

*The Great Canadian Seditious Trials:  
The Courts and the Winnipeg General  
Strike, 1919–1920, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.*

Foreword

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The hallowed halls and courtrooms of the Manitoba Law Courts can humble any person, and I presume that was the builder's intention. As an articling student, it was never the marble floors or high ceilings that cut through my own sense of presence. Rather, it was the vivid memory of watching my father, Jacob (Jack) S. Walker, Q.C., argue his last case in the very same building. Confined to a wheelchair, and braced by a halo medical device bolted into his skull at four separate points, he courageously made his legal submissions. His most recent surgery to stop the spread of cancer would not stop him from practising the law.

My father died of cancer at the age of 56 on Thanksgiving Day, October 10, 1994 leaving behind his wife, Evelyn, and his five young sons. His funeral was three weeks after my 10<sup>th</sup> birthday and was attended not only by friends and family but also judges, lawyers and former clients alike.

What happens when your father dies at ten years old? People share their stories about him.

I've been told about my father's triumphs as a Provincial Court Judge, trial lawyer, successful businessman, humanitarian, philanthropist and, most recently, the author of *The Great Canadian Seditious Trials: The Courts and the Winnipeg General Strike, 1919-1920*. Obviously, I knew my father as well as any ten-year-old, but the ongoing stories are what keep my head up and filled with pride.

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It was my father's amazing talent to self-motivate and obsess over his subject matter that made him tremendously successful. Luckily, for fans of Canadian history, one such obsession of his was the Winnipeg General Strike.

As the son of Jewish immigrants, my father grew up in a blue-collar household in rural Manitoba. He applied his family's work ethic to his studies and racked up academic honors. He utilized his free time by getting involved with politics and community as both the leader of the Young Liberals and the Hillel Jewish organization. After completing law school at the University of Manitoba, and later receiving his Master of Laws, he turned his attention to the most significant event in our Province's history.

His own family background allowed him to deeply empathize with the plight of the 30,000 workers who went on strike in 1919. Their stories turned into his passion and he wanted the world to know about it. He believed that the public needed further narrative on the eight strike leaders, lawyers and judges involved in the Sedition trials. He felt that the story and its significance had as much action as any Hollywood movie. Accordingly, he began his research, before the stories were forgotten or lost with time, with those who participated.

Over the course of twenty years, my father compiled records on the infamous labour strike that captivated Canada. He expended great efforts in his research and travelled all over the continent to meet with the key figures involved. As a trial lawyer at the time, naturally his focus was on the leaders charged with Sedition against their own government and their subsequent court proceedings. The fruits of his labour are now a paperback indispensable to our province's history and invaluable to the legacies of the families involved. After all, our government was waging an attack on our free speech and freedom of the press.

Before my father got too sick, these documents existed in our home, where seemingly every drawer in the house acted as a filing cabinet for his manuscript. Having five small boys, he'd edit when and where he could find the time. His passion for the material is on display with editorials on almost every page of his written research.

One such editorial is with regards to strike leader J.S. Woodsworth, reading as follows:

*Incredible! The government charged a Methodist minister with sedition for quoting the bible.*

For those interested, these documents and recordings now reside at the Manitoba Archives, stored as a collection known as the "J.S Walker papers."

Although my father died before he could submit the finished product of his efforts to the publisher, he successfully preserved the precious memories

and stories of those involved with the trials, the very goal he'd set out to accomplish.

In my view, stories are the best way to summon people back into our lives, and in my father's book he summons the legacies of the many memorable Manitobans involved in the court proceedings. All in a style that only he could.

As for recent stories involving my father, I'd like to share one.

During a recent trial I had conduct of, I had taken my seat at an old Barristers desk in the Court of Queen's Bench. By the look of it, I estimated that the piece of furniture had seen decades of trials play out upon it at the Manitoba Law Courts. As I awaited the entrance of The Honourable Justice Dewar to address the jury on the murder trial that we were to begin, I repositioned one of the old and crooked desk drawers. My body immediately froze, I turned to my co-counsel, Mike Cook, and requested that he read to me what was inscribed into this piece of old wooden court furniture. Mike said,

*"Jack Walker  
March 12, 1968"*

It's not clear to me whether it was in that moment, or when it was combined with the jury's verdict of not guilty on behalf of our client, that I realized the stories shared with me by those who knew my father had brought me directly to where I was supposed to be. On April 25, 2019, my wife Lindsay gave birth to our first son, Jack.