



Robert (Bob) Wallace Perigo



SOLDIERS' MEMO

The beginning...



I was born on May 2, 1951, to Wallace (Wally) Redman Perigo and Shirley Perigo. My six siblings (Lois, Pat, Dougie, Karen, Murray, and Marion) and I were all born at Orillia Soldiers' Memorial Hospital. We grew up together in a house downtown on Elgin Street, and lived there until I was about eighteen years old.



Top row - Mom, Karen, Pat,
Bottom - Doug and Bobbie



Early life...



Downtown Orillia was very different back when I was a child. I remember there used to be a small grocery store at the end of our street on Front Street. Mom would send us with her shopping list to bring to the grocer, plus a note that said we could buy candy with the change. We also never locked our doors in those days. Sometimes we would be gone camping for the whole weekend and, when we got back, Dad would just take a look around to make sure everything was still as we left things. The neighbourhood has changed a lot since then.

As kids, we were often at Mom's mother's place, who we called 'Little Gram'. She lived up at the top of Peter Street and we'd go there for family reunions or simply to spend time with her. She had a huge garden that went from Peter Street to West Street that we loved to explore. I remember one time my brother, Dougie, told me to go smell one of the hot peppers growing in the garden. Merely smelling it burnt the inside of my nostrils and my eyes. That was the first time I ever heard my Gram yelling at us grandkids for fooling around. She was a sweet woman. She was also a good cook and a baker and would use many of the things she grew in the garden, like corn and strawberries, in the food that she made.

Our uncle, Harry, used to babysit frequently on weekends. I remember one time when I was out in the backyard on the swing set, and I fell and split my head open. I don't know if he was mad at me or just scared, but he went ballistic. He used to have false teeth so when he'd start yelling, they'd be flapping around on the inside of his mouth, and I couldn't understand him which I thought was hilarious at the time. He was amazing though - knowing all that he went through in life, and then all that he accomplished, I think he was a really incredible person.

We didn't grow up very religious, but Mom still dressed us up on Sundays and sent us each off with a quarter that was meant for the church. Instead, we would take our twenty-five cents and spend it at the "Church of the Golden Dragon." It was a Chinese restaurant, but they had the best fries and gravy, and cherry Coca-Cola. That's where nearly all of us Baptist church kids spent our time on Sunday mornings.



The restaurant was first opened by my school friend Ernie's parents, the Lem family. Ernie and I went to Orillia Central School together, which was just around the corner from the restaurant, so we'd often end up there having Chinese food for lunch. The Lems were such a great family and people of all ages went to their restaurant for many years.



When I was a kid – way before I started working at the dairy – I remember people used to have to put their milk money outside and the money would be collected by the milkman when the milk bottles were dropped off. There were a few occasions that I remember some of my friends and I would take the money – about forty cents – from people that we didn't like. For example, we stole the money from the old lady that screamed at us for picking a few plums off her tree. I feel bad now, and if I could give it all back, I would. We were being dumb kids. My friends would use the money to buy candy and I would buy wieners. It's funny; nowadays I'm a sugar nut, but back then I only wanted those little wieners.

I used to sing when I was a little boy. My wife Debra says that one of Mom's proudest moments was when I sang a solo of Little Drummer Boy at the Orillia Opera House at Christmas time. Deb said that, even after a couple decades of us being married, my Mom would still tell her the story of me singing that day and how nice of a voice I had. I used to be very musical; I taught myself to play the guitar and the Dobro. There were a few of us in my family who played instruments.

My dad played a big-bodied guitar and my brother, Murray, and I got into music sitting in our bedroom and practicing with Dad's guitars. Murray ended up becoming much more talented than me. He could play almost anything, and he could sing really well. I haven't played at all since Dad died.



Teenage years...

When I was a teenager, every Friday night we would go out to dance at The Pav, and then for more drinks at The Shang or for food at the Golden Dragon. That's what all the young people would do in those days. The Pav would always be packed, and they played great music. I danced a lot, and the girls couldn't get enough of me. At that time, I wasn't old enough to be buying alcohol yet but a friend of ours would get it for us. We'd meet up at the end of the street and share our mickey of whisky while we walked along the tracks until we got to the Pav.

I never did well in school; I always hated it. Reading was difficult for me because everything on the page would be all mixed up, so it was really hard for me to learn. I would be looking at a paragraph, get through that one, start on the second one and the next thing you know I'd be back on the first one again. When I got to high school, I struggled with the same problems, so I didn't end up finishing. That's when I decided to go to Toronto to work at the racetracks.

Pets...

We had dogs and cats growing up. The only dog that I can really remember is Scamp, a fat little Dachshund-type of dog. Back then all the milk was drawn by horse and wagon and Scamp used to go down to Hurl's Dairy on Elgin Street at the bottom of West Street to roll in the cow manure. He'd come home smelling awful and needing a bath.

We also had a big ugly Tomcat named Bruno; my brother Murray called him that. He used to sit up on the shed outside of our window and mew all night long. I used to hate that cat, but I remember after we moved to Silver Creek, Mom said, "You've got to go back and get Bruno." So, I went down to Elgin Street in my Camaro and tried to take him with me in the car, but he was going nuts bouncing off the windows, and I couldn't get into the car with him. He was going up to the windows looking at me like he was going to kill me, so it was either I keep him in and risk him attacking me on the ride home, or I open the door and let him go. In the end, he lived the rest of his life down there on Elgin Street, I suppose.



My parents...

