

Yorkton Stories

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Curt Keilback talks to himself, and to us

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Dick DeRyk

He called on both radio and TV about 2,400 NHL games from 1979 into 2007. And he appeared in four hockey-themed movies, including Goon and Goon 2. He published a book last year, a collection of short stories about his experiences in hockey and broadcasting. As he says in the introduction to the book, he talks about the good days and the bad, fully aware that a bad day behind the mic at a hockey game is a good day anywhere else. The book is called Two Minutes for Talking to Myself. And if you happen to be in Yorkton this summer, he will be doing a book signing at Coles bookstore in the Parkland Mall on July 22nd. He finished school here and started a broadcast career in Yorkton at GX Radio. We talked to Curt about the book, about his recollections, about hockey broadcasting, and a few other things. Thanks, Curt, for talking to yourself, because I really enjoyed the book. And thanks for talking to us. Talk to me a little bit about your first years in Yorkton. You came, you were born in Brandon, the family moved to Yorkton.

Curt Keilback

Yeah, well, no, it was actually, as far as Brandon was concerned, I think we left there when I was two. My dad was in broadcasting at CKX, and we moved from there to Winnipeg. So I spent the next several years in Winnipeg until I was 11 years old. And then it was Grey Cup day of 1959, when the whole family moved to Yorkton to raise the population by about two or three percent, I think, because old Jim and Pat, they had seven of us. We went in there, and I'll tell you, it was the greatest move we ever made. Dad was happy with the move, even though some people questioned people going from Winnipeg in a broadcast role to Yorkton, but he liked it. It doubled his salary, among other things. And it was just a tremendous place to grow up. Got lifelong friends there we still see a lot of to this in the summer. So it's a great memory. And we stayed there, you know, through until 1979, at least I did, and then since then moved around a lot. But we did have a cabin out at Good Spirit Lake for 38 summers. So we didn't get too far away from Yorkton very often.

Dick DeRyk

And you went to school here. You went to which public school?

Curt Keilback

Went to Simpson School for grade six and seven, Angus Spice in grade eight, and then on to Yorkton Collegiate Institute, YCI. In fact, we were the last class to graduate from there, although graduate may be exaggerating a little bit, but it was 1966 when we graduated out of out of YCI.

Dick DeRyk

Yeah, and in '67 the Regional High School opened. So that was the last year. You mentioned you're still keeping in touch with a bunch of people here. You were here for the Sports Hall of Fame induction dinner where the YCI Gridders were inducted, and I imagine that was a bit of a reunion and a homecoming as well for that whole crew.

Curt Keilback

It was, you know, I wasn't a Gridder, but I knew every one of them, obviously. It wasn't a particularly big school, and a great bunch of guys, and I was amazed really how many were able to make it for the function. But there's something about Yorkton, there really is. You never really get away from the place. And I've talked to a lot of people who are not only there now, some friends have stayed there for life, but people who've moved to places like Calgary and Vancouver and different places, and they always look for opportunities, look for excuses to get back home for a couple of days. And something like they had with the reunion for the Gridders, the induction into the Hall of Fame. That was a great opportunity because you know that so many other people, in many cases, you wouldn't have seen for a long time, and great to get to share some great old high school memories with would be there. So it was a really good weekend.

Dick DeRyk

You tell a story about your first experience with broadcasting when your dad took you to the arena in Winnipeg. He was doing hockey games with the very legendary Cactus Jack Wells.

Curt Keilback

Yeah, they were a pair. They were involved in a lot of things together, and they were sports voices here in Winnipeg, and they did baseball and they did football and they did hockey. And I was fortunate because oftentimes dad would take me with him, and I would sit with he and old Cactus Jack in the press box. And I guess until I was about 12 years old, I really believed Cactus Jack was my uncle. I think I called him Uncle Jack in those days, and he was great, he was instrumental in actually bringing us back to Winnipeg and having me start with the Winnipeg Jets. But that book I talked about that being at a game where they won the Edinburgh Cup. I think I was seven years old, and seeing what was going on and seeing the great time that dad and Uncle Jack were having at work and thinking, this is no job, this is fun, this is what I'm gonna do when I get out of school, and it turned out I did.

Dick DeRyk

Cactus Jack, I think your dad's nickname was The Kid.

