

## **Remembering a Builder of the Cross Country Ski Community in BC**

*– by Lars Taylor*

The cross country ski community in British Columbia lost one of their builders last week. On December 31st, 2023, Per Gaarder passed away after a long battle with cancer. Chairperson of Cross Country BC between 1983 and 1988, Per was also one of the team behind securing a permanent cross country ski venue in the Callaghan Valley (i.e. Whistler Olympic Park) as a legacy from the 2010 Olympic Winter Games

As a competitive athlete in the sport of cross country skiing throughout the 1980's, I considered Per a mentor as did many within the racing scene at the time. Following the premature end to my competitive athletic career due to a spinal cord injury in 1991, I discovered the Gaarder family's ability to take a young athlete under their wing extended far beyond the competitive arena as they, and the entire Nordic community in British Columbia and Canada, supported my post injury rehabilitation. I continue to owe Per, his family, and the Cross Country Ski community in British Columbia debts I can never repay.

In his passing, Per has provided me with a final gift in opening a door to glimpse back into the community which was once central in my life as I have reached out to spread word of his passing. I have been saddened to find, during my efforts, that many of the developers of organized cross country skiing in British Columbia who are familiar to me have reached the end of their lives in recent times. However, this feeling of sadness has been more than offset by reinforcement of my lifelong impression that cross country skiing continues to be a strong community which attracts excellent people with involvement at the grassroots, recreational, organizational, and competitive levels of the sport. My opinion has always been that, with lifelong engagement, participants stand to gain not only physical health benefits (I *still* use the same interval sessions I was assigned as a pre-teen, now in my mid-fifties), but standards of behaviour and a way of looking at the world which can aid them in dealing with anything they may encounter in life. Once a skier, always a skier. It warms my heart to know that this community continues to thrive and provide benefits to all participants from beginning of life to end.

[How is Lars Doing? How do we feel?](#) *By Per Gaarder*

[A Word From Lars...](#) *By Lars Taylor*