My dad was born right in town in Orillia. He worked for thirty-seven years as a postman after his stepfather, the Postmaster of Orillia, got him the job when he returned home after the war. I didn't know much about Dad's time in the army because he didn't like to talk a lot about that time, but he told us a few things that I still remember. He told us that when he was in Europe, he and his fellow army men used to catch fish by throwing a grenade into the river which would kill the fish, so they'd be easy to collect when they floated to the top of the water. I suppose they were hungry, and they did what they needed in order to eat. He also told us a sad story about the guys being out in a desert somewhere and sleeping under a tank brigade. As the men were sleeping, the tanks slowly sank into the sand which ended up crushing a few of them to death.

Dad also told all of us that he was shot seventeen times. This is something that we all eventually learned was not quite the truth – all of us except for my sister Pat. It wasn't until we were at Dad's funeral and Pat heard the full story in Dad's eulogy that she came to understand the truth. That's when she learned that Dad had always been pulling our legs and, in fact, had been talking about getting shot from a needle. It turns out that's something he hated, and it would always make him faint. It was funny when Pat turned to me at the funeral and said, "That wasn't true?!"

Dad really didn't like guns after the war so he never got into hunting, but he absolutely loved fishing and would go out as often as he could. He taught me a lot about fishing over the years. He wasn't much of a drinker either, but he would go to the legion every day to have a beer with his army buddies before going home. He was there to socialize mostly. Although he didn't drink much, I do remember a hilarious time when I was about thirty and we were at a bluegrass festival together. Dad was drinking a few beers, clapping, singing, and laughing his butt off. When he stood up, all the booze must have gone straight to his head, and he fell and went rolling down the hill. I ended up having to drive him home that night.





Bob and his Mom, on his wedding day, 1996



Bob and his Dad, 1994

Mom was born on a farm in Orillia; she was a real farmer girl. I remember she told us that she hated butter because she used to spend so much time churning it when she was young. After she met my dad and had kids, she became a stay-at-home mom. She didn't have to shop or pay the bills; Dad took care of those things and gave her an allowance. I remember she was nervous after Dad passed away because she had to learn how to do a lot of things for herself. My sister Pat really helped her through this.

Mom was a wonderful mother and spent most of her time raising her children. We were pretty spoiled now that I think of it. We didn't really have any chores or anything growing up because Mom always took care of everything. I remember one time when my brother-in-law, Doug, was over and Mom had made hamburgers, each of them with different coloured toothpicks in them. Doug asked Mom, "What's that for?" And she said, "Well that one is for Bobby because he doesn't like onions, and this one is for Pat or Karen because it has to be well done, and this one's not supposed to be too well done." She had seven kids and had to do that for each of us with every meal when we were growing up. That's the way she was, though. She always made sure we had everything we needed.

My parents had a good relationship and did a lot of things together over the years. They used to go out dancing at Craighurst, to different bluegrass festivals, and they loved to camp. Every summer for nineteen years they camped at Big Chief Hill, a campground owned by the Reid's. Dad liked that he could bring his boat and keep it at the dock and go fishing often while he was there. Dad really looked after Mom and his children as well. He wasn't very affectionate with us; he never said 'I love you' or anything like that, but he liked to spend a lot of time with us. It seems like that was his way of showing his love towards us. Both my parents always made sure we were well taken care of, and we always felt loved.



Favourite childhood memories...

Some of my favourite childhood memories are of my birthday parties. Mom always baked birthday cakes that were filled with coins wrapped in wax paper and all my buddies loved that surprise. One year, I remember dressing up as a cowboy with a hat and toy gun and running around with my buddies. A lot of friends would come to my parties, and we always had so much fun together.

Every twenty-fourth of May, a bunch of my buddies – Doug Rowe, Steve Jarnold, Blaine Scott – and I would go camp out in Bluffs Creek. We would walk from Elgin Street with all of our things down to the railroad tracks, and then walk along the tracks down to the creek. We'd have our little pup tent and things that we needed, and we'd camp there all weekend. We were only ten years old, maybe. I remember one year it rained so hard that the creek rose and, when we woke up, we were all soaking wet. We had a lot of fun and the only trouble we really got into was when a train was coming down the track and we had to jump into the creek to get out of the way. It was kind of silly looking back at it now, but it was all pretty normal back then.

Bob's birthday party, 1959




I have a lot of wonderful memories of fishing with Dad on Lake Couchiching. I remember it would be around suppertime and Dad would come home from work as a postman. Not all the kids were able to go because we had such a large family, and most didn't even want to go, especially the girls. Usually it would be between me, Dougie, and Murray, but I would go with Dad the most. Mom would make one of us an early supper of porridge, toast, and hot chocolate, which we'd eat quickly and then walk down to the lake with Dad. We had an old Peterborough boat with the seat and steering wheel in the front and the motor in the back. I remember once when I was seven or eight years old, I was sitting in the boat holding on to my Musky rod trying to fish, but the purr of the motor and rocking of the boat was putting me to sleep. Suddenly, I felt a whack at the side of my head, and I heard Dad saying, "Don't lose that rod, mister."

I caught my biggest fish when I was thirteen. At the time, the Postmaster General from Toronto had come up for the summer and he was running the post office in Orillia where Dad worked.



One day while Dad and I were out fishing, the Postmaster General happened to be out at the same time. He and Dad were talking back and forth to each other from the boats and suddenly my line went stiff. I said, "Dad I think I caught a big log on the bottom," because there was no pulling on the line. But right after that the boat got pulled around sideways and the chase was on! Dad was yelling, "Don't lose that fish, don't lose that fish!" He was putting the pressure on me because the Postmaster General was watching. In the end, I caught a huge muskellunge which made it to the local paper, and that made Dad very proud.