Curt Keilback

Yeah, he called him The Kid. He also called him the Jolter. There was Joltin' Jimmy, he called him The Kid, but mostly he called him The Kid because I guess Cactus was a few years older. And actually, it was Cactus Jack got dad into Winnipeg, too, because there was a story there where Cactus Jack had gone into Brandon when Dad was there to do a hockey broadcast of a playoff game. And Cactus was going to do it to Winnipeg, and Dad was gonna do it to Brandon, but Cactus fell in the steps on the way up to the broadcast booth, broke his leg, had to go to the hospital. So they gave my dad two microphones and he did the broadcast to Winnipeg and to Brandon at the same time. And somebody back in Winnipeg, I guess the guy who owned the radio station heard it. I think it was old J. O'Blick, after whom CJOB was named. He heard it, he liked

him, and he called him up and said, When can you start? And next thing we knew, we were in Winnipeg.

Dick DeRyk

Yeah, I remember doing hockey broadcasts in Yorkton in '67, '68, I think two seasons with your dad in the old Yorkton arena. The press box hung up on the south wall. There was no heat in the arena. Your dad Jim did the play-by-play. Dave Adams, who was the Labatt's salesman, did the colour commentary. I was at the Yorkton Enterprise, a rookie reporter, and I did the statistics. And Staff Sergeant Leo Lynch from the RCMP did the three-star selections.

Curt Keilback

Yeah.

Dick DeRyk

And that was quite a crew.

Curt Keilback

It was. They had a good time too, you know. And they always had a little liquid heat with them, too, as I understand. But that was back in the day.

Dick DeRyk

It was necessary.

Curt Keilback

In that rink it was.

Dick DeRyk

It was chilly, it was chilly because George Morris put in the heaters above the stands, the natural gas fired heaters. George Morris donated those. But the press box was still colder than well, colder.

Curt Keilback

It was cold.

Dick DeRyk

You had some early experience, unpaid, doing radio in Yorkton when you were still a kid as well.

Curt Keilback

Well, yeah, I was actually when I was 13, I did a show called Minor Sports Corner. And thinking back was kind of weird, I guess, really, because I didn't know what the heck I was doing. And if I interviewed somebody, I would have a list of questions there and I would read off the question. And you know, you're 13 years old, you're kind of shy and nervous about it. But I suppose in the long run it was a good experience. But I remember when I kind of decided I didn't want to do it anymore and it was accepted, I was pretty happy because it was a little more responsibility than I was prepared for at 13 years of age.

Dick DeRyk

But you started you were the "sports director", which at GX, which meant that you were the only guy doing sports. Just like at the Enterprise, I was the news editor, which meant that I was the only guy doing news in the in the 60s. When did you get into that? How did you get into that?

Curt Keilback

I had done some baseball games in a couple of summers, but it was nepotism, that's what it was. Dad was working there, and I wanted to get into radio. He knew it. And Ed Laurence was the program director. His sons were interested in radio. So it just so happened that Greg Laurence and Curt Keilback, sons of two of the people who were there, started the same day, May the 1st of 1970. Next thing you knew, dad moved on to Regina because George Gallagher had bought a station there and he moved there. So with dad gone and me having started supposedly as a DJ, although that didn't work out very well, I wound up moving into the sports department, and as you say, became the sports department.

Dick DeRyk

So it's fair to say that radio was in your blood and it was in your bloodlines.

Curt Keilback

Absolutely. No, I used to listen to a lot of broadcasts when I was a kid, and I totally enjoyed them. Particularly, I liked listening to hockey games, and I can remember when we lived in Yorkton and I would still listen to Cactus Jack doing the Winnipeg Blue Bomber games on CKY, and he always sounded like he was having such a great time because he was. And you know, so it was in my blood. And I tried to pick up a few pointers, I think watching these people, and I used to watch Hockey Night in Canada too, and I was a big fan of Danny Gallivan. I thought he was the best. So you try to pick up from different habits from different people and put it all together. And if you've got the interest, you're gonna get the chance, and it worked out.

Dick DeRyk

You wrote a book in 2022. I don't know when you started writing it, but it was published in 2022. About 235 pages of short memories and commentary, and some very pointed one-paragraph stories that generally, I think you were fairly kind to everybody, with maybe a few exceptions. Where did that idea come from? What here I'm thinking, you know, I think I'm two years two years older than you. I can't remember a whole lot. Well, you know what they say if you remember the 60s, you weren't really there, but I don't remember a whole lot of things, you know, that happened in the 90s or you know, because there's so much happening, especially when you're in the news business. Where did the idea come from?

