

MARTIN ALEXANDER BERGMANN (1956–2011)

The day before a 19-metre-long research vessel set sail for the Arctic in September 2011, the sponsors of the expedition renamed it the *Martin Bergmann*, in honour of one of the 12 people who had died in a plane crash at Resolute Bay in the Arctic 10 days earlier. Most Canadians might be forgiven for not knowing who Martin Bergmann was or why an Arctic research foundation would have named the former fishing trawler after a mid-level civil service director like him.

“Marty,” however, was no ordinary civil servant. As director of Canada’s Polar Continental Shelf Program, he was responsible for providing ground and air support to approximately 130 scientific groups from more than 40 universities and government agencies around the world. Despite the program’s shoestring operating budget, he did his job so well—and with so much passion, humour, and constructive conniving—that in the days after he died, tributes poured in from Korea, China, Japan, France, Germany, Sweden, Norway, and Great Britain, from the head of the National Science Foundation’s Office of Polar Programs, and from the captain of a Canadian icebreaker that had carried him and others through the Northwest Passage that summer.

In Canada, biologists, botanists, oceanographers, archeologists, deputy ministers, defence commanders, Inuit leaders, policy makers, and journalists made time in their busy schedules to attend two memorial services—one in Winnipeg, the other in Ottawa—or to watch the webcast of the event on their computers at home. Two trust funds were established in Marty’s name, and the Royal Canadian Geographical Society voted unanimously to create a new Arctic science medal in his honour. At the memorial in Winnipeg, Joe Oliver, the Minister of Natural Resources, presented Bergmann’s wife, Sheila McRae, and his children, Kristofer, Nicholas, Toby, and Isabelle, with the flag of the Peace Tower that flew on the day he died.

Marty was an Arctic scientist long before he became an administrator. But he didn’t intend it to be that way in the spring of 1979, when he drove from Montreal to Winnipeg in his Plymouth Duster to get some field experience with Harold (Buster) Welch. Welch was an adjunct professor at the University of Manitoba and a full-time working scientist at the Freshwater Institute in Winnipeg.

Although Marty had little skill with a shotgun, Welch made sure that his protégé got plenty of hunting time in the wilds of Manitoba to prepare him for a five-month field trip to the camp that Welch, Dave Schindler, and others had set up on the west coast of Hudson Bay. Tenderfoot that he may have been just a few months before, Marty took to the field with natural talent the following spring. He also quickly fell in love with the land and the people who inhabited it.

Shortly after he completed his master’s degree, Marty was challenged to reopen the old Char Lab in Resolute, where he and Welch shifted their scientific focus to the Arctic marine system. In the ensuing years, they co-authored nine peer-reviewed papers.



Marty Bergmann at the Franklin graves on Beechey Island. Photo: Ed Struzik.

Whether in science or administration, Marty had a reputation for being a brilliant, perennially upbeat dreamer who knew how to get things done in a system that as a rule discouraged bold ideas and cutting-edge research. He always asked, “What’s best for Canada?” Nothing illustrates this talent better than the time when Marty spotted veteran CBC news anchor Peter Mansbridge sitting in Frankfurt airport in March 2006. It was late in the evening. Mansbridge was in between flights and thoroughly exhausted after completing a Middle East assignment. Hoping to get some sleep in a quiet corner of the airport lounge, he spied this “gentle bear of a man” walking across the room towards him.

“Hi, I’m Marty Bergmann. I’m from Winnipeg,” said Marty as he held out his hand to introduce himself. Mansbridge had been through this kind of thing hundreds of times before and was in no mood for chitchat at this hour of the day. But that didn’t stop Marty from mentioning that he was a Fisheries and Oceans scientist. Marty then pointed to a *Time Magazine* article sitting on the table that described how climate change is transforming the Arctic.

“You should be doing this story,” Marty advised. Mansbridge assured Marty that he would—if Marty could get him, his news team, and a satellite system on an icebreaker sailing through the Northwest Passage. Marty didn’t miss a beat. “I can do that,” he said.

The rest, of course, is history. Within weeks, a rule-bending plan was put in place, and that summer, Mansbridge and his crew joined a team of oceanographers aboard the CCGS *Louis S. St-Laurent* to broadcast a series of superb documentaries on the Arctic to millions of Canadians.

