

Farewell to Halifax's dancing man-about-town

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19 Jun 2021 [+1 more](#) JOHN DEMONT jdemont@herald.ca @Ch_coalblackhrt John Demont is a columnist for The Chronicle Herald.

It always pleased me to see the mayor of Spring Garden Road, to glimpse the slight, elderly man with the rolling gait of someone who had spent substantial time at sea, as was surely the case with Captain Cyril Rupert — better known as Ted — Worthington.

I admired his natty attire: the dress shirts and suit jackets, the

ever-changing hats, the signature bowtie, which in the film by Saltwire colleague Eric Wynne you can hear Worthington explain the art of tying. It can be viewed online at www.saltwire.com.

When I saw him holding court in the morning at Steve-oreno's Cappuccino, or dancing to big band music on a summer

afternoon in the Halifax Public Gardens, I marvelled, as we all did, his blithe spirit.

When I passed him on Spring Garden Road, where he had strolled for more than 30 years, I would see the puckish grin, the expectant expression, and declare to myself, there, THERE, is a man who enjoys his days, and vow to do a better job enjoying



Ted Worthington and Lana Pinsky do a little dancing as they listen to Roxy and The Underground Soul Sound at the bandshell in the Public Gardens on July 1, 2015.

my own.

Earlier this week when I said to

Cristian Worthington that his dad, who died on June 12, at age 90, seemed like the happiest of

men, I thought I could hear him nod all the way out in Vancouver.

“He spent his life searching for home,” he said, “and he found it on Spring Garden Road.”

Ted Worthington, you see, was born in the gritty U.K. port city of Liverpool, home of the Beatles, whom Worthington would come to worship, in a house where life was not easy.

When the Second World War broke out and the German Luftwaffe began bombing Liverpool, he was evacuated to a farm in Malpas, near Cheshire, England, where he spent most of the next five years.



At 16 he signed onto the HMS Conway, a naval training school, or “school ship,” that harkened back to the 1850s when new shipping laws in the U.K. required merchant navy officers to be better educated and more professionally trained.

“In the course of earning his master mariner’s certificate he travelled everywhere,” Cristian, a software entrepreneur, told me this week.

His dad sailed through the Suez and Panama Canals, visited Australia and Asia, and even

saw Canada for the first time. In the last year of training he met his wife, a passenger, on a voyage from Argentina to England and a year later settled with her in Buenos Aires, where they spent the next decade and raised three children.

Argentina, by then, was an unstable place. Worthington tried and failed to find work back in the United Kingdom. Fond memories of his visit to Canada led to him packing up the family and moving to Toronto before heading to Halifax where he got a job managing the creation of Halifax’s South End Container Terminal, and eventually became chairman of the Atlantic Pilotage Authority.

“We had come from Argentina and Britain, places where people were having problems,” said Cristian. “We were looking forward, not backward.”

His son remembers standing in the streets of Halifax when Pierre Trudeau drove by in an open-roofed convertible on the way to the Canada Games at Saint Mary’s University — and the impression that left on a father who had just spent a decade in Argentina where the president only travelled anywhere in a bullet-proof car.

Ted’s goal was to become Canadian, which meant Saturday nights sitting around the television set trying to figure out the nuances of Hockey Night in

Canada, and, when the opportunity arose, playing a role in the community.

The Manchester United fan was one of the founders of youth soccer in Nova Scotia, and, in the 1970s, was part of a small group who fought successfully to preserve Hemlock Ravine, the last old growth forest in Halifax, from development.

As well as running marathons — he once finished second in his age category at the ultra-competitive Richmond, B.C. 10K — the elder Worthington ran for Halifax city council in Ward 10, losing by only 10 votes after a judicial recount.

I truthfully didn’t know any of

that when I talked to his son. To me Worthington was a flaneur, a stroller, wanderer, and man-about-town, for whom the bar, restaurant and café-filled streets around Halifax’s downtown — where he lived on Queen and Birmingham streets, before moving onto Spring Garden — were “made to order,” according to his son.

His winter home was the library, the old one with Winston Churchill striding across the lawn and the sparkling newer one where this nonagenarian, who was active on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, kept up on the news and current affairs.

In summer you could find Worthington in the Public Gardens,

dancing near the bandstand with his partner Lana, just as you see him in the picture accompanying this column.

Wherever he went Halifax seemed to fit him perfectly. He spent his life around ports, after all. Then there was the informality of this city — the way that he could strike up a conversation with complete strangers here, even, when the occasion allowed it, in his fluent Spanish — which so reminded Worthington of his Liverpool birthplace.

A city this size, furthermore, ensures a man who truly loves people can stand out. “He wouldn’t have been happy in a place where he was any-

mous,” said Cristian. In Halifax he was surely not.

At the same time, the shipping world is a global one, and as word of Worthington's death spread, the condolences began pouring in, filling his son's inbox.

When asked if there were any plans for commemorating his dad's passing Cristian said they would have to wait, because for someone with the kind of social circle a Covid-limited gathering of 50 would be “pointless.”

All he could say is that when the time comes there will be a few stories and there may even be dancing. “Bowties,” he added, “will be mandatory.”