leave Chicago, but Detroit had been winning the Stanley Cup, and that's was the ultimate, you know, when you're playing hockey, is to be on the Stanley Cup winner. And I was happy to go there because and then there were different guys like Lindsay phoned me and Gordy Howe phoned me and welcomed me to Detroit. I never heard that before, you know. And it was pretty nice. I felt like I was wanted over there. So I went there for four years, and I think we won a couple Stanley Cups. We won the league title probably five years in a row there or something, I think. And then we won the Stanley Cup, and it was it was really something. I was there four years.

Chicago were having a little problem. People were dropping off, they weren't coming to the games. They remembered me from a few years ago and they wanted me back. I guess it was the owners that says Prystai's got to go back to Chicago. And I was playing pretty good. I had a couple of good years, you know. Well, I went back to Chicago one year, and I wasn't very happy to be going there again because, you know, I got buddies in Detroit there and that. And so I was there just about a year, and I wasn't very happy there, and I guess they must have seen that, and so they traded me back to Detroit again. I went back there for three more years. Yeah, there was Red Kelly and Marty Pavelich and Gordy Howe and I lived together. And this lady that looked after us, she looked after us, and we got out of line, she'd tell us, you know. So it was good for the bosses, I guess. Kept tabs of us.

I had a cracked ankle in Detroit. This was towards the end of the year, and they asked me to go to Edmonton and get in shape. And I said, sure, I'll go to Edmonton, as long as you don't cut my pay. So they says, no, and we'll bring you back right at, you know, when you're when you get back in shape. Well, I went to Edmonton and I played there four games and broke my ankle again. So I was in the cast for six months. I went back just for a little while. I wasn't there very long. And then I broke my leg a second time. And then a doctor from Detroit told me I shouldn't be playing till at least the start of the year. I broke my leg again in October. So then I was in the cast for about eight, ten months. And it happened very easily. A guy just kicked my feet from under me, and I just fell to my knees, and the guys came, what's the matter? I said, My leg's broken again. I could tell. And it was. Well, then I met my wife in Edmonton, and I thought I'd get married, and that's what I quit hockey.

All the years that I played hockey, I could hardly wait to get back home. I don't know. I was a small town boy, you know. I didn't like the big cities. It wasn't bad, you know, when you're there, but I'd rather be out in the prairies here, and I can hardly wait to get home every year. My mother only saw me play one game in junior or in hockey. She came to Maple Leaf Gardens at one time, and it was towards the end of my career, and I scored the winning goal there that one night, and that's the only game she saw me play. My dad came out east a number of times. My mother she was a home person. She listened to all games on the crystal set or on the radio. I guess we had a radio at that time. She didn't discourage any of us really from playing hockey or any sports.

Dick DeRyk

When home in summer, Metro would work and play baseball. His friend Red Kelly remembered that both he and Metro would go home and work hard. Kelly in southern Ontario and Metro in Yorkton, and would come back to the team in the fall in better shape than most of the other players because of the work they had done. In the summer of 1950, Metro took on the job of looking after York Lake Golf Club.

Metro Prystai

They were looking for a guy to look after it, you know. So I said, yeah, I'll look after it. So I wasn't really a pro. I wasn't really a good player. I was that was just, you know, a name. I was a groundskeeper. I looked after the grounds and looked after sandwiches and all that. So I wasn't really a pro. You know, it's the same thing with a lot of guys back then. They weren't pros, they looked at it as a business like that. Bill Kerr, he couldn't even golf, I don't think. But he looked after the golf course. I worked out there one year and that was it.

Dick DeRyk

After he retired from the NHL, Metro coached the Omaha Knights, a semi-pro team, but that lasted only one year. He and the team's management didn't see eye to eye on how to run the team. He spent three years coaching the Moose Jaw Canucks and two years coaching the Melville Millionaires, both Saskatchewan Junior League teams at the time, winning the Saskatchewan junior championship with the Canucks in 1962.

Metro Prystai

And then I had enough because I had five little kids running around, and I wasn't very happy a lot of times when we lost games, so I said, I better get the heck out of this racket. And they're a tough bunch, coach those juniors, you know, it's just like looking after kids. And then the philosophy of hockey changed a little. You could win a game, and you could be a son of a gun or something, you know. And it's all right as long as you won. You could lose the game and be proud of your guys, but everybody thought it's terrible to lose a game. I wasn't brought up that way. I, you know, played the game tough. If you lost, well, you lost. I just says to heck with it. I'm not gonna take this kind of stuff.

Dick DeRyk

Metro was also busy with hockey schools in the summertime.