Curt Keilback

Well, the idea to write a book was not actually mine. It was spawned more out of the lake, Good Spirit Lake, sitting around by the fire in the evenings, and you'd start telling some stories over a couple of cold ones, and and the next thing you know, someone would say, you know, you should write this stuff down. And I'd always say, Yeah, maybe I will one day. And then I know my wife really encouraged me to write a book. And there was a show I did a few years ago in which I had to write an editorial for, and I think we did 13 shows, so I wrote 13 editorials and I didn't throw them out. So a couple of years passed by and I came across those stories, and I thought, I got more stories than that. I wrote some more stories, and the next thing you know, I had about 100, and

then COVID came along and there wasn't much to do, so I wrote another 100, and then I thought, you know, I got a book here. So it almost came by accident. It was, by about the last 50 or 60 stories, I was committed to making it into a book. But prior to that, it was just something to do.

Dick DeRyk

I was looking at your dad's obituary. He passed away in 2022, last year. And his obituary says he was born with the gift of gab, paired with an incredible ability to recall names, faces, and statistics. And I'm thinking, well, the apple doesn't fall very far from the tree. Because the stuff that you recall in that book, I mean, it's amazing the detail, the people that you knew and the stories that you remember.

Curt Keilback

Well, I appreciate that, Dick, but I can tell you for a fact I don't have the photographic memory that my dad did. And I don't think there's any question he did. He remembered every detail of everything. But I was surprised actually, because another guy that I worked with when I started broadcasting here in Winnipeg was Ken "Frier" Nicolson, and he'd sit around, a tremendous storyteller, and he'd tell stories, and I'd say, you know, how does he remember all that stuff? I don't remember that stuff. And then I've only been here for two years. And then it's almost like once you retire, and then maybe that's why you're not remembering things, Dick, because I know you keep working and keep at projects, but when you got nothing better to do, you sit there for an hour and these memories will come back. And then next thing you know, if you start writing them down, and that leads to another thing. And you know, since I wrote that book, I think I've thought of a couple of other things that had I thought of at the time, they would have been in there. But yeah, my memory is better than I thought it was, but still nowhere near what my dad had.

Dick DeRyk

A couple of stories out of the book that really caught my attention. The one that you talk about, what you said to you was the most impressive performance you saw in those 2400 games, and that was Teemu Selänne seven goals and two games to beat Mike Bossy's rookie record in 1993. I mean, I don't remember the specifics of that. I certainly remember Selänne as you know, one heck of a hockey player, but you were there. I mean, that's gotta be, that made a huge impression.

Curt Keilback

Oh, yeah, it was so much fun. You know, it was just to the point where every time you went to a game in that rookie season of Teemu Selänne, you couldn't wait for his next shift. I found myself looking at the bench to see if he was standing up to come back out onto the ice because every time he got on the ice, you expected that kid to get a breakaway and score a goal. And he could fly and he was, still is charismatic, so yet you couldn't help but like the guy. And it was just a lot of fun to watch. And like I say, when he scored those seven goals in two games. He had to score seven in those two games to get them at home because we're going on the road for the next five games. He was going to score them there, and he wanted to score them in Winnipeg. And the fact that he was able to score seven when he needed seven in only two games, that is the most impressive thing I saw.

Dick DeRyk

The funniest story, I think I was telling somebody about it, and we all chuckled about it. It was peanut butter night. Oh I'm reading that and I'm thinking.

Curt Keilback

Oh, I know. I know it was crazy.

Dick DeRyk

You could anticipate what happened, right? I mean, but obviously nobody did.

Curt Keilback

No, no, you'd say, you know, you give everybody a jar of peanut butter heading into a game. What could possibly go wrong? But exactly what could possibly go wrong did. They surrendered a late lead, lost the game in overtime, and that place was jars of peanut butter. And you know what they look like when they get to the ice, it's not a pleasant sight. And it was really hilarious because the goaltenders pulled the nets down over top of them, the players, the coaches, everybody running for cover, the fans are screaming, and it was fun, is what it was. And nobody got hurt. And it's kind of a memory you'll have forever. Unfortunately, I've never seen a video of it. I don't know if maybe the Jets found it and erased it or what happened, but there's no record that I've seen of it.

