



BILL OZARD, 73 BROADCASTER

Polite until the end despite being sacked for saying thank you

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Bill Ozard began working for the B.C. tourism ministry on the morning of Feb. 16, 1978. Less than two hours later, he was fired.

The sacking generated newspaper headlines, tough questions in the Legislature, and, eventually, an out-of-court settlement.

The incident was an inconvenience for Ozard and an embarrassment to the province's Social Credit government.

The dispute was all the more remarkable for having been caused by a classified advertisement placed by Ozard expressing his gratitude for the job.

Ozard, who has died, aged 73, had a long career as a broadcaster in Victoria and Halifax, where he was a familiar figure as a hotline host, election-night commentator, and contributor to the annual Christmas Daddies Telethon.

William Wakefield Ozard was born in Victoria on Feb. 2, 1938, to Evelyn Royal Georgina Bonavia and William Charles Ozard, a school teacher.

Ozard's introduction to radio came as a student at Victoria College, where he studied English and history. A radio club formed on campus in 1955 and Ozard was a founding member as one of the "top college disc jockeys" who hit the airwaves each school day at noon. The studio was in a gardener's hut where they spun records and read the news to students in the nearby cafeteria. The broadcast day for CJVC that debut year ended promptly at 1:25 p.m., so students could return to class.

Ozard found work at radio stations CJVI and CKDA in his hometown before leaving to take a post in Halifax with CJCH in 1960. He soon became one of the best-known broadcasters in Nova Scotia, hosting a hotline radio program and anchoring election night coverage on the sister television station launched the year after he moved east.

For four years he hosted Phone Forum, a popular radio call-in show. A photograph from this era shows him in the studio, a headset covering his ears, dark-framed glasses on his face, a cigarette smoking in his raised left hand.

A successful hotline show needs “a true dialogue, richly laced with controversy and opinion,” Ozard wrote. “The hosts must take stands on issues, they must be crusaders.” One of his show’s successful campaigns led to an inquiry into conditions at a mental hospital at Cole Harbour.

He left radio briefly in 1969 to become a publicist for the Scotia Square development in downtown Halifax, only to soon after return to CJCH as station manager.

In his 1999 book, *“Not Guilty:” The Trial of Gerald Regan*, the journalist Stephen Kimber tells a story about how an exposé on vote buying in Regan’s constituency got killed. The radio station’s owners were seeking the purchase of a television station and feared upsetting a powerful Nova Scotia Liberal. It fell to Ozard to break the news to reporters and it was a sign of his management style that he allowed them to angrily express their dissatisfaction.

In the 1974 federal election, Ozard challenged longtime Progressive Conservative incumbent Bob McCleave in Halifax-East Hants. The broadcaster increased the Liberal share of the vote, but he still finished a distant second.

The defeated candidate took a position as director of special promotions in the Nova Scotia tourism ministry, later becoming deputy minister.

It was with those qualifications that he was hired by the British Columbia government as a \$2,035-per-month supervisor of travel marketing. He rented an apartment in Victoria and placed a classified advertisement in the local newspaper expressing his gratitude.

“Three months ago, I decided to return to Victoria after a 17-year absence,” he wrote in the advertisement. “God’s blessings are many.”

He thanked 13 people by name, including tourism minister Grace McCarthy and her deputy.

When he reported to work he was told his tiny advertisement created the impression his had been a patronage hire.

“I never dreamed there could possibly be any adverse comment on a thank-you note,” he said.

Ozard was dismissed after about 90 minutes. Reporters were told he had not passed his probationary period, the same excuse offered in the Legislature when the matter was raised by the opposition New Democrats.

Ozard filed a writ of summons in the B.C. Supreme Court to determine whether he remained in the ministry’s employ and, if so, to order his salary be paid. The matter was settled out of court with McCarthy telling the Legislature the bureaucrat had received \$4,300.

He wound up with a similar job in neighbouring Alberta where for several years he promoted travel within that province.

Ozard was diagnosed with colorectal cancer five years ago. He died from the disease, or, as his family stated in a paid obituary notice, "signed off the air," on Nov. 25 at Bedford, N.S. He leaves a son, four daughters, three grandsons, and a sister.

Special to The Globe and Mail

I knew UNTD Bill -- and in 1967 when I was OIC UNTD Training in Cornwallis I needed some publicity for a UNTD Centennial Project. The Project involved all 150 UNTD's under first year training in groups of 25 each (6 divisions) -- 6 weeks. Their Exped Training week was to rediscover and sign post each of the 100 miles of the historic Old Military Road linking Fort Anne with the Citadel in Halifax (and build foot bridges as required). When it was clear that the project would succeed I phoned Bill and asked for publicity in Halifax.

The last division of 25 cadets (all from Alberta and B.C.) emerged from the woods at the Hammonds Plains Road from where the Stad Band marched them into Halifax and onto Citadel Hill. I had organized G.I. Smith, Acting Premier (Stanfield was out of province campaigning for the P.C. leadership) and Admiral O'Brien to welcome them inside the Citadel walls. I presented Smith with a mock deed to the trail so that it could be incorporated into the emerging network of hiking trails in the Maritimes.

Bill Ozard mustered the press and the cameras. The picture in the G&M is the way he looked in 1967. He may have been a First Summer 57 to 59 UNTD. I was 56 to 58 -- which he may also have been -- and that would be why I felt free to call him -- but he is/was one year younger than I am. Amen !

Bob Duncombe