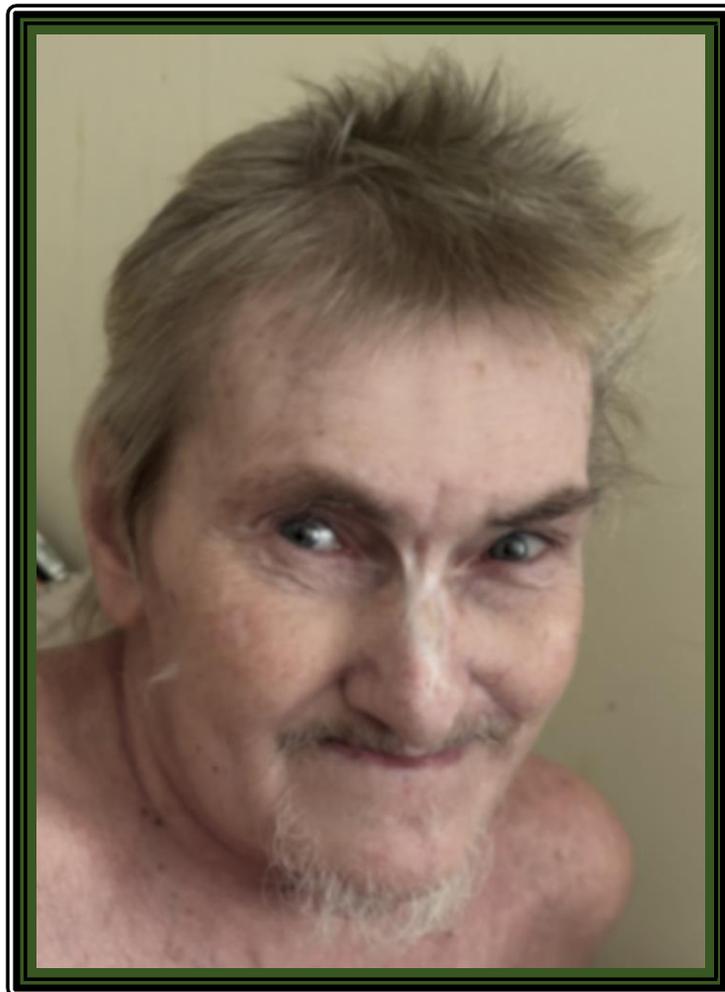


Robert
Bruce
King
Legacy Letter



Robert Bruce King

Legacy Letter

Done September 19, 2025

at his home in Saint Louis, Missouri
with Unity Hospice Volunteer Vicky
Meehan

Volunteer's Note

I met Robert through Unity Hospice when I began volunteering to help patients who wanted to do a legacy letter for their family. He was living in a nice little city apartment where he gets help at home through hospice and other programs. I found it interesting that Robert doesn't have or want a television. He prefers to read and can use his phone if he needs to look up something online. I found Robert to be very engaging and upbeat in his perspective on life. It was a pleasure to help him with this endeavor.

A Unique Arrival

Robert Bruce King was born at Mount Sinai Hospital in Toronto, Canada on *Mother's Day*, May 8, 1955. While his mother was busy delivering her fourth child, Robert's father was down the street at Toronto General Hospital having his appendix removed at the same time. Later on, a family friend provided transport for Robert and his mother to Toronto General in order for Dad (who was unable to leave his hospital room) to meet his newborn son. Robert's unique Mother's Day birth remained a gift to his parents for the rest of their lives.

Due to his family's Scottish roots, Robert was named for *Robert the Bruce*, who was the king of Scotland in the early 1300's. He led his country in a successful war against England to restore Scotland to an independent kingdom and is regarded as a national hero. Robert is quite proud to be *Robert the Bruce's* namesake and (in the interviewer's opinion) shares such qualities with him as patriotic pride, nobility and courage!

Growing Up

Robert's earliest memory as a child was when he was five years old. He tells his story:

I had borrowed a friend's scooter and was riding around the block. Now, the blocks are somewhat different in Toronto than they are here in Saint Louis. They're only maybe a quarter of a mile around all four sides; and I was on the opposite side of my street on the next street over. I fell and landed on a pipe, cutting my eyebrow just above the eye socket. I was bleeding a lot and ran all the way home with the scooter in my hand. When I got there, I dropped the scooter, but I still had the handle in my fist. Somehow, I threw that down, and we never could find it. At home, I was bleeding and told Mom what happened. She rushed me to the hospital where the doctor said if the gash had been just a tiny bit lower, it probably would have killed me. So, narrowly escaping death at the age of five is the first thing I can remember in my life.