Modest as he was, Bergmann liked to give credit for his daring and cunning skills to mentors such as Welch and Schindler and to oceanographer Eddy Carmack, who once famously asked the Canadian Coast Guard if he could borrow their largest icebreaker and sail it to the North Pole. To everyone's surprise, the Coast Guard agreed, and in 1994, two icebreakers, the CCGS *Louis S. St-Laurent* and the USCGC *Healy*, became the first ships to make that historic journey.

The audacity of that request, coming as it did at a time when the Canadian government was mercilessly slashing budgets, was percipient. A few years later, the United States National Science Foundation decided to set up a research station in the Beaufort Sea pack ice for a year. Normally, this would have been done by placing tents on the ice and flying people in by aircraft. After a number of international discussions, Marty wondered whether it wouldn't be better to freeze a Canadian icebreaker in the ice for a year instead. "Never been done," said Carmack, when Marty called him to see what he thought of the idea. "Then let's do it," said Bergmann.

Not only was the CCGS *Des Groseilliers* eventually poised and ready to spend a year in the Canada Basin, but Marty had also arranged to have the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans on board the CCGS *Louis S. St-Laurent* icebreaker to wave good-bye to the expedition. Ice Station SHEBA, which was designed to provide polar input to global climate models, is still widely regarded as one of the most successful Arctic science projects ever undertaken.

At the memorial in Winnipeg, Carmack wondered aloud whether there was anyone in the room who hadn't received a call from Marty at some time over the weekend or late at night, after Marty had flooded the backyard hockey rink and put his children to sleep. It was in this way that he got to know just about every Inuit leader, scientist, bureaucrat, pilot, and journalist who had some connection to the Arctic.

Marty's ability to make friends out of his many contacts served him well. When he decided to throw a party at the Polar Continental Shelf base station in Resolute in the spring of 2008 to generate support and publicity for Arctic science, everyone once again thought he was crazy. A flight to Resolute required an investment of at least \$5000 and a week of time off from work. Weather delays could make that time away even longer.

But Marty prevailed, and dozens of scientists, journalists, politicians, and high-level bureaucrats attended, arriving by plane or icebreaker. The evening social, which included virtually every adult resident of Resolute, was a

huge hit—and long overdue for an organization that had operated almost in isolation from its Inuit neighbours.

Marty may have outdone himself in the spring of 2010, when volcanic ash from an Icelandic volcano stranded him and dozens of other people from around the world who were attending the Arctic Science Summit.

Realizing that they could be there for a very long time, Bergmann made calls to the Department of Foreign Affairs and the Department of Natural Resources in Canada to see if they could fast-track the papers and permissions that he would need to charter a plane from Greenland to Baffin Island and get both the Canadians and the internationals home through Iqaluit. The speed with which Bergmann got through the red tape so amazed Hong Kum Lee, the director general of the Korean Polar Institute, that she nicknamed him "Mighty Marty."

Many people in the Arctic science community found it odd initially that Marty would make the move from being the director of the National Centre for Arctic Aquatic Research Excellence in the Department of Fisheries and Oceans to managing the Polar Continental Shelf Program. The profile and finances of the PCSP had become such a bad joke by then that scientist John England likened it to a "rusty old microbus" compared to the "space shuttles" that other Arctic countries were operating.

Marty instinctively knew that the PCSP was vital to Canada's northern security and worth his best efforts. Not only did Marty breathe new life into the organization, but he took advantage of various government funds to rebuild and expand the infrastructure of the base at Resolute. And he did this at the same time that he, Danielle Labonté of Indian and Northern Affairs, Peter Harrison of the Privy Council, and a handful of others were working on plans for a new Arctic research station.

Marty was savvy enough to know that he would likely be retired or too long in the tooth to be involved in any meaningful way by the time the Arctic Science Centre was up and running in Cambridge Bay. But his legacy will live long in that institution, as it will in the newly renovated Polar Continental Shelf facilities in Resolute and on the research vessel that will be using that Northwest Passage community as a safe harbour for years to come.

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