Dick DeRyk

It would be good to find to find an old video. Maybe somebody will dig one up and find it. All I'm thinking of is the poor guys that had to clean the ice up, you know, after it was all over, like I mean, where do you start?

Curt Keilback

Yeah, I don't know that the Zamboni could have been set up to handle that too well. I hadn't thought about that before.

Dick DeRyk

Yeah, that was a good one. You mentioned in one of the stories that Gretzky could have been a Jet.

Curt Keilback

Well, he should have been a Jet. And because Nelson Skalbania, who owned the Cincinnati franchise in the WHA, was in financial trouble, and he had this property by the name of Wayne Gretzky, and he decided to sell him. And I think the asking price was \$100,000. That's all it was. And you relate that to the kind of hockey money there is now. But anyway, he called Winnipeg and Ben Hatskin left it up to the people responsible, who at that time happened to be Rudy Pilous, said, nah, the kid's too skinny, he'll never make it in a big league like the NHL. And of course, there was all the animosity going on toward the WHA, too. So they were convinced that anybody who played there wasn't good enough, even Bobby Hull and a lot of others were. So anyway, they turned them down, and Peter Pocklington was next on Skalbania's phone list, and he picked up the phone and said, Yeah, I'll give you 100 grand for the kid, and that's what happened.

Dick DeRyk

It boggles the mind to think what could have been.

Curt Keilback

Yeah, I know. You often think about that, the difference that would have made. You know, one thing, I mean, he was a better player than Dale Howardchuk, but you got to realize there would have been certain differences. They wouldn't have had the first draft pick. So that the team would

not have had a Dale Hawerchuk, but they would have had Wayne Gretzky and they still would have had guys like Paul MacLean. And they probably wouldn't have had Dave Babych either, because he was a first overall pick. But there was only one Wayne Gretzky, obviously, get that many points. So it made a huge, huge difference.

Dick DeRyk

I learned a new term and maybe I'm naive on hockey terminology, but you mentioned the Gordie Howe hat trick. I'd never heard the term Gordie Howe hat trick.

Curt Keilback

A Gordie Howe hat trick is a goal, a fight, and an assist. And yeah, that was mentioned in the book. Tie Domi got one of those, the day he became a father for the first time. The Gordie Howe hat trick.

Dick DeRyk

Gary Bettman. He's been the king of the NHL for a long time. He's been the object of a lot of dislike and scorn among the fans. I mean, when the guy goes to hand out a trophy at a final and gets booed by the crowd. What is it about Gary Bettman? Like he seems to just rub a whole lot of people the wrong way.

Curt Keilback

He looks arrogant. I think that's a simple way to put it. He wears a smirk. I do think that maybe he's had a little bit of training though, because that smirk was always evident in earlier days, it's been reduced a little bit. Either that or he's just a little older. But sometimes you can get training for that sort of thing. But I think people just thought of him as being a little bit uppity. Whether or not he is, I don't know, but players sure like him.

Dick DeRyk

Some of the situations down in Arizona, I mean, he was fairly influential and still is, you know, in a lot of franchises that you know may or may not be in trouble or appear to be in trouble. He seems to be pretty powerful when it comes to how the decisions and how things go down.

Curt Keilback

People in Phoenix, Arizona, including people associated with the Arizona Coyotes, have asked me what it is that Bettman thinks about the Coyotes. Why is it he's got some love affair with having a team there? I mean, they're playing out of a rink that seats fewer than 5,000 people, and there's a certain guarantee that some of those tickets have to go to the college crowd at a reduced price. So, I mean, they're selling maybe 4,600 tickets, and they're selling them all every game, and of course it's quite a price, but still it's not a major league facility, but he insists they stay there. And how long that's gonna be, whether they're gonna build the new rink, but I don't know what the status is on that right now, but at best it'll be two or three years away. So that's a long time to stay in a junior-sized rink.

Dick DeRyk

You interviewed Harold Ballard when you were pretty young, when you were a bit of a rookie. Now, Harold Ballard has a reputation as being, I don't know if mean is the right word, but you know, not necessarily the most friendly guy, easy to get along with. But you seemed to have broke through that when you were a rookie reporter.