My family was really poor. Dad and Mom had six children. Working as a furrier, my dad used to hand-sew the inside lining on fur coats. Fur coats were a luxury item which made for a pretty good profession. But with so many mouths to feed, we still had to go to thrift stores to buy our food. They didn't have any food banks at that time, but they did have a store where they sold bent cans and such. We'd go there and stock up. If it didn't have a label, my dad would buy it anyway, so sometimes we got potluck surprises!

Mom stayed home with us until I was six years old, and then she started working in a little plaza which would be called a strip mall here. She worked for a department store called Fairweathers. Later, she moved to a different department store named Horizon where she worked as a sales lady on the floor. Horizon wasn't a huge store—it was owned by the Hudson Bay Company. Mom would only work half a day when I was in kindergarten because she had to be home when I got out of school. All my siblings went to the same school. I had two older sisters and one older brother plus one younger brother and one younger sister.

I loved school—was a great student and got mostly A's and B's because I did everything I was supposed to do. Had a lot of friends, both in school and in the neighborhood. We lived downtown in the city of Toronto. There were a ton of kids.

We had a pretty close family home life. Always, we sat down together for family dinner. The ketchup and margarine had to be on the table. My dad loved ketchup! Myself, I could do without it, and I usually still do. I like it some odd times on French fries, but I'd rather have gravy. I like to taste the food, so I don't really care for sauce on anything anymore.

One story that gets told over and over is the one about the spaghetti. My niece just brought it up again recently. My older sister was about nine, and I was about seven. We were both born in May so we were both Taurus, meaning we were pretty stubborn. My sister figured I didn't have enough salt on my spaghetti, so she put some on it. Well, I turned around and put salt on hers too—but *way* more than she put on mine, so she didn't want to eat it. My mother intervened and told her that if she didn't eat it, she would have to wear it. My sister retorted she'd rather wear it, so Mom complied and wear it she did! Right over her head. And I didn't have to eat my spaghetti because she had put too much salt on it, so Mom gave me some new stuff. But I was the one who was the instigator. I would get away with anything I could! And at that time, I was the youngest, so I could get away with A LOT of things! We still laugh about the spaghetti story today. When my sister's daughter brought it up the other day, I told her, "Yes, that was our famous salt fight."

Another story I remember is that somebody was stealing money from the household money jar. My dad said none of us could go outside until they found out who was doing it. My older brother and sister came to me and told me to go tell Dad that I did it, even though I wasn't the one. So, I listened to my siblings and went and told Dad and Mom that it was me who did it. They looked at me and said, "How did you do it?" So, I showed them how I could climb up to the cupboard to get to the jar. Next, they said, "Well, how did you open the jar?" That's when I said, "I DIDN'T DO IT!" I couldn't lie to my parents. If you are honest with people, you don't ever have anything to worry about. As a result of my honesty, I was able to go outside and play while everyone else had to stay inside and deal with the missing money scenario.

I remember another time when I was really young. I had done something wrong—I can't even remember what it was, but my mom said, "When your dad gets home, he's going to punish you!" Well, that scared me, so I went into their bedroom where they had this big, tall wardrobe. It had a flat top, and I climbed up on that, curled into a ball, and went to sleep. I woke up about three or four hours later. My dad had been home for a while, and they had all been looking for me. When I came out, they said, "Where were you?" I told them I was hiding and had fallen asleep. I didn't get punished, and they never found out where I had been hiding. It was my safe spot where I could go whenever I wanted to be alone.

In grade six, the educators came out with having to learn French in school. I didn't want to learn French and told my teachers that. They gave me the option of learning to play chess instead, which is what I did, and I became a very good chess player. I used to play with my maternal grandfather. Lots of strategy involved in that game. I'm glad I learned chess, but now I wish I had taken French or Spanish growing up. I never learned any language but English. Interestingly enough, I can understand French some, even though I can't speak it. I guess because it was spoken around me so much. As an adult, I moved from Toronto to New Brunswick, which is another province on the east coast where they speak English and French.

Tragedy

In 1982, my younger sister was killed when she was 17 years old. She was crossing the street on a green light when she got struck by a car. In a bizarre twist of fate, my mother died nine months later on the same street about two miles away from the site of my sister's accident. She was doing the same thing—crossing the street on a green light. The newspaper ran a headline story because it was such a strange coincidence. Needless to say, this event devastated my family. However, in the long run, it ended up bringing us even closer together since we all held each other up and clung together to get through our grieving. What's that old saying? "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger!"

Because of the way my mother and sister died, to this day I don't cross the street at a light. I always jaywalk instead. There's a superstition that death comes in threes. I don't want to be the third to end my life.