An aerial photograph of a residential neighborhood with a semi-transparent white text box overlaid. The text box contains two paragraphs of text. At the bottom center of the text box, there is a black location pin icon with the number '13' inside it. A dashed white line extends from the bottom of the text box towards the bottom left corner of the image.

Christmas time was always a big celebration. I don't know how our family could afford it, but we always did it big. On Christmas Eve, we'd leave cookies and milk out for Santa and then go up to bed for a few hours. Then at 4:30 in the morning, all of us kids would be sitting at the top of the stairs waiting for the "okay" from our parents to go down. As soon as we were allowed, we'd go running down to the Christmas tree. We'd start by opening our stockings, which were stuffed with oranges, candies, walnuts, and little gifts. We'd work on opening those until Dad wasn't grumpy anymore from being woken up so early, and then we'd move on to the presents under the tree.

I remember one year I got a really cool firetruck where the fireman climbed the ladder. I loved that thing! After opening gifts we'd go tobogganing up at Fittons Road, but not before testing out our saucers on the stairs. If it weren't for the front door, we would have landed right in the snow banks out front! I think my most cherished family tradition was Christmas because we all got together at that time – my parents and siblings and their families. Once both my parents passed away, things never seemed the same.

My children...

I was thirty years old when my first daughter, Shauna, was born. I was so happy when she arrived. Shauna was a beautiful little baby with dark hair; we used to say she looked like a little Eskimo. She was a clever little girl, and she learned to walk and toilet train really early.



Bob and Shauna, 1986



Shauna and Katie

My second daughter, Katie, was born about a year and a half later. Unfortunately, when she was about six months old, we found out that there was a problem with her development and that she would need special care for the rest of her life.

Although it wasn't what we had originally planned, my ex-wife's parents took Katie in and provided full-time care for her that we didn't feel we were able to provide at the time. As a result, I didn't have the relationship with Katie that I would have liked. Sadly, she passed away when she was only twenty-eight.

Some of my favourite memories with Shauna are of us snowmobiling and fishing together. Shauna loved to fish, which I'm sure she got from me. We used to go often, and she became really good at it. I think she was about 5 years old when I took her ice fishing for the first time. My dad and I built a fish hut, and we tied a rope permanently to one of the beams behind the seat. The rope had a big loop that would go over Shauna and under her arms so that no matter what, if she leaned forward, she couldn't fall into the fishing hole. I remember one time that I took her, we got out to the fish hut and all the snow was gone from around the base of the hut. That meant that wind would blow snow into the hut through the gaps at the base and eventually freeze the hole over.

I told Shauna that I was going to quickly shovel snow around the edges, but first I needed to lift the base to put blocks under it so that it wouldn't be sitting directly on the ice. We had all our fishing lines set up and the minnows tied, and suddenly Shauna said, "We got a bite, dad." I said, "No, that's just me lifting the hut; it's making the lines bounce," and she went, "No seriously, I got a bite!" Not believing her I said, "Yeah, okay," and I finished up what I was doing and went around the corner. Then the door opened up and a white fish plopped right in front of me. Shauna said, "I told you we got a fish!"

I used to plow snow in the winter months when things were slow, and I used to take Shauna with me in the back seat and she'd usually sleep the whole time. I remember one time we were out early in the morning, and she said, "I'm tired," so I told her to go ahead and lay down in the back seat and go to sleep. Eventually I got a call on the radio from Al Hewitt, who I did some work for sometimes, and he told me, "We're all heading over to Hills for some breakfast, come join us." So, I made my way over there, and just as we were reaching Memorial Avenue, I tapped on the brake a bit hard and Shauna rolled off the seat onto the floor, and I said, "Breakfast time!"



Amanda, Shauna, and Joey

When I married Debra I gained a third wonderful daughter, named Amanda, and a couple of years later, I gained a son-in-law named Steve. Steve and I became fast friends as we shared many common interests - they both have always made me feel included. Amanda, you may not look like me, but you are an amazing daughter.

Working at the racetracks...

I used to work during my summer holidays at Hurl's Dairy. I remember one year when I was fifteen years old, I was helping the guys deliver milk and one of them started telling me that he thought I would be a great fit for working at the Woodbine racetrack in Toronto. He asked me if I would be interested in going down there and I told him that I would give it a try. I had to ask my parents for permission, of course, and they weren't particularly excited about it, but they let me go since I had already decided I wasn't going back to school.

I was supposed to be an apprentice jockey, but all I did was shovel poop, feed horses and exercise them. The work was really tough. I would work seven days a week, from early in the morning until late at night. After I would give the last water to the horses, I wouldn't be getting to bed until around midnight. On the weekends, if there weren't any races taking place, then I'd be working at the farm cleaning out all the stalls.

Working at the racetrack, I would make twenty-six dollars a week and it would cost twenty-eight dollars a week just to be able to eat the most basic, bare bone meals at the Woodbine cafeteria. You couldn't really afford to eat or do anything else with the money you earned, but my parents used to come down every two or three weeks with a packed lunch and leave me with some food and extra money to help me out. Although it was tough, it was an adventure, and I liked that it was something different. I got a couple friends into it and that made it even more fun, just to have people I could travel and hang out with. We would travel around from Woodbine to Greenwood, to Blue Bonnets in Montreal or even down to Florida a few times in the winter. I also got to go to the Queen's Plate every year, which was really cool. I did that for a couple years and experienced it all: being thrown off the horse, kicked, bit, stomped on. But after two and a half years I said that's enough of that, and I went home and got into marine mechanics and small motors.