Curt Keilback

Yeah, he was great to me. And yeah, I mentioned in the book, I was tentative to say the least when I approached him. Friar asked me to do an interview with him, because I think he did have a kind of an intimidating presence. But when I walked up there, he said, you know, sit down and then let's have a good chat. So we did. We had a long chat, and then he told me I could talk to him about anything at all, which was great. He was in good humor. And then I did call him later for to be a guest on a show of ours, and he was gracious, he was good. I enjoyed talking to him, and he was a character. I mean, he loved the spotlight. I think microphones were pretty popular for the most part, where, when and maybe as long as they were outside of Toronto. So he liked the attention and he liked to be outrageous too. And the more outrageous he was, the better he felt because you know, it reminds me of somebody down in the States. But you that's just the way he is.

Dick DeRyk

Did you run into any people that were in the hockey world that were hostile, that were openly hostile? I mean, we see it now, you know. We see some of the coaches that you know don't want to talk to the media, or you know, did you run into that?

Curt Keilback

No, well, Jacques Demers was very good. Now you just told me my memory's that good, and now I can't think. Jacques Lemaire. Jacques Lemaire is what I'm thinking of. He was the setter, of course, with Guy Lafleur in Montreal. Yeah, Lou Lamoriello, who was his boss at the time. And I can remember one time, you know, it was commonplace to, as a visiting broadcaster, to do the coach in the morning. So I'd go and I'd interview the coach, and it didn't matter if Scotty Bowman was tough for some people to approach. I didn't have any problem with him. But I went in one time and I walked into the toward the coach's office when Jacques Lemaire was coaching the New Jersey Devils, and somebody said, Where are you going? I said, I'm going in to talk to the coach. He said, You can't go in there. I said, Watch me. So I opened the door and I walked into the coach's office, and he was standing there with Larry Robinson, and both of their mouths fell open when I walked in there. And I said, I want to get a talk with you. And he said, Don't you know I don't talk on game days? And my immediate reaction, although I didn't say it aloud, was, no wonder they don't sell any tickets in this place. At that time, the New Jersey rink was empty all the time. A coach who wouldn't talk on game days. I couldn't understand that. And of course, Larry Robinson wound up later on coaching elsewhere. I don't think he continued with that philosophy. That was Jacques Lemaire's and it was also Lou Lamoriello's who disliked the media. In fact, Lou Lamoriello, when he was a general manager in New Jersey, insisted that all the media, including the team broadcasters, had to fly commercial. He wouldn't allow them on the same plane. So, I thought that was kind of childish. But that's the approach that he took.

Dick DeRyk

You have a piece in the book called It's Nothing Really, and it answered a question that I've always wondered about. How do you remember all the lineups, all the players? I mean, it was one thing. It's one thing if you're doing broadcasts in a six team league, you know, but when you're doing dozens of teams, how do you do that? Because that's always fascinating.

Curt Keilback

Well, I think it's like any other walk of life. That's what you do. And you take a look at the lineups of the different teams, you get familiar with the people because a lot of them hang around for a few years. It was easier than most because I was always in the presence of either the Winnipeg Jets or the Phoenix Coyotes. So out of 40 players, there's 20. And so there's only 20 others. And for the most part, every team had people that you'd be familiar with, whether Jim Peplinski and Joel Otto and Joe Nieuwendyk and Jamie McCowan, people like that in Calgary, and of course the Edmonton Oilers, everybody was familiar with a lot of the names there. So there may have been a few people you didn't readily identify, but that's what a program was for. So what I always did, I would look at the program and I would think there's five or six guys here. I'm not sure I'll recognize them immediately. So I would just write those five or six names down, only those names in big bold letters, so that I could just glance down and pick it up. And it worked pretty well. And like I say, for the most part, you know most of the players anyway.

Dick DeRyk

I think you have the closing line of that little story is that if you hear a broadcaster say and the Flyers are going up the ice, it means that he couldn't identify the player.

Curt Keilback

He doesn't know who's got the puck. No, I did that a lot. We all do that. Here come the Flyers out of their own zone. He doesn't know who has the puck.

Dick DeRyk

Talking about in the beginning, in the start of the book, in the beginning in your Yorkton years. And you just mentioned Friar Nicholson, who was obviously an influence on you and made a call to you one day and said come and work with me.

Curt Keilback

Yeah, it kind of surprised me. It was somebody I had never met before. I'd heard the name, and I was familiar, of course, with the WHA, and that's where he worked, but I'd never heard him call a game. And to get the call when I did and have the opportunity, it was something unreal at the time because I grew up always wanting to be a hockey broadcaster, and I certainly never anticipated actually achieving that goal in the National Hockey League, but it happened. Expansion came along at the right time for a young guy from Yorkton, and I jumped on it.