Frank Block

Hockey school led Metro out to Nelson, BC, where he taught the hockey school for many consecutive summers. Veteran NHL as Glenn Hall, Johnny Bower, Johnny Bucyk, and Andy

Bathgate would also be among the instructors. The picturesque scenery of Nelson was incredible. The people of Nelson were quite proud of their surroundings and would often ask the players what they thought of their town. Glenn Hall remembers how the conversations went.

Glenn Hall

We were at Nelson BC running a hockey school. And it is beautiful country, but everybody in Nelson talks about, what do you think of this country? And I'd say, beautiful country, beautiful country. Next guy, what do you think of this country? Beautiful country, beautiful country. It's lovely, lovely. Finally, Metro interjects and he says, It's horseshit. He said, you should see Moose Jaw! That's one of my favorite. That's Metro, yeah.

Dick DeRyk

Metro spent several years as a salesman for a brewery living in Yorkton but traveling throughout Saskatchewan. One day, while passing through Wynyard, a town on the main highway west of Yorkton, he saw a for sale sign on an insurance agency business. Wanting to settle down, he and his wife Evelyne bought the business and both worked there, also expanding it to provide travel agency services. They ran Prystai Agencies for 13 years, making their home in Wynyard.

Frank Block

Metro and Evelyne had a great marriage, five wonderful children, a good business, and a cabin on the lake. And then in 1984, they got some bad news. Evelyne was diagnosed with cancer. Medical treatments would help prolong her life for a while, but Metro knew they had to make the most of the time they had left. David said,

David Prystai

Dad sold the business in about '85 and they went traveling.

Frank Block

Their travelers would take them to Australia and other exotic destinations, including Hawaii and Spain. They made the most of Evelyne's remaining days. Then on January 23rd, 1986, Evelyne passed away. Metro's companion and soulmate was gone. Metro's son David remembers his mother well.

David Prystai

Great cook, and always kept care of us, and easy easy going and...

Frank Block

And of course, she was gone far too soon. Following Evelyne's passing, Metro took time to collect his thoughts by going out to Victoria. He loved it there. It gave him a sense of peace, comfort, and renewed strength. Unfortunately, Metro would need to draw on that strength again when on August 13, 1987, his daughter Merrill died from an asthma attack. David remembers what it was like for his father.

David Prystai

He was pretty strong about it, good old Ukrainian blood in him. But I could tell it hit him, especially when Merrill died.

Frank Block

Losing your wife and a daughter in less than two years would be hard for any person to deal with. When Merrill died, Metro was just 59 years old. Having sold the agency, he decided to do some more traveling, including a trip down to Arizona with some friends. He also took the opportunity to spend time with his children, who were now starting families of their own. It wasn't long before Metro decided to get back to work. This time he took a job selling cars for Thone's in Wynyard. Metro enjoyed it and loved meeting the customers who were always asking him to share some of his hockey stories. In 1989, Metro was inducted into the Saskatchewan Sports Hall of Fame for his outstanding accomplishments as a player in the National Hockey League. In 1991, Metro went back to Yorkton where he continued his work for Thone's. Keith Washenfelder of Thone's said that his wife Bridget was a nurse in Yorkton, and she had a friend at work by the name of Mavis. Mavis's husband, Ken Tullock, had died of cancer in 1990. Bridget introduced Mavis to Metro, and Bridget and Keith accompanied Metro and Mavis on their first date. Metro and Mavis got along very well. They had a lot in common with both of them having lost their spouses to cancer. Mavis's zest for living and youthful spirit were exactly what Metro needed. Mavis loved to sing and would apply that talent by singing the national anthem at hockey games or performing at weddings. Metro really liked Mavis, but he was worried about how his children would react to the notion of him getting remarried. Michael remembers some advice he gave Metro on a phone call one day.

Michael Prystai

I said, Ah, you're still young enough, you don't need to be alone for the rest of your life and whatnot. So if you're gonna be happy, that's all that matters. That's what should count. You've always told me that. Do what makes you happy, don't worry about anybody else. 'Well, you know, I'm not really sure.' And I said, you know what, Dad? Don't worry about it. And it wasn't long after that he introduced us to Mavis and everything else. But Mavis is a really nice lady. I really liked her and her two boys, Scott and Evan. Really, really good guys.

Frank Block

The two were married on April 30th, 1994, and remained together for 19 wonderful years, until Mavis's death on May 24, 2013. Their time together, though, was truly wonderful.

Dick DeRyk

Long after his playing career was over, Metro was reunited with the Stanley Cup.

Frank Block

On July 9th, 2005, Metro had a chance to share the Stanley Cup with his children. Lord Stanley's Cup was brought to the community of Yorkton, where Metro got to participate in Saskatchewan's Centennial Parade with the Stanley Cup by his side. The following day, Metro got to take the cup to Wynyard, where all of Metro's kids got to hoist the Stanley Cup in Michael's backyard.