When I worked at the racetrack, I used to work for a guy called Warren Beasley, from King City. He owned a lot of horses. In 1969, Avelino Gomez won the Queen's Plate riding on our horse, 'Jumping Joseph.' After the race, Gomez gave me his boots, whip, and helmet but about a month after he gave it to me, someone broke into my room and stole everything. Although I lost my guitar, record player, and my records – including Abbey Road by The Beatles and my Joe Cocker record – it's the things that were given to me by Avelino Gomez that I still think about. They would probably be worth a lot of money if I still had them today. He was a great jockey; definitely one of the best.

I talked to Avelino Gomez's sister once and she told me how much of a shame it was that my things got stolen. Actually, it's a pretty incredible story the way we connected. One day, she came into my shop looking to repair something. We didn't know each other from anywhere before then. We started talking and I guess because of her name I asked if she knew of Avelino Gomez and she said, "Yeah, that's my brother!" We talked quite a bit after that. She must have had a cottage up north and was passing through Orillia and happened to stop in my shop needing a repair. What are the chances?

I used to know a lot about horses, but I've forgotten most of it now.

When Debra and I first met I was still riding horses every so often, and when we went to Cuba, we rode horses together.

Debra used to have her own horse, so it's something we both loved at some point in our life.



Working as a mechanic...

When I came back from working down at Woodbine, I started working for Bob Harrington at Leatherdale Marine where my brother-in-law, Doug, worked for many years. He was instrumental in steering me toward my career as a mechanic. We've always been close and did a lot of things together, like hunting and fishing, or working on their house.

My Aunt Marion always supported me with my career as well. She was great; she'd help me with my resumes and helped me apply to a lot of my jobs. I worked at a lot of the different marinas because I wanted to learn all of the motors that were out there. There was surely a method to my madness. Starting my own business was quite a thing for me. I started out just working out of my own garage. I had all the knowledge, but I didn't have a business license at first. Eventually my business, Perigo Marine and Small Motors, became legitimate around 2001. That's when I picked up the major players in the business like MTD, Briggs and Stratton, Kohler, Tecumseth; and they were hard to get. Once we got established, more business came to us and eventually many people told us that we were the best in town.



**Bird's eye view
of the shop**

A photograph of a 'Best of Orlinda' award sign. The sign is yellow with a black border. At the top, it says 'Best of Orlinda' in a cursive font. Below that, it reads 'Perigo's Small Motor Repair' in a bold, serif font. Underneath, it says 'BEST SMALL ENGINE REPAIR'. The main body of the sign contains a paragraph of text starting with 'Fourteen years ago, Perigo's Small Motor Repair looked a little different than it does today: moving from a 2 car garage with a leaky roof to their new location on a property then known as Ron Ward's Canoe Showroom, Bob and Debra Perigo launched what would become their family gem in Perigo's Small Motor Repair. Having been in the small engine repair business for over 30 years today, the team at Perigo's looks back to their roots with loving nostalgia and the desire to stick to the principles which grounded them in the first place: "family, community, and the unity of both". A family-owned and operated business, it's not unusual to find a son-in-law, daughters, or grandson Joseph (loyal apprentice for 8 years) of Bob and Debra lending a helping hand when things get busy. The Perigo family knows the small engine business inside and out and can help with any small engine repair by providing service, warranty and parts for many different manufacturers of outdoor power equipment sold at big box stores (such as MTD, Yardworks, and Troy Built) to residential owners of small gas-powered equipment. To find out more about how Perigo's Small Motor Repair can help provide service or parts for your small engine, or to learn about their annual events such as the Yearly Fall Snow Thrower Special, visit their store at 3827 Soules Road or call them at (705) 327-0743.'

Best of Orlinda
Best of Orlinda
Perigo's Small Motor Repair
BEST SMALL ENGINE REPAIR

Fourteen years ago, Perigo's Small Motor Repair looked a little different than it does today: moving from a 2 car garage with a leaky roof to their new location on a property then known as Ron Ward's Canoe Showroom, Bob and Debra Perigo launched what would become their family gem in Perigo's Small Motor Repair. Having been in the small engine repair business for over 30 years today, the team at Perigo's looks back to their roots with loving nostalgia and the desire to stick to the principles which grounded them in the first place: "family, community, and the unity of both". A family-owned and operated business, it's not unusual to find a son-in-law, daughters, or grandson Joseph (loyal apprentice for 8 years) of Bob and Debra lending a helping hand when things get busy. The Perigo family knows the small engine business inside and out and can help with any small engine repair by providing service, warranty and parts for many different manufacturers of outdoor power equipment sold at big box stores (such as MTD, Yardworks, and Troy Built) to residential owners of small gas-powered equipment. To find out more about how Perigo's Small Motor Repair can help provide service or parts for your small engine, or to learn about their annual events such as the Yearly Fall Snow Thrower Special, visit their store at 3827 Soules Road or call them at (705) 327-0743.

I definitely feel differently about myself from when I was a young man. I'm more confident, more sure of myself, and more assertive than I ever was. I believe in myself more now, I guess; especially when it comes to mechanics. I remember one day in the shop I was working on something tricky, and I suddenly realized that I'm a mechanic!