Dick DeRyk

You told the story about he had checked with Cactus Jack, I think to see who was around, who was available.

Curt Keilback

No, what they had done is they had invited people to send in information, resumes, and examples and tapes of broadcasts they had done because they wanted to expand to another broadcaster to help Friar with the games once they got into the National Hockey League. And apparently they didn't find anybody they liked, so I was pretty lucky in that regard. And they were frustrated. And Cactus Jack happened to walk by and they said, who the heck can we get to work with Friar in these games? And Cactus said, get The Kids' kid. He's in Saskatchewan, and The Kids' kid is me. So that's what they did. They called, and I went in and had the opportunity to broadcast an

exhibition game out of Colorado Springs, the Colorado Rockies, as they were at that time against the Jets. And I guess they liked what they heard. And next thing I knew, we were here.

Dick DeRyk

There you go. Have you had any reaction, commentary from people who you mentioned in the book or who were close to the game after your book was published?

Curt Keilback

Well, a few people have said things. I haven't had any negative reaction, if that's what you're wondering about. I was curious as to whether that might happen. But no, there hasn't been any negative, and there really hasn't been a whole lot of positive either. You know, one thing I find with people connected with the hockey business, they don't seem to react to stuff like that very much. I did a hockey movie, I had a significant part in the hockey movie Goon, and I really thought I would hear something about that. Not one person associated with hockey has ever even mentioned it to me. A lot of other people have, people have seen the movies and made a comment about it, but nobody from the hockey world, so to speak.

Dick DeRyk

You did Goon, Keep Your Head Up Kid, the Don Cherry movie.

Curt Keilback

Oh, I didn't do that one.

Dick DeRyk

Oh, didn't you?

Curt Keilback

I did one called My Awkward Sexual Adventure. It wasn't about me. I was the reporter.

Dick DeRyk

Yeah. How did you like the movie stuff? I mean, is it something you could have started earlier, and would have done more of it, or was it just a kind of a one-off thing?

Curt Keilback

It was fun, and it again it was totally unexpected. Apparently, what had happened is a guy by the name of Michael Gauss, who was the producer, happened to be in Winnipeg one time in a cab, and a cab driver had a radio broadcast of a hockey game I was doing, and he said, One day I'm gonna do a hockey movie, I'm gonna get that guy on it. And that was in apparently 1988. And then he called me about, well, 20 years later, whatever it was, I guess more than 20 years later, and asked if I would go in this movie. So I said, Well, why not? Why wouldn't I? So then, of course, you still have to go through the audition process, and I had no idea, I'd never done an audition for a movie. So I came with the script that they had sent me. And they said, No, no, no, you have to memorize it. And I said, Well, it's pretty difficult to memorize play-by-play, but whatever. So I did it for them, and they liked it, I guess. But actually, I don't even know if they liked it. They had no choice, they'd already offered me the job. So I took it, and it was a lot of fun. And and it it was kind of funny because I got hot for a while. All of a sudden, they did about nine movies in two years, and then I said no to one because I was gonna be in Yorkton for some function.

That was it, they don't call me anymore. Somebody had told me, too, they said, you know, don't ever say no. If you say no to one, they'll never call you again. But something was going on in Yorkton, I think the annual golf tournament that I host in June for brothers and friends, so I wasn't gonna miss that to audition for a movie, and since then they've not called. The Noodleman golf tournament.

Dick DeRyk

Noodleman golf tournament. I've heard stories about that from Rex and Ron and some of the guys. Yeah. In fact, it might not be at Noodleman but the last time I saw your dad was quite a few years back, was at Deer Park golf course, and we happened to bump into each other and I think you may have been there as well.

Curt Keilback

Did you ever golf with my dad?

Dick DeRyk

I never golfed with him, no.

Curt Keilback

He was the world's worst golfer. Bar none. I used to enjoy golfing with him because I knew I could beat somebody.

Dick DeRyk

But he enjoyed the game.