Michael Prystai

Yeah, and I live just across the street from the skating rink. That day they knew dad was coming down with the cup, and so they arranged to have him go over to the rink with the Stanley Cup and sign autographs. Yeah, there was quite a few people turned out for that. And I remember it was a hot, hot day. He was grateful for the experience and to have the you know to be able to be with his kids with it. But he was just, you know, he said, geez, you know, I didn't think there'd be that many people come out. You know, that's the way it was. I didn't expect that many people, but he stayed

until everybody was gone. Yeah, he enjoyed it. You know, he said, Aw, I've seen some people I haven't seen for a few years, you know. And yeah, I think he was grateful for the chance to have it here with his family and his kids and stuff.

Dick DeRyk

In July of 2007, the city of Yorkton honored Metro by renaming Catherine Street on the west side of Gladstone, the portion that runs in front of the Kinsmen Arena, as Prystai Way. Metro considered it an honor on par with winning the Stanley Cup because this was local. This was his hometown, bestowing that recognition.

Two years before he died, Metro made a sentimental journey back to Detroit with his family.

Frank Block

In 2011, Metro, along with his sons David, Michael, and James, his son-in-law Mark, his grandsons Jordan and Jacob, and his nephew Chris Andrews, packed their bags and traveled down south so that Metro could show them where he used to play hockey. The trip to Detroit was particularly exciting. Metro's nephew Chris Andrew said, I won't forget the experience of seeing Metro meet the coaching staff, including Coach Mike Babcock and also at that time assistant coach Brad McCrimmon in the dressing room. They made Metro feel quite at home and spent some quality time out of the morning responsibilities sharing stories with Metro and escorting him through the offices and then to the dressing room. When Metro entered the dressing room, most of the players stopped what they were doing when the trainer introduced Metro as Detroit alumni. They were all genuinely interested in meeting Metro and shaking hands with him, and also asking him about his era of hockey. I was very impressed with their professionalism and the excitement they showed Metro for that short period of time. All of the players warmed up to him and made him feel quite comfortable in the dressing room. It was awesome to witness his experience with the players. Metro's son Michael remembers.

Michael Prystai

It was the Saturday night before the game. And we were downstairs, and Dad was signing an old chair that the ice maker had in his office. This old red leather chair, you know, kind of rounded, back from the '50s. probably, and Gordy Howe and all these other ex-Detroit players had signed it, and they were in there signing this chair, and we were kind of outside the office waiting. And all of a sudden, this big burly bearded guy comes walking through, and he's got a bunch of sticks, and a younger guy with him, and he goes into the office, and he says, Hey, I forget the ice maker's name, and he says, I'm just gonna leave these in here and I'll be back, you know, tomorrow or whatever, pick them up. And the guy that was setting this all this up for us, he says, Oh, you know, I'd like you to meet Mr. Metro, and he says, You don't have to tell me his name. He says, Mr. Prystai, what an honor to meet you. I'm so glad. I'm Darren McCarty. It would be an honor if I can get a picture of you with me and my son.

Frank Block

David saw this too, and he couldn't believe it.

David Prystai

Just the respect that he showed coming from a guy like that. Still they still understand, I guess. The hockey guys still understand where their history was.

Frank Block

Another Red Wing player that exhibited the same level of respect for Mitchell was Pavel Datsyuk.

Michael Prystai

Oh, Mr. Prystai, it's such an honor to meet you and you know, so glad you can make it here. And is there anything we can do for you, you know, and stuff like that, eh? It was just nice to see just the basically total respect for these old-time players like that. Yeah, yeah, it was you know a really good time. I was really, really glad we did it.

Frank Block

During that trip to Detroit, Metro also had a chance to catch up with his dear old friend Ted Lindsay. Having the opportunity to reconnect and reminisce with Ted made it a day to remember. Chris recalls it was pretty close to elation when they greeted each other. They had smiles from ear to ear during their visit with each other. Metro also had a chance to meet up with General Manager Ken Holland to watch the morning skate. For Metro, the whole experience was really quite incredible.

Metro Prystai

You know, being in Detroit and then I hadn't been there for a long time, afterwards when I went in there, and you think that I was King Tut there. It was really something.

Frank Block

For all of them, it was the making of some truly remarkable memories. For the grandchildren, it was so amazing to meet some of the current players like Nicholas Lindstrom, Pavel Datsyuk, Justin Abdelkader, Tomas Holmström. Since Metro didn't start his family until after his playing days were done, none of Metro's children ever had the chance to see their dad play in the NHL.