I had figured it out and I was proud of myself. I'm pretty much self-taught, but I learned so much over the years that eventually I had some people who had been in the field longer than me, coming to pick my brain and asking for advice. I had to do



some school, but it was really hard for me because I'm fairly certain that I have a learning disability. When I read, everything is all jumbled up on the page and I have to reread the same line over and over again. Over the years I've needed to take courses in order to keep up to date with the companies that we were selling and repairing for. It was tough to study but I managed to pass all the exams that I needed. I've come a long way.

COVID Christmas, 2021

My life with Debra...

Debra and I met at a Christmas party that was at an after-hours that a friend of mine owned back in 1994. Debra happened to be there with a girlfriend of hers, but her friend ended up meeting someone else and taking off. I was sitting at the bar alone and Debra came over and started talking to me. We got into some great conversation, and it felt like we hit it off right away. I don't quite remember, but Debra says that on our first date, I took her out to East Side Mario's with my daughter Shauna, who was twelve or thirteen at the time. Both of us had teenage daughters from our previous marriages.

When we started dating, Debra was still a little leery after having her ego a bit bruised by a guy that she previously dated. It wasn't long before she realized that I was different. I remember going over to her place after just a few dates. Her dad and I were talking and having a beer together. Apparently, after I left, Debra's dad said to her, "What do you think of this Bob guy? What are your intentions, because I'm telling you right now, he's got it bad for you, so if you're not interested, you'd better walk away." Thankfully she didn't walk away and after living together for a year, we decided to get married.



**Christmas,
1994**

We were married on August 17, 1996, at the United Church on Oxford Street. It was a beautiful wedding with all of our friends and family from both sides. After the reception, we hopped into our boat on the lake that our friends decorated with balloons and a 'Just Married' sign, and we headed out for our honeymoon. We went to Big Chief for the night and then the Locks for two days in our boat.



Wedding day, 1996

Debra and I have had lots of boats together. I grew up with boats because Dad always had a boat, but he always had small boats. When Debra and I got together we got the big boats. We had the 25 ft Sea Star, which was the one we had our honeymoon on. Later, we were too busy to be spending a lot of time on the boat so we got the inboard-outboard 17 ft Star Craft, which was a ski and fishing boat, and it was on a trailer so we could haul it around easier.

I remember when we did a big pig roast in our backyard so that both of our families could meet. We had all of our friends and neighbours there as well. My friend, Al Ward, and I were up all night basting the pig with beer the night before the party. On the day of the party, both of our dads sat in the back together pointing and judging everyone that walked by. They were hilarious; you could just imagine those two old men sitting in the back snickering with each other. That was the first time they met.

Our moms had already met before, and they really got along. They were very close in age and the sweetest women, but fairly different from each other. Deb's mom was French-Canadian and really particular about things being done a certain way. My mom was more laid-back, quiet and would listen and laugh.

Debra and I did a lot of traveling together over the years, often with close friends and family. Some of my favourite memories are of snorkeling and fishing for Mahi Mahi in Hawaii, with our friends Dan and Maria, or driving out to the East Coast of Canada and seeing the sunflower fields in Prince Edward Island with my sister-in-law Karen and her husband Vince. One year, we took a trip out to the Azores since I had been wanting to go there for a long time because my last name is Portuguese. I remember we went to a place where our meal was cooked in the ground from the volcanic heat coming from the earth. That was really special. I'm so glad I got to share many of these trips with my loved ones.



Newfoundland Viking Trail

One year we went to see the Grand Canyon with Debra's sister, Colleen, and her husband, Bert. While we were out there, we stayed at a motel casino. We were having a good time at the casino, but Bert kept telling us that we had to get on Route 66 and drive to California. He insisted that we had to go. We figured okay sure, California isn't too far, we'll rent a car and drive over to Hollywood or Palm Springs, and it'll be a fun road trip. So, we head out and Bert is driving along Route 66. Not even an hour passes before we get to this store that sells t-shirts and other souvenirs, and then we see this big sign that reads, "Welcome to California." We pass the sign, cross the border into California and then Bert makes a U-turn and starts driving back the other way. We asked him, "Where are you going, Bert?" and he told us, "I went to California, and now I'm heading back to the casino!" That was hilarious! On that trip, we also saw the Hoover Dam and the Grand Canyon. You can't explain the beauty of the Grand Canyon. You get out of the car and look around you and that's all she wrote. I think we all cried when we saw it.



Maui



There is one trip that I wish I didn't have to take, and that is this palliative journey. My brother-in-law, Vince, and I were on this path together for quite a while. Unfortunately, his journey ended too quickly. He visited me for as long as he was able, as I can't get out anymore. We enjoyed some wonderful conversations over the phone before he passed. The conversation always ended the same: I would say, "I love you brother," and he would reply with a grunt or a "Yeah." One of the last conversations we had, the call ended the same but for one difference - Vince replied, "I love you too."



"Sons with Arthritis - Ibuprofen Chapter"
Bert, Bob, and Vince

Debra and I always had Christmas with our grandson, Joey, and his parents but one year we decided we would try spending Christmas in Mexico to see what it was like down there. That was when we ended up meeting Dan and Andre. They were staying at the same hotel as us and we saw them sitting alone at the bar. Something about them was Canadian, you could just tell. We went up to them and said hello and started chatting with them and realized we all got along so well. At one point, one of them says, "You do realize we're a gay couple, right?" And Debra says, "That's okay with me if it's okay with you." They were a truly wonderful couple and became really good friends of ours. Dan and I used to go fishing all the time, and Deb and Andre would cook dinner and drink wine. Unfortunately, they both died tragically which was very sad. It takes a lifetime to make friends like that, where you all mesh so naturally together, so it was such a loss. We miss them so much.