Curt Keilback

Oh, he enjoyed the game. He did. You know, he had a situation one time where he was not a very good golfer, as I say it. He was still living in Winnipeg, and a buddy of his, name of Bill Brown was a pro at Niakwa golf course. And Bill said, Jim, come on down to the golf course on Saturday. Nobody is as bad as you're telling me you are. I'll give you a couple of lessons and you'll be fine. So sure as heck, dad goes down there on a Saturday to Niakwa Golf, not Niakwa, pardon me, it was the Assiniboine Golf Course.

Dick DeRyk

Dale Esopenko ended up there.

Curt Keilback

Dale Esopenko was there. But prior to him, Bill Brown was the pro there. And Bill gave him a lesson. And afterwards they went into the clubhouse to share a pint. Dad says, so Bill, what do you think? Bill Brown says, Well, Jim, I got a plan for you. Take two weeks away from the game and then quit. So then he realized it was a lost cause, but he enjoyed the game, as I say.

Dick DeRyk

What's your take on the state of broadcasting in both radio and TV these days? Hockey broadcasting. We used to know the broadcasters, right? I mean there was the names. And now you know I tune in, and you know, there's two guys that I've never heard of before. There seems to be a bit of a revolving door, you know, in the city.

Curt Keilback

I don't like that personally because when it was strictly on network television and local, that sort of thing, there were people you did get familiar with. And I think the people who were on network generally were pretty good at play-by-play. Nowadays it just seems like the sports networks throw anybody and everybody out there, whoever happens to be available going to a hockey game. They pay multi-millions of dollars for the rights, and then they're not particularly, I think the standard of the play-by-play broadcasters on the cable networks has deteriorated significantly from what we grew used to on the networks.

Dick DeRyk

There's a few of them that I enjoy listening to. There are many where I will watch a whole hockey game with the sound off because really I can see what's going on. You know, I really don't need somebody to telling me, tell me what is obvious by looking at the screen. Whereas there's other guys who fill in background information and provide context because they have the knowledge and you know, and can pass that on. But just to hear somebody say so-and-so passes the so-and-so to so-and-so. Yes, I see that.

Curt Keilback

Well, you do and you don't, you know, I think you and I are probably different on this. I don't like too much information in the middle of a hockey game. I don't mind information pre-post and in between, but statistics in the middle of a game, I don't understand them. And I can remember when I went from radio to television, my first thought was I was going to cut back a little bit because the picture can tell much of the story. Then I watch a game on television. You generally cannot tell who has the puck on television unless you can see the number or see the name, particularly if it's a rink-wide pass and someone from the other side's got the puck. I think personally, I think it makes it a lot more exciting when the broadcaster gets excited and calls a scoring play than he does by saying, well, that's his fifth goal in the last 14 games. He last scored March 11th. No, and he's just tied the game. I don't understand that. So I personally like the more exciting aspect of play-by-play than the informative one.

Dick DeRyk

You want to hear about the cannonading shot.

Curt Keilback

Yeah, I like that kind of stuff.

Dick DeRyk

You left hockey in 2007, or you left broadcasting hockey in 2007 in Arizona, not under the happiest of circumstances. Looking back on that, what's your thoughts?

Curt Keilback

I was totally innocent.

Dick DeRyk

It wasn't me, Judge. Wasn't me.

Curt Keilback

No, it wasn't. And it's funny, you know, because I'm the first one to admit when I do make a mistake, but I certainly hadn't made one there. And it was just a personality conflict between a guy who was probably promoted beyond his station when he became general manager of a satellite operation in Phoenix, and he wanted the opportunity to extend his power, so he took advantage of a very weak president who I don't know. Anyway, he saw what he could do, and and I wound up being the collateral damage.

Dick DeRyk

Well, I mean it's big business. There's a certain amount of cutthroat stuff happens at that level, I would imagine.

Curt Keilback

Yeah, you know, but usually there would be some kind of a warning. My warning had been a week before that they were thrilled by my work and they were working on a new contract. That was my warning. And then the next thing you know, you're out on your ear with no compensation. So no, I'm still bitter about that. Always will be, and I think I should be.

Dick DeRyk

You also had thoughts of getting back into the broadcast business when the Jets came back to Winnipeg. What was the process there?