Only two of my siblings are still living today—my older sister and my older brother. My younger brother died with a seizure at age 59. My oldest sister got lung cancer and passed in 2015. My father lived to be 94 and only just went to be with his Father in heaven three years ago.

More About My Family

In 1986, while still in Toronto, I got married. I was on cloud nine! I had a wife, two stepchildren that I loved, and they loved me right back, even to this day.

Unfortunately, in 1992, we found out that my wife had lung cancer. It was caused by asbestos that she was exposed to when she was young and living in Prince Edward Island. They had used asbestos in the roads there. Later they switched to tar when they learned about the dangers of asbestos, but she had grown up all around it. When we got her diagnosis, it was devastating. She died in 1993. Her kids were young adults by then. I took to drinking a lot to numb the pain.

Now, my stepdaughter has five kids. And her daughter has a son, so I'm a great grandfather! And my stepson has two kids. They all live in Ontario, Canada.

I'm excited to put this written history together to pass on to them. My uncle, my dad's brother, started doing a family ancestry tree for our family.

Then he died and my cousin took it over. It's an ongoing project because I've got cousins and cousins and cousins. With our family on the King side, every year around Christmas time we'd all get together. We had to hire a hall because there were so many of us. My dad had four siblings. My mom only had one. I feel fortunate that we were close with both sides of the family.

Moving to the U.S.

In 2002, I met a woman online. In 2004, she came to Canada and was going to take me back to the States so I could stay for a while. When we got to the border, I saw the "Welcome to Michigan" sign. However, about an hour and a half later, I was going the opposite direction, and it was "Welcome [back!] to Canada."

Seems that on her way into Canada, she had told them she was going to pick up her boyfriend. The authorities flagged her car; and on the return trip, they checked and found I didn't have the proper paperwork, so they sent me home.

I had to go through the process of getting a Visa, which turned out to be very expensive. I probably made a mistake coming here. I should have had her come to Canada instead. But she had two kids with her first husband and since there were kids and her whole family was here, I thought it was the right thing to do at the time. We were only married five years when she started cheating on me with her ex-husband. We got divorced in 2015.

My family wanted me to come back to Canada, but it didn't make sense because I would have to wait six months to get back on Canadian free health care and/or to get any pension money. I was already set up here on Medicare and Social Security.

Professional Life

I had originally wanted to be a chartered accountant. Because my family didn't have a lot of money, I had to go to work and pay for my own schooling. But after a while, I realized I wasn't learning what I wanted to be taught, so I dropped out and went to work at a grocery store called Loblaw's. Believe it or not, they are associated with Schnuck's grocery stores here in St. Louis. Schnuck's took over the Loblaw's stores at some point.

My best job was a Health and Safety Rep for a company called Biolab Canada, whose parent company is in Decatur, Georgia. I was trained in all aspects of health and safety--CPR, the whole nine yards. I worked there for eight years, from 1995 to 2003. I started with the company in manufacturing, then moved up the line to shipping, then became a supervisor and finally the registered safety inspector. This entailed my going around to the various facilities, making sure they were safe to work at. I'm actually still registered in Canada as a health and safety rep—it would be something like OSHA here in the States. While I was on the job, we had a couple of minor accidents, but nothing major ever when I was there. My inspections each month would identify anything that needed to be addressed by the management. I was really proud of that work.

After I moved here I got a similar job for a company in Fenton, but they didn't seem to care what was going on. I found they had a useless eye wash station that didn't have any water or chemical in it. If OSHA had come in and seen that, they could have closed them down. So, I told them I'd fix the problem—and then I got canned three weeks later.

It was a bum rap because I bought some beer for a guy who used to drink every day on his lunch hour. He asked me to buy the beer, and I did. But I hadn't done any drinking since I came to the U.S. many years earlier. Somehow, the supervisors found out from the convenience store employee that I had bought the beer. They fired me because they said they could smell it on me. I asked them to send me for a drug test but they wouldn't. The manager told me, "You were just in the wrong place at the wrong time." I said, "Well, when I take that to the Labor Board and tell them that I was in the wrong place at the wrong time, how is that going to look on you guys?" So, they ended up having to pay me a bit of money, but I didn't get my job back.

After that, I worked a time for a company named Labor Ready that sends you out to job sites that need workers. Then I ended up in Hazelwood, working at a cookie factory where they make Fig Newton cookies. One day when I was working on the line there, they were packaging products that they were sending to Canada. I looked at the product and had to tell them, "Hey – this isn't right. All products going into Canada have to be labeled with both French and English. This is only in English." So, I saved them a headache and a lot of money since the product would have ended up being rejected and shipped back. That was one where I was in the RIGHT place at the RIGHT time!