In 2012, when we decided that we were going to retire, we sold the shop and the house and purchased a double-wide trailer in a seasonal trailer park in Angus, Ontario. We lived there for six months, from May until October. It was beautiful; we redid the whole thing, floors, kitchen, put in AC and I built a two-story shed in the back. Then in October, we purchased a mobile home in Florida, and we lived in Florida for the winter months. I redid both of those trailers from front to back. Unfortunately, we were only able to go South and do that for a few years, because my brother-in-law passed away, and then I needed open heart surgery right after, so our retirement didn't go as planned.

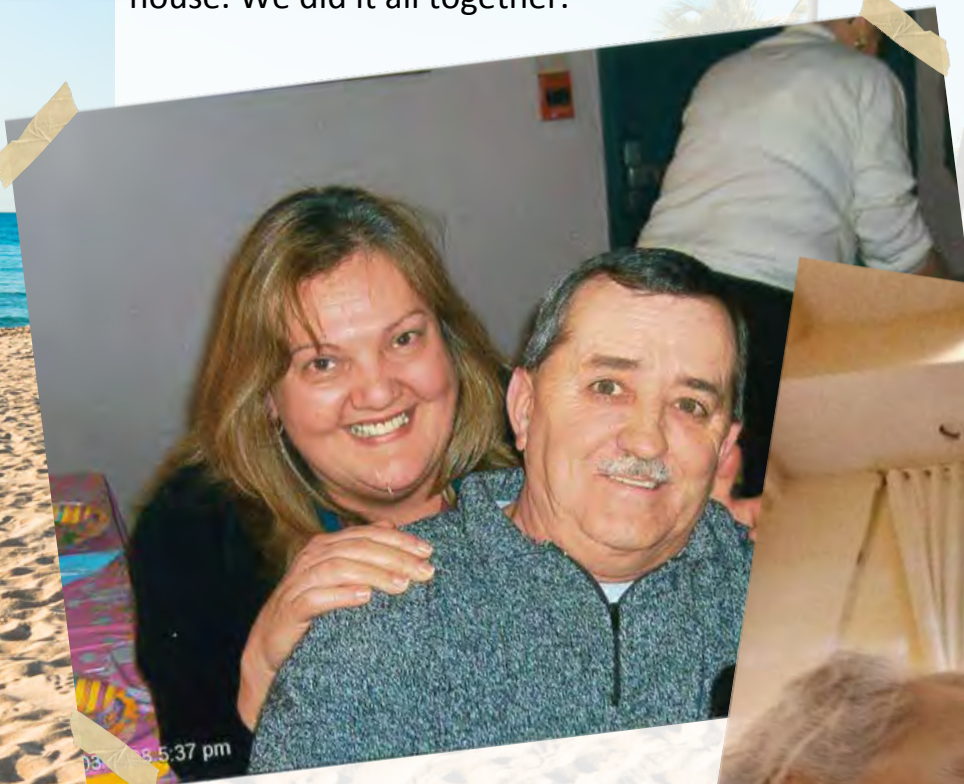
When we were in Florida, we made some great memories and great friends. I remember Old Bill from Kentucky and his family who lived right across from us. We met Bill the very first day we moved in because he was parked in our driveway. He was almost fifteen years older than me, and we got along really well for the most part. He was a moonshiner, and so was his dad and his grandfather. We did a lot of fishing together. I also loved going to the Wagon Wheel, which was a huge flea market where we'd go to buy fresh vegetables and fresh seafood. We definitely lived well down there.



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Florida

I have loved Debra since we first met. She has always done so much for me and has looked after me well. Plus, she puts me in my place. Debra is funny and we've always gotten along really well. We worked together for a long time – about twenty-five years. We were at Dura for about five years until I couldn't handle both that and the shop at the same time. I left first and then a year later the shop became so busy that I needed Debra's help and so we ran the shop together. We worked together most of our married life and we never really fought. We even worked together to build our house. We did it all together.



My wishes...

If I could have three wishes they would be to have my lungs back to normal, at least for a little while, anyway; to go back to work, I really miss the work and the people. In my trade, once you stop working, your body just stiffens up. And I'd love to go back to Florida; I loved fishing there. I loved getting up and meeting all the guys at five in the morning. First, we would head to the bait shop and get all the shrimp and things we needed to go out fishing for the day because we wouldn't be back until three or four in the afternoon. Debra would come along sometimes with her chair and read her book underneath the pier so she could get some shade. The heat out there was intense so I couldn't stay down there year-round. Plus, I love Ontario for its summers, so I'd want to come back north.

One thing I've always wanted but never got was a hobby farm - just a small farm out in the country with a couple acres of land, and where you could have chickens, cows, pigs and, of course, your own horse. I think it's really nice to have your own land where you can walk through your own bush, and if you have a wood stove, you can cut your own wood. I have wanted one forever. During my first marriage, my brother-in-law and sister-in-law had one in Lafontaine, so we used to go up there all the time to help out.

