Robert William Patrick “Bob” Duncan

Bob’s final days were unexpectedly short. They were spent surrounded by his children, grandchildren, and beloved Verna holding his hands and filling his room with love. At 78 years of age, he passed into the arms of Jesus on 20 July 2026 at Victoria General Hospital, Victoria BC.

Robert William Patrick “Bob” Duncan was born 12 December 1947 in Victoria BC to William Alexander ‘Bill’ and Agnes Rose Ellen (Campbell) Duncan. He leaves behind Verna, his wife of 53 years, his children Darren, Allison (Mike) Gratz, Laurie, Peter (Christina), grandchildren Theo, Zoe and Felicity Gratz and Thomas and Sophia Duncan, sisters Kathy Ringuette, Mary (Bob) Gustafson, many nieces, nephews and cousins. He was pre-deceased by his parents, older sisters Rosellen King and Carol O’Connor, brothers-in-law Ted King and Claude Ringuette, niece Stephanie King and nephew Robert Gustafson.

Bob grew up on Royal Canadian Air Force bases across Canada. At every place he lived, he did his best to spend time outside. After his dad’s posting at Patricia Bay (Victoria, BC), the family moved to Sea Island (Vancouver, BC) before relocating to North Bay (ON) where he spent formative years climbing trees to catch baby hawks, finding beaver dams, picking berries, fishing, gardening on borrowed land, and delighting in his freedom to explore the natural world. Every spare moment in winter was spent playing hockey outdoors. In Bagotville (PQ) he continued to play hockey, became proficient in swimming, and focused more on academics. After Bob graduated from high school, his dad requested a final posting to Comox (BC) so Bob could do his post-secondary education on Vancouver Island. After taking Grade 13 in Courtenay (BC), Bob studied Biology at the University of Victoria and graduated with a BSc in 1970.

Bob was focused, passionate, curious, and had an amazing memory. For most of his career of almost thirty-six years he worked as an entomologist for the federal government at the Pacific Forestry Centre in Victoria. He was well liked by his colleagues and became a well respected expert in his field. He could identify any insect in the British Columbia forest, and had a special interest in the Garry Oak Meadow ecosystem of southern Vancouver Island.

In the final years of his career, he travelled to many parts of the province with the aim to collect, rear and then photograph larval stages of every known conifer defoliating insect. His comprehensive book titled “Conifer Defoliators of British Columbia” was published in 2006 prior to his retirement in 2007.

Bob had an innovative spirit. He had a strong interest in energy efficiency and caring for the environment. He walked, cycled, car-pooled, and/or rode the bus to work every day of his career. Bob enjoyed fishing for many years as well as growing as much food as possible in his extensive gardens and orchards. Bob married Verna in 1973 and lived in Victoria for ten years. They bought land in North Saanich, commissioned and built the most energy efficient house in Western Canada, and moved their young family there in 1983. Four decades later, once costs for solar panels decreased, his dream of using the sun’s power was finally realised. He covered the specially designed roof with solar panels and purchased an electric vehicle.

Bob loved to travel and travelled with purpose. As a child he went on memorable road trips to visit relatives in Saskatoon and Victoria. As an adult he took Verna and later the children on camping trips across Canada and many US states. Stops included historical sites, forests, fields, beaches, and the homes of family and friends. From 2004 to 2015 he and Verna visited Kenya, Greece, New Zealand, Israel, Italy, Turkey, Spain and Portugal. For most of the later trips, Bob traveled

with plant import permits, allowing him to collect fruit tree cuttings to add to his home orchard.

Perhaps Bob’s most famous dream was to grow as great a diversity of temperate, citrus and Mediterranean fruit trees as the local climate could sustain. To achieve this, he evaluated cultivars, and developed techniques for over 500 different varieties of tree fruits in their home orchard. Not one to keep knowledge to himself, he and Verna ran Fruit Trees and More, a small but impactful nursery business and demonstration orchard for just over 31 years. Together they taught, inspired and equipped customers to expand their horizons, embrace the impossible, and grow a huge range of fruiting bushes and trees. He was especially happy to meet people who had moved here from around the world and sell them trees so they could grow fruits from their childhoods.

Bob was a founding and active member of the BC Fruit Testers Association. He was often invited to speak at garden clubs and conferences, and as well as being interviewed for local and national newspapers, magazines, television and radio. He particularly appreciated the enthusiasm and interest of students who came on tours as part of their studies at college or university. He is locally, nationally, and internationally known for his pioneering fruit growing techniques.

Above all, Bob was a family man. Verna was his soul mate, and true partner in life. For almost 20 years they went for morning coffee dates at a local coffee shop. Every Sunday, they attended church together – his faith was deep and personal, and many in the church community were close friends. He would drop all other activities and focus his attention entirely on any children, grandchildren, extended family, and friends that popped in for a visit. He walked with them through the orchard, the forest, to the beach; he listened to their stories and shared interesting things he had learned, then picked each one the most delicious fruit they had ever tasted.

Bob shared joy and knowledge with all who knew him – of all creation, of creatures big and small and of all the delights of the garden. He will be remembered fondly by family, friends, and the community.

A private burial was held at Royal Oak Burial Park, Victoria BC. A celebration of Bob's life will be held at 2:00 pm on Monday, 24 August 2026 at Mary Winspear Centre, Sidney BC. In lieu of flowers, please donate to the charity of your choice.

Condolences may be offered to the family below.

McCall Gardens
www.mccallgardens.com

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