Curt Keilback

There really wasn't a process. I did let Mark Chipman, the owner of the Jets, know that I was interested in coming back, and it became fairly common. I was interviewed by a fair number of radio and TV stations just because they assumed I would be a candidate, and I was hoping I would be. But at that particular time, the new ownership didn't want anything to do with the previous club. They didn't want to call him the Jets. They certainly didn't want to have the same broadcaster. And I was kind of aware of that, but I was hoping I could push past it, and it didn't. Now things have changed. Initially, they didn't have anything to do with the alumni either. Then over the last couple of years, they've warmed up to the alumni. And, you know, I mentioned in the book that Bobby Hull's jersey was worn in the first game. That should never happen. That number nine was retired. So it was just a change in philosophy that they initially wanted, they didn't want to call them the Jets. They wanted a brand new beginning, and people wanted them called the Jets. They wanted a lot of familiarity, and eventually the new ownership realized there is something to a background, there is something to tradition, and they've accepted that and welcomed it. In fact, I've done a couple of things for the Jets recently for the retirement of Teppo Numminen and for honors to Numminen and Selanne and of course the late Dale Hawerchuk.

Dick DeRyk

What are your thoughts? I mean, we're talking, it's April, and by the time this gets broadcast, you know the season may be over. What are your thoughts on the the '22-23 Jets and their situation now here? You know, they seem to make it, they like to have it close at the end of the season, you know, because a few months ago, it you didn't think that they were going to be fighting for a spot.

Curt Keilback

I know it's actually quite funny because you know, watching the reaction here on social media and also the newspaper and everything else, about oh, five or six weeks ago, people here were openly calling for the Jets to win the Stanley Cup. A week ago, what has happened to the Jets? Some people going as far as say they'll never go to another Jet game, they're bitter, they're upset, they've been a waste of money. Now going into this conversation we're having, they have won the last couple of games, and suddenly, wow, these guys are pretty good. And it's just a case of bandwagon hopping, and you see it all the time. So I think they've got some of the old guard there that maybe have been around too long, and might be time to switch a couple of the people around. But basically the nucleus looks pretty good. I think the future looks good, and I believe they've got a good coach in Rick Bowness as well, but he's got his hands full with that hockey club.

Dick DeRyk

Yeah, fans are pretty fickle.

Curt Keilback

They are that.

Dick DeRyk

Curt, this has been great. I've enjoyed our chat. I want to say again, that book was an enjoyable read. I liked it because I didn't feel like I had to sit down and read the whole thing right through. Pick it up and you read four or five stories and you can put it aside. And when you pick it up again, I didn't have to think back, you know, what part of the plot is he talking about now? Because it's all individual kind of pieces.

Curt Keilback

You know what's up on page 7 or page 3, it doesn't matter.

Dick DeRyk

Yeah, doesn't matter.

Curt Keilback

It's all individual stories and that's by design. And that's also an easier way to write a book, you know, than trying to make it like a novel. Just individual stories, particularly if you've been in the kind of business that you and I are in. And that's what you've always done. You've probably wrote individual stories.

Dick DeRyk

So it's available on Amazon, it's available on Kindle. Where else can people get it? And obviously hard copies are available at which bookstores that people would be familiar with.

Curt Keilback

You know, I was as the time we're talking, I can't say anything about Coles because they had some kind of a cyber attack there, and you can't get new product. So I've been informed that certain Coles stores, my book is sold out, and I've got tons of copies of the book, but they won't take them because they have to go through a middleman. So it's kind of a frustrating thing. But hopefully the

situation is resolved well before I do my book signing in Yorkton in July. So we'll have some books available at that time.

Dick DeRyk

I'll bring my cell phone. You can sign it because I've got you on Kindle there.

Curt Keilback

So yeah, it's still available at Amazon and Kindle and Friesen and here in the Winnipeg, McNally Robinson, and I believe now they're selling it at the airport, which I think is a good place to sell it because short stories for riding on a plane, but we'll see how it goes, but it's been interesting. And if you ask me how well it's going, I can't answer that question. I don't know. I really don't. Every once in a while, someone calls me up and they say to bring some more books and other places that have to have go through the middleman, they don't tell me what's going on. So it'll be a while before I know.

Dick DeRyk

The response has been, like you said, maybe not a whole lot of it, but it's been favorable.

Curt Keilback

Yeah, most of the well, I haven't had any negative response, but maybe that's because the people who bought my book are all friends and relatives. So I don't know.

Dick DeRyk

It's good to have a large family and a large city of friends for something.

Curt Keilback

I got six brothers and sisters, and I know they all got a copy. None of them would wait for me to give them one. I said, when we get together, I'll give you one. No, they couldn't wait. So they all bought one, so there's six sales right there.

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