

# James Robinson

Suddenly, while putting out the hummingbird feeder on his balcony, James “Robbie” Robinson made his final, well-timed move on the morning of January 16, 2020.

Left with huge holes in their hearts are his very fortunate children: Doug (Ginny), Julie McIntyre (Sandy), Peter (Barbara), Bonnie (Frances Thorsen) and his grandchildren, Briar (Kevin O’Gorman) and Alex, step-granddaughter Louise Blight (Ian), and step-grandsons Matt (Tess) and Alex Champagne. The extended families of the Boakes, Slaters also feel his loss greatly.

Robbie was born to Mildred and James Hamilton Robinson in Northern Ontario. He was predeceased by his sisters Kathleen (McArthur) and Evelyn (Slater).

Robbie (then Ivan) had what he described as a happy, carefree childhood. He had a beloved dog, a pet chicken and enjoyed all the winter activities despite the pain of thawing toes and fingers. His Sunday School teachers at St. Paul’s United Church’s Young People’s Group had a very strong influence on Ivan. It must have inspired his later interest in becoming a Sunday School Superintendent at Downsview United Church. There, he was successful in recruiting so many teachers that it became one of the largest Sunday schools in the city. While he believed that the Bible stories provided good lessons, he mainly wanted to share the importance of learning, community and mutual support.

When the war came, Ivan went to Brockville for Officer Training. Due to his colour blindness, he was unable to become a pilot, as he would have wished, so he became a paratrooper instead. Fortunately, he was still putting troops through their advanced training when the war ended.

Robbie (his “war name”) joined the first big class of returned

men at the Ontario Veterinary College in Guelph in 1946. That first year, a lecturer in Textile Chemistry, Mary Boake, caught his eye in the cafeteria and he was "smitten". He swept her off her feet and onto his motorcycle, under the disapproving eyes of some of the senior staff, and they married after his second year, something Robbie described as "the best move" of his life.

Graduating in 1950 and spending two years at Cornell for an MS in Virology, Robbie and Mary put down roots in Toronto. They built the Downsview Veterinary Hospital at Keele and Wilson and acquired the home next door where they raised their growing family. Active in the Rotary Club as well as the church, Robbie enjoyed being a community worker as well as a much-loved veterinarian, popular especially with bird owners.

Subsequent moves were made, always at the most opportune times. The first was to Etobicoke in 1965 for larger premises, then to a "hobby farm" in East Sooke, B.C. in 1976 where Robbie raised sheep, ducks, geese, and guinea fowl, then into Oak Bay in 1992, and finally to Berwick Royal Oak in 2011.

When the responsibilities of the farm were lifted, Robbie could scratch his travelling itch and visited at least 55 countries. Together, Mary and Robbie sailed from Rome to Singapore, through the Panama Canal, travelled on the Orient Express and explored Europe, Scandinavia, Down Under and more. On his own, Robbie made many trips and long-term friendships travelling with Elder Trek. They included Mongolia, where he sampled fermented yak's milk and literally gave his host the shirt off his back. Other adventures took him from Cairo to Cape Town, Borneo, Antarctica and rafting down the Tatsanshini River. Just a couple of years ago, he took the train across Canada by himself. Anyone who knew him wouldn't be surprised that he had a shirt made with "Anyone for Bridge?" written on the back. He walked up and down the club car, trying to drum up a table, but, sad to say, he only

got one taker.

Loving tropical climates, Robbie persuaded Mary to buy a condo in Ajijic, south of Guadalajara, Mexico before 2001. For several years, they enjoyed golf, playing bridge and Robbie “soaked up the sun” for 2-3 winter months. The lure of the sun also partly explains the biannual family Christmas trips to Kauai over the last 14 years. The other part of the explanation is that there was nothing more important to Robbie than his family and they were the grateful recipients of his loving generosity.

People may not be aware of the extent of Robbie’s philanthropic generosity, but he supported several organizations, mainly those involved with helping and educating children. They include Plan Canada, Sleeping Children Around the World, Casa Guatemala and Innovative Communities which helps, in part, to train young people to be teachers in Guatemala and return to their communities to teach. Through the Victoria Foundation, he also contributed to many other worthy causes and charities.

After Mary died in December 2013, Robbie was well supported by his “Berwick family”. It was wonderful to know that he truly felt that way about his friends and the staff at Berwick. He thrived on the duplicate bridge he played and taught, enjoyed the men’s poker and outings and being an active member of the Berwick Welcoming Committee. It’s possible that Berwick’s Pub had to be enlarged mainly to accommodate the gatherings he’d organize.

In addition to being charming, generous and hospitable, Robbie was a great story-teller—especially about his war years, travels and experiences on the farm in East Sooke. He also could actively debate anyone who cared to take him on regarding subjects like climate change, welfare recipients and “his boy, Stevie”. He’d often try to “poke the tiger”, especially with his daughters, but would usually back off

gracefully, always with that twinkle in his eye. He could start a joke totally deadpan, so you thought it was a true story and then he would laugh uncontrollably when he delivered the punch-line. Again, with the twinkle and possibly, tears. The Pinot joke was a classic example of "if it works once, milk it!!"

Robbie was also a true gentleman of the old school, and as long as he was physically able, he would hold a door open, pull out a chair or help someone on with their coat. Other admirable qualities included his ability to concoct brain-teasing treasure hunts, juggle his finances, call in the sheep and swans, and live in the moment.

Despite his failing health in the past few months, he was happy to wake up every day and made the most of it. The loan of an electric wheelchair restored his independence somewhat and he revelled in bombing around Berwick in it. Our family was so happy that we could gather this past Christmas and enjoy some quality time together—mostly over meals. All of his favourites were enjoyed: Roast beef, honey-garlic chicken wings, eggs benny (runny), Chapman's Butter Pecan ice cream and Asti Spumonti (Martini & Rossi). He was such a great role model in how to live life for your own enjoyment and but also to benefit others. He will be so missed.

The family would like to extend their sincere gratitude to the staff at Berwick, especially to Paramjit and Apple. Many thanks also to Dad's GP, Dr. Geoffrey Luckhurst (who we'll always call "Lucky" after he revived Dad and let him have another 6 months with us). We know Dad appreciated so much the friendship of Jack Campbell, his Duplicate bridge and golf partner of 35 years. He also greatly valued the friends he made at Berwick, including Don McLeod, Blair Taylor and the rest of his bridge and poker buddies. We were so happy that Dad found a congenial companion in Maureen Westlake for the last couple of years and know that she will feel his loss with us.

It is so hard to say good-bye to such a loving, witty, engaged, generous and thoughtful person, but those who would like to help us do so can join us in a Celebration of Life in the Sequoia Centre at McCall Gardens, 4665 Falaise Dr. Victoria BC on Friday, February 7, 2020 at 2:30 pm. An informal celebration will be held in Toronto on Tuesday, March 10, 2020 at 6:30 pm at The Caledonian Scottish Pub, 856 College Street.

In lieu of flowers, donations to the above mentioned charities would be welcomed.

Condolences may be offered to the family below.

McCall Gardens

[www.mccallgardens.com](http://www.mccallgardens.com)

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