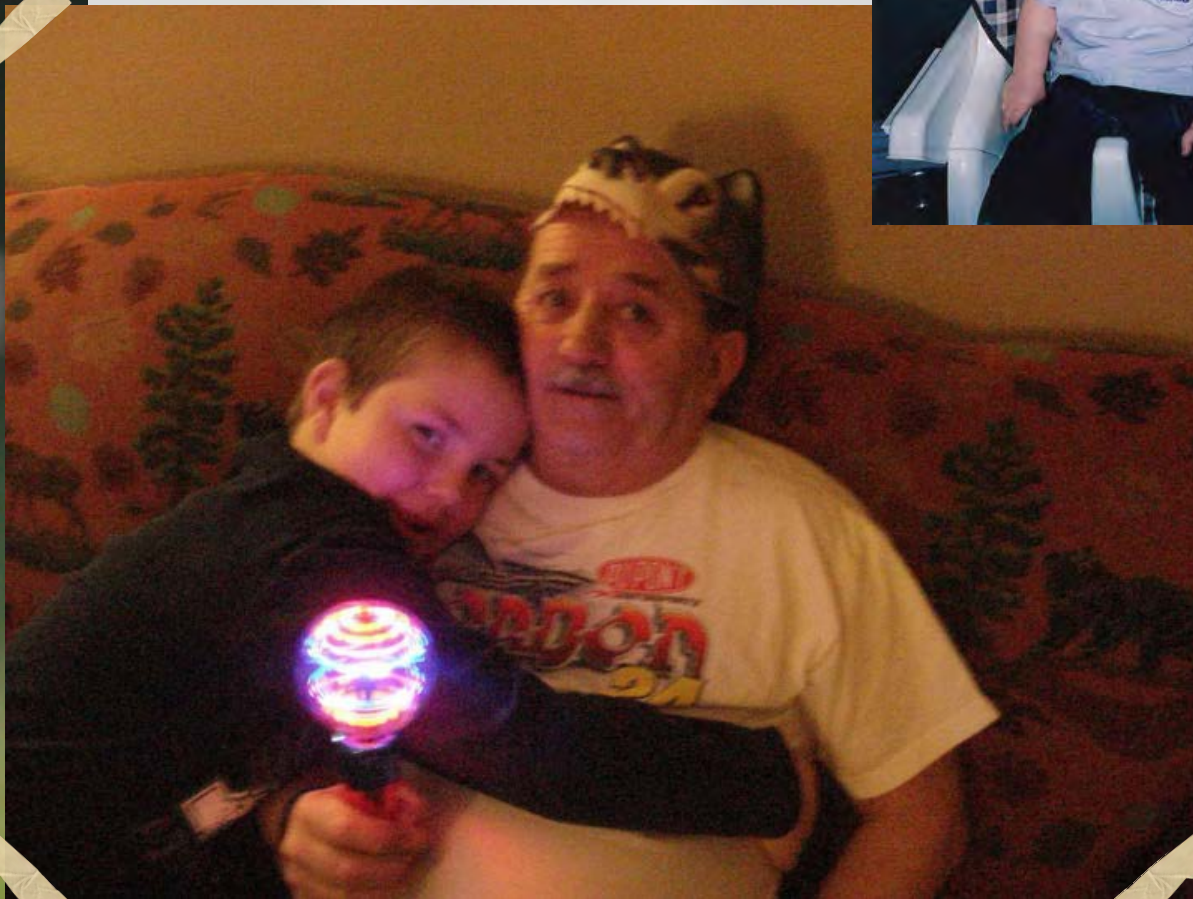
If I could go back to any age, I'd go back to my twenties. That was when, despite both my parents' advice, I got a motorcycle. My friend, Phil Holt, and I did a lot of traveling around Ontario on our bikes and had a lot of fun together. I felt so free and didn't have any real commitments or responsibilities back then. That was also before I got married the first time. I've always said that the biggest mistake I ever made was that I should've married my second wife first.

I'd like for my children and grandson to remember everything about me. I know they've got stories that they cherish, and I suppose that's good enough for me. But I hope they remember that I always had time for them and always loved them.

One thing that will always have a special place in my heart is the poem that my grandson Joey wrote for me when he was a young boy:

My Best Friend by Joey Winter

We like to have time in the shop.
We fix small motors and talk and talk.
I like to play catch and to pass.
He even taught me to cut the grass.
When I have sleepovers, we watch TV.
We even watch hockey just for me.
For all of you who may not know,
my best friend is my Papa Perigo.



