

Shriver Winner Skis for #40....read on

When Paul Thompson (RPCV Malaysian Borneo 71-73) returned from his 5 years in Asia he had no idea what was next. After teaching high school science from the British syllabus in Sabah, East Malaysia, he thought that getting a teaching certificate would be a smart career move. He received his BS in Elementary Ed from the University of Minnesota and found a second grade teaching position in the rural WI town of New Richmond the following year, 1976.

While teaching his second graders reading, math, the basics of Asian countries & culture and the finer points of throwing the Frisbee, Thompson's favorite sport, he had an epiphany. Having grown up as an avid hockey player in Mpls. MN skiing was not really on his radar as a fun and fit way to spend time during MN / WI winters. That is until on a deep snowy night in late February 1978 Thompson and his teaching buddy Clark Anderson heard about this Birkebeiner ski race in Northern WI where two thousand+ cross country skiers skied 55 km through the northern boreal forest. WHAT!!! Thompson did the math, 34+ miles in sub-freezing, sometimes sub-zero temps, no way!

The challenge was intriguing and in 1979 with borrowed skis from his hockey playing brother, Paul and Clark lined up for their first Birkebeiner ski marathon with a few thousand other skiing fanatics. 6 hours and 42 minutes later crossing the finish line in Hayward WI the hook had been set and Thompson had caught Birkie Fever.

While he was training to ski 55 km Thompson was also learning about The Hunger Project (THP) and it's goal to eliminate hunger and poverty in the next 20 years. The experts said it could happen, what was missing?....the political will to get it done. Thompson started talking and getting pledges for his skiing...10 cents per kilometer, 55 km for a \$5.50 donation. Some people gave more and by the Birkie he had over \$1,000 collected.

The following year he added the American Refugee Committee addressing the refugee crisis in Cambodia, \$4,000+ raised, in year 3 it was Operation Bootstrap and building schools in Tanzania added to the recipients and more than \$10,000 was donated. The fever for the Birkie continued, as did Thompson's passion for "Ski to End Hunger." Enter Save the Children and Thompson working in the refugee camps of Somalia working with youth recreation programs in Lugh Jelo a refugee camp of 70,000 displaced people. (Some of his Frisbee students from 1981 in Somalia are now friends, living in MN). Returning from Somalia, Thompson started a local fundraising and educational office for Save the Children, complete with "The Craft Shop" to sell handmade crafts from countries where Save the Children worked. Ski to End Hunger continued to attract skiers, media attention and fundraising support for many groups over the decades.

In 1989, two friends nominate him for the Sargent Shriver Humanitarian Service Award. When selected, Thompson travelled to Kent State, Ohio to accept the award. Kent State was the place partially responsible (site of Vietnam war protest in May 1970 where 4 students were shot and killed just before he graduated from Gustavus Adolphus College) for his passion to serve his country through the Peace Corps.

Thompson keeps skiing every year except 1990 when his son Christopher was born just after the Birkie. Raising money for a school weather station, his son's Waldorf School and local food shelves the Birkies' keep piling up. His nephew Scott, inspired by his uncle's many stories, joins the Peace Corps and goes to Nepal in 1993, with a grand send off from Thompson's World Wise School students and families. Climate Change is now beginning to overwhelm the lives of the people most at risk from poverty, including many of his students and friends in Borneo and throughout Asia. Thompson retires early from teaching to focus his attention and energy on solutions to this crisis. He begins a local non-profit Cool Planet- Neighborhood FUN ~ Action for Our Planet, and co-leads a local chapter of CCL (Citizens' Climate Lobby) to address the missing key....political will for a livable world.

NOW HERE WE ARE, 2020, and instead of the perfect vision we all were hoping for, we are struggling through this pandemic and learning how to zoom our way to a more fulfilling future. George Floyd's death was at the intersection Thompson drove through daily on his way to Bancroft School just down 38<sup>th</sup> St in South Mpls. He is still skiing, but cross-country skiing is on life support with off and on need for machine made snow for training and races. What's an outdoor loving, skiing RPCV do to make sense of it all?

Keep skiing but with a special message on this 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Focus and Connect.

Here are the recipient organizations for Birkie 40:

**Peace Corps** is reimagining itself assisting 7300 evacuated volunteers to find employment while planning meaningful changes for re-introducing new programs to meet the world's needs. Our **RPCV4EA (Returned Peace Corps Volunteers for Environmental Action)** are heading up a movement to engage the Peace Corps community of nearly 230,000 former volunteers and staff to address climate solutions.

**Citizens' Climate Lobby/ Education (CCL/CCE)** is hopeful that their bi-partisan legislation (Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act) will finally take center stage in Congress as Republicans and Democrats come to the light that nothing lasts without bi-partisan agreement. Educating and empowering citizens to use democracy as a powerful tool to seek solutions.

**Braver Angels**, new on the scene, is teaching the skills of listening and how to find common ground with people of different world views. Discussing the intersection of climate, racial justice and well-being.

**Cool Planet-** skiing, biking, playing frisbee, getting people outside to do what they love, protect what they cherish while having fun and staying fit. Cool Planet Skiers mottos are "conversations for climate action" and "preserving winter for future generations"

These are the groups that Thompson will be skiing for during his 40<sup>th</sup> Birkie and he's asking for your support, not just to raise \$40,000 for 40 years of skiing but to ask his friends and supporters to get involved with one or more of these organizations.

Two of the messages from Thompson's CCL experience are "the antidote to despair is community" and "Politicians don't create political will, they respond to it"

His story began with his Peace Corps experience, what's your story? Time to put a human face on the problems and solutions our country and world face today!

Contribute to the \$40,000 goal and get involved....visit [www.Coolplanetmn.org](http://www.Coolplanetmn.org) for details. This is the time to move our communities and country from social distancing to social gathering.

Special this year, when you contribute \$40 or more receive a copy of [Greenhouse Game](#), a climate saving card game with real solutions. With on line or hard copy versions, this game will inspire you and your family to cut emissions and build a safer, healthier future.