

## **Bob MacLaughlin (1947-2007)**

Picture Bob, Grade 5 in Clyde public school, on a makeshift stage...he's singing Gene Vincent's Bee-Bop-a-Lula. And a group of kids are cheering. Bob said about that experience, "It just happened." "I loved my audience." "I felt accepted."

Bob knew the feeling of acceptance and returned it in a myriad of ways.

We are all here, because sometime, somewhere, somehow we felt thoroughly accepted by Bob. We are here with this large hole in our hearts, in our lives, trying to come to terms with his death. We are here to grieve and mourn and remember and celebrate Bob's life.

The last couple of months of Bob's life were something of an anomaly. Because as we know Bob was anything but sedentary. He could run a music shop, sell you a Gibson and a few Mel Bay books, give guitar lessons, seed a crop, and play at a dance, not in a week, but in the same day. Even a few short weeks ago, he got up out of his hospital bed, several times, to play at a Patsy Cline Tribute. Where, by the way, at one engagement, he was thrilled to be awarded the Paul Harris award for contributions to the community.

Bob's life was a buzzing, blooming, hum of activity...and he would tell you, not all of it, *focused*. And this certain vitality was both Bob's gift and his burden.

He lit up a room with his energy and motion. Even when he sat still he was somehow moving. And he couldn't stop entertaining. Nobody could deliver an off-colour joke like Bob. And nobody I know had as many at his disposal.

But his particular energy was also, at times, not easy on relationships. Bob knew this about himself and tried to put a name to it, and over the past number of years, did just that. And it helped him.

He worked on his life. And because of this he became unafraid to talk about the bad parts, the pain, the incompleteness of his relationships.

On one visit I asked him if it was hard to talk about his funeral. He said no, that in fact he felt he was somehow fortunate to have the chance. I asked him if he was afraid of dying. He said no, that he had just had a very heavy heart over leaving those close to him, especially his kids and grandchildren.

Here he spoke of his deepening faith in Jesus and about finding some peace of mind in this.

He told me that he didn't need to go to church to worship, but at the same time, at one time in his life, while going to the United Church, he thought that it didn't hurt that he had a perfect attendance record. Bob was good at covering his bases.

But over these last few months, he expressed amazement by all the love that kept coming through the door. He wanted me to tell everyone, in no uncertain terms, how this humbled and inspired and brought him such joy, even as he lay in his bed. This love brought him peace.

And, he talked about the life lessons he learned and wondered why they only came at the end of life. We talked about that as being as good an argument as any, for something interesting ahead.

But of course he wanted me to talk about his love of music, this force that meant much. And even though there was a cost, an inherent loneliness, music, was the only thing he could think of doing in his life.

What Bob was, at bottom, was a musician. He understood music the way perhaps, a farmer understands the soil, or the way a carpenter understands wood. But what most of us understand and so accept about farmers and carpenters, it's harder to understand about musicians and performers.

And