

CARL BJARNASON



CARL BJARNASON It is with great sadness, the family of Carl Bjarnason announces his passing in Victoria, BC on January 30, 2014. A prominent educator and academic in his native Manitoba, his lifelong commitment to excellence in education - public education, in particular - won great admiration from friends, family and professional colleagues. Born in Brandon, MB on August 20, 1915, Carl grew up in a Canadian-Icelandic culture that traditionally put great value on learning. As a youngster, he developed a fascination with history that stayed with him throughout his life. He was especially intrigued by the lure of ancient Rome (he taught Latin) and felt the Romans had lessons for us today in culture, politics and the arts. He found something of value and interest in a vast array of themes...from American history to the Carolingian kings who ruled central Europe in the eighth and ninth centuries. Carl felt one of the giants of history was the greatest of the Carolingians: Charlemagne, who although basically illiterate himself, promoted public education and learning. He was intrigued by mathematics (which he also taught) and was enchanted by its poetic and elegant symmetry. As a young man, he devoured the works of mathematicians Bertrand Russell and Alfred North Whitehead. Education, Carl felt, was the key to almost everything. He literally saved nickels and dimes to send himself to university where he earned a BA at Brandon College; and earned degrees at the University of British Columbia; the University of London, London, England; and earning finally a PhD from Michigan State University in East Lansing, MI. His career started as a school teacher in rural Manitoba; interrupted by service in the RCAF during the Second World War; then a high school teacher in Brandon, where he soon was promoted to a school principal, then superintendent of all the city's schools, and in 1966 became dean of Education Administration at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg until his retirement in 1980. At teacher training college, he became best friends with Ray Spafford and in October 1941 married Ray's pretty young sister, Edna. For the next 70 years, Edna and Carl made a lethal, take-no-prisoners Bridge team, until Edna's death in 2011. Together, they loved relaxing at the cottage they built at Lake Killarney in Manitoba. They travelled frequently through the US and Europe and Iceland. (Carl worked valiantly to learn Icelandic over the years, with modest success). And both would unwind on occasion with a smooth Scotch, although Edna could opt instead for her favourite rye (on the rocks). Carl had a great love of and pride in his country and felt it was capable of great things. The key to a democracy's greatness, he argued endlessly, was its commitment to public education. He had no patience with the argument that private schools are better. If they're better, he said, the moral imperative is not to simply accept it, but rather to make the public system the best. He argued that case all his life. A memorial celebration will be held in Victoria at a date to be announced. Carl was predeceased by his wife, Edna; Icelandic immigrant parents, Gurun and Sigurdur; and

by sisters Dora, Helen, Margaret, Runi; and by brothers Herman, Joni, Kay, Marty, and Allan. He is survived by sons and daughters-in-law Dan and Nance of Toronto; David and Linda of Brandon, Manitoba, and grandson Jeff, of Brandon.