Dick DeRyk

Metro may have generally been soft spoken, but that didn't mean he didn't have opinions, not just about Nelson B. C. and Moose Jaw, as Glenn Hall recalled earlier, but also about hockey as it was in the early 2000s.

Metro Prystai

When I played hockey, I wouldn't deliberately go out and like Richard, you know, we liked the guy, but we hated him because he scored goals against us, you know. But there's nobody who would go after him really. Oh, the odd time, you know, maybe a guy just whack him or something. But like now, like you see these guys hitting one another, you know. I can remember one time I was falling and going towards the boards and might have broken my back, and my stick was out like this, and a guy like George Armstrong with Toronto, he held my stick back so I wouldn't hit the boards. Now, if you were doing that, they'd be pushing you harder than that. But there was more respect then.

Mind you, the money, now it's money talks, you know. I've talked to a lot of the guys, you know, and they say, yeah, if we had to do it over again, we'd do it over again. Because we had a lot of fun, you know. Nowadays, it seems to me that you gotta be big, you know. And big and running the guys, running the guys. You know, like when we play hockey, there were little guys, you know, there were guys like the Bentleys, the Mosienko, and there was nobody better to watch than those

guys. They skated and passed and all that. Oh, some big guy about six foot six is running at him and trying to put them through the boards. I think there's too much stick work involved nowadays. Mind you, there's money involved, and if you can put a couple of star players out, you might beat them in the first round of the playoffs. I don't know what how the heck they can pay some of these guys the money they're paying. And it's good that the players are making it because for so many years the owners were taking all the money. They were making lots of money, and the players were getting nothing. But yet we enjoyed it. Even Gordy Howe, I can remember him saying, Well, where can I make this kind of money in Saskatoon? And he loved the game. We loved the game.

Dick DeRyk

Metro died in October of 2013 at the age of 85. The funeral service took place in Wynyard, and he is buried there in the family plot at Sacred Heart Parish Cemetery, alongside his first wife Evelyne and daughter Merrill. When his obituary was published in various places, he was fondly remembered by many.

Fellow high school student Terry Rogerson recalled that in his junior hockey days in Moose Jaw, Metro was known as Marvelous Metro. "I went to Central High School in Moose jaw with Metro. So well thought of and liked."

David Halme wrote: "A great guy...willing to give me chance to play with the Melville Millionaires in 1964...he gave me a push forward to a great life in hockey and education." And from Emma Obodiac, wife of Stan Obodiac about whom we did a podcast two years ago: "Metro was one of Stan's dearest friends and I remember one year visiting Metro and Evelyne in Melville. Truly the Green Years! We were all so young then."

Ashley Andrew, a niece of one of his sons, remembered this: I will never forget all the time i spent with Metro at Fishing Lake. From the underwater firepit to the Barneymobile, always so much fun. He will be greatly missed. Rest in peace, meatball.

The nickname Meatball was given to him by his teammates in Chicago. He had gone from Metro, to Meat to Meatball, and the line he centered, with Bert Olmstead and Bep Guidolin on the wings, was known as the Meatball Line.

Merve Kuryluk

Oh well he was he was just a perfect gentleman. I don't think he had a an enemy in the world type of deal. He was he was such a nice man. You know, just like he was just just a good guy. A lot of fun and and had a lot of good stories to tell us.

Frank Block

Marty Pavelich, who played with Metro in Detroit, said,

Marty Pavelich

He was just a terrific guy. I mean, you know, Metro was one fine hockey player. He was a a true National Hockey Leaguer.

Frank Block

Friend and teammate Emile Francis said of Metro,

Emile Francis

Of all the guys I ever seen in junior hockey, he was the best junior player I've ever seen. Yeah, that's how good he was, like you know. He was a very, very good player. And that's where he got the nickname from, Marvelous Metro. And he was, I mean, yeah, he was a terrific, terrific player. And not only he was a terrific player, but I mean he's a real good guy off the ice as well as on the ice.

Frank Block

Friend Ken Newans said, Metro...

Ken Newans

He's just one of the nicest people to ever play sports. And the greatest Moose Jaw Canucks player of all time. And just a wonderful guy.

Frank Block

Lifelong friend Claire Drake said,

Clare Drake

There's all kinds of people when I mentioned Metro's name, that he was a friend of mine and I played with him and well I didn't play with him in an advanced stage, but I played with him in public school in amateur, and they'd say, oh god, one of the best players I've ever seen play. And all that, you know, guys were always really impressed with him. He's such a nice guy, too.

Frank Block

Larry Popein said that,

Larry Popein

Well he was a real gentleman, you know, he was a real gentleman too, off the ice, and he acknowledged everybody. He was no smart ass or nothing like that. He was just a great great, great guy.

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