Passion For Sports

As a Canadian, of course I am a hockey fan! I played as a goalie when I was still in school up through the 10th grade when I wanted to focus more on my studies. But I still love hockey, baseball and football, and support all the Toronto teams. I don't care so much for basketball, but Toronto does have a pro-basketball team, which is the only Canadian professional team. Vancouver used to have one, but they were moved to Nashville. In baseball, the Montreal Expos also moved to the States, and they are now the Washington Nationals.

My two favorite teams are the Toronto Blue Jays in baseball and the Toronto Maple Leafs in hockey. I follow them closely and have a nickname for the hockey team when they're not doing great. I call them the Maple Laughs!

In the NFL, I like the Dallas Cowboys and the Los Angeles Rams. The Rams have a unique history in that they came from Los Angeles to Saint Louis for a while before they ended up back in L.A. Because they were a Saint Louis team at one point, I still root for them.

Life Reflections

One thing I've observed over the course of my life is that it's full of choices. There are good choices, and there are bad choices.

For example, a good choice for me, as far as my doctor would be concerned, would be to quit smoking. But for me, that's not even in my equation. It doesn't make sense because I find that a lot of people who smoke a lot, for a lot of years—when they quit, they die. When you quit something that you've been doing all this time, because the doctor tells you to—that it's better for you, I'm not always convinced it *is* better for you. Just like when people find out that they have cancer. The cure is worse than the disease.

My grandfather on my first wife's side died when he was 96 years old. 80% of his body was full of cancer. But he lived to be 96. He never had chemo. He never had radiation. My wife, his granddaughter, found out she was sick in September. She was 138 pounds at the time. They gave her chemo and radiation. She died four months later at only 95 pounds. With the radiation and chemo, your immune system is shot. So even if you were to kick it now, it might come back because you've got nothing in your system that's going to fight off the disease.

Take me—I've got hydronitis, which is a boil-type thing in my armpits and on my butt. There's really nothing they can do about it. They might be able to operate under my arms, but on my butt, they can't. It's something I've got to live with so I don't worry about it. I just don't dwell on it. And with the COPD—hey, I'm gonna die sometime from something.

We're all going to die of something. When you're born, the minute that you're born, you start to die. It's a part of living. Dying is the final stage of living in this life. People come to see me and say, "I'll see you next week." I reply to them, "Yeah, unless the man upstairs wants me before that!" When He wants you, nothing's going to stop it. And you don't necessarily know how that's going to happen. I mean, sometimes you have a clue when you do get sick, but a lot of times you don't. It just happens out of the blue.

With me, my doctor figured I needed more help. That's why she got me into hospice with my COPD. I do have oxygen here. I've used it twice since last year. I think I have a good attitude about life which carries me a long way. I've got low blood pressure, which is worse than high blood pressure because they can treat high blood pressure; but raising the blood pressure up—that's rough.

When I get up out of this bed, if I stand up, I can't walk right away. I have to get my bearings . . . and *then* start walking. Or else I hit the floor. And the floor is unforgiving. I know that because a whole bunch of people I've known have fallen and broken hips. So, I just have to be very, very careful. Take it one day at a time.

I try to have a really healthy frame of perspective about life and living. That's an accomplishment. Not everybody shares that outlook. When I wake up in the morning, or *anytime* I wake up after being asleep, all I can say is *thank you*. Because I'm awake. I'm still alive. The day that I don't wake up alive, some people are going to suffer, because I'm going to come back and haunt them! Ha ha!

But I'm thankful for every day I do wake up. And that *is* an accomplishment. I don't worry about things I have no control over. If the doctor puts me through blood work, tests, I don't worry about it. If something's gonna happen, it's gonna happen. I can't stop it. So why worry? I just roll with it. Just keep doing what I'm doing.

I don't have very many negative thoughts. I don't get angry with people. If I find myself in a bad mood, I don't take it out on other people. I keep it to myself. There's a lot of people, especially in this building, that if they're in a bad mood, you know about it. They'll take it out on you or somebody else. You're wasting time and energy on things you have no control over. Thinking positive gives me peace and harmony. I'm good.

I'd like to remind you to remember to just take one day at a time, one hour at a time, one minute at a time. You're not going to change the flow of a river by worrying about things, by overthinking it. Just go with the flow and everything should work out. Don't look for trouble. If trouble's coming your way, let it come, but deal with it when it actually arrives—don't obsess about it before it gets here. What a waste of energy.

I would like to remind all the people in my life how much I love them. I hope that they do the best they can for everybody—not just themselves. Try to make sure that everyone in the family is taken care of. And everything else will look after itself. If everybody's watching out and helping each other, then you don't have a care in the world.