Joey and "Papa" Bob

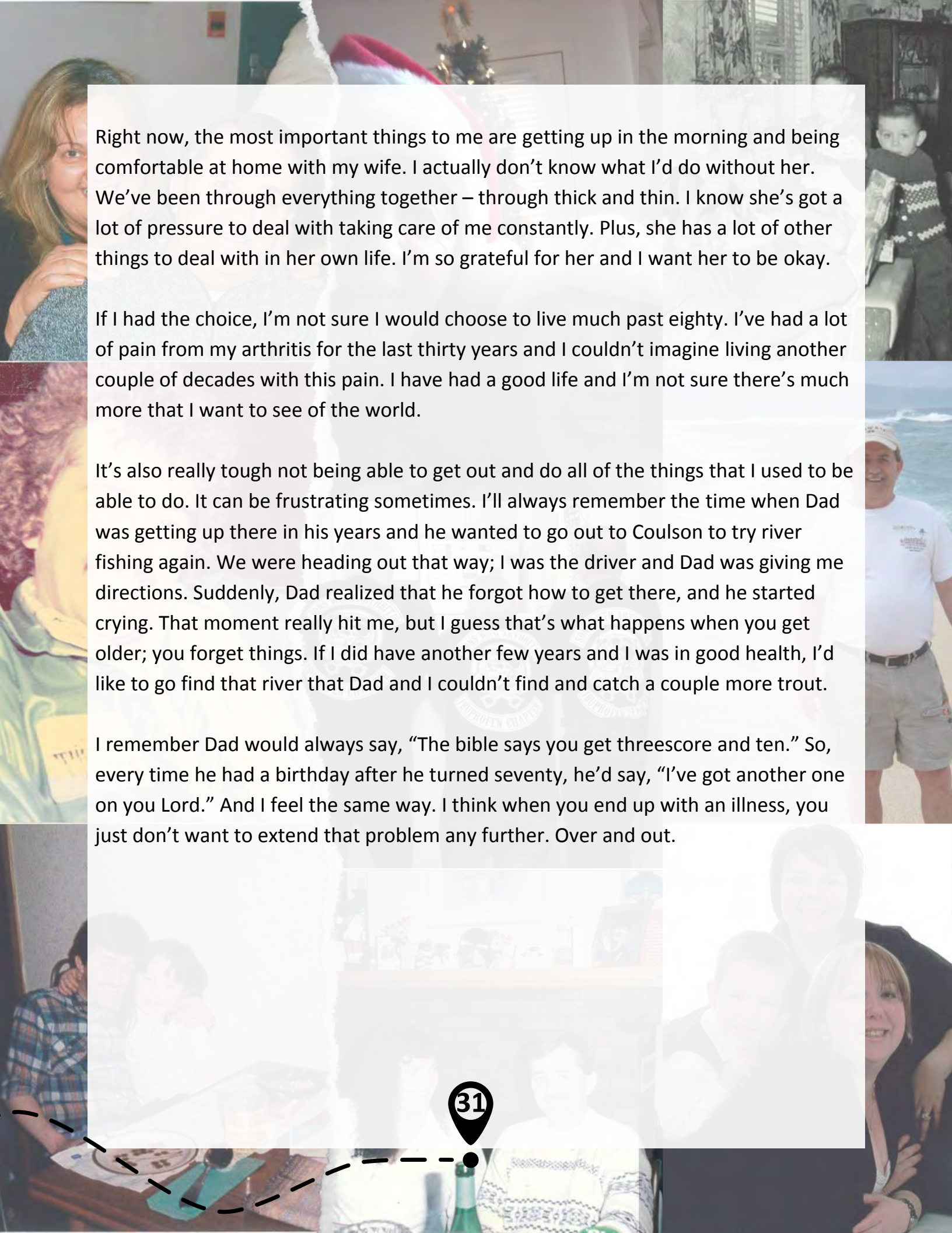


Present day...

In 2019, I was diagnosed with Pulmonary Fibrosis, which has a life expectancy of three to five years. Finding out that my illness is terminal was one of the most difficult things I've ever had to experience. I don't cope with things the way that I did in the past, which was by having a few more beers or another rum and coke. The way I cope with difficulties now is by taking the time I need to process them. Still, the diagnosis was really hard to take in at first, and I tried to push it away and ignore it. But now that some time has passed, it's something that I've accepted, and I feel okay about it.

I have had a lot of family and old friends reaching out lately. Many of them didn't even know that I was sick but since finding out they've been coming to visit and spend time with me. Lately I feel like I've been reconnecting with a lot of people, and I guess I kind of want to reconnect so that I can say goodbye.

I am glad that Debra doesn't have to worry too much about when I pass away because we have enough saved for when that time comes, and we got a lot of things taken care of already. I know I don't have any bills and debts that I'm leaving with her; thankfully we don't have that to worry about. I don't think a lot of people get the chance to be in that position to start with. For many, death comes suddenly, and the family is left trying to figure out what to do with everything. Debra and I have had a lot of time to think about it and to make arrangements for the both of us.

A collage of photos serves as a background for the text. On the left, a woman with blonde hair is smiling. On the right, a young boy in a patterned sweater is visible. Below that, a man in a white t-shirt and shorts stands on a beach. At the bottom, a group of people is gathered around a table with a pizza.

Right now, the most important things to me are getting up in the morning and being comfortable at home with my wife. I actually don't know what I'd do without her. We've been through everything together – through thick and thin. I know she's got a lot of pressure to deal with taking care of me constantly. Plus, she has a lot of other things to deal with in her own life. I'm so grateful for her and I want her to be okay.

If I had the choice, I'm not sure I would choose to live much past eighty. I've had a lot of pain from my arthritis for the last thirty years and I couldn't imagine living another couple of decades with this pain. I have had a good life and I'm not sure there's much more that I want to see of the world.

It's also really tough not being able to get out and do all of the things that I used to be able to do. It can be frustrating sometimes. I'll always remember the time when Dad was getting up there in his years and he wanted to go out to Coulson to try river fishing again. We were heading out that way; I was the driver and Dad was giving me directions. Suddenly, Dad realized that he forgot how to get there, and he started crying. That moment really hit me, but I guess that's what happens when you get older; you forget things. If I did have another few years and I was in good health, I'd like to go find that river that Dad and I couldn't find and catch a couple more trout.

I remember Dad would always say, "The bible says you get threescore and ten." So, every time he had a birthday after he turned seventy, he'd say, "I've got another one on you Lord." And I feel the same way. I think when you end up with an illness, you just don't want to extend that problem any further. Over and out.

"It was an honour and a privilege to take part in writing Bob's life story. What an adventure it has been! His relationship with Debra has shown me that no matter what life throws at you, you can always make it through with the right person by your side."

~ Karuna, Volunteer at Hospice Orillia



Bobs story was captured utilizing the Footprints Program at Hospice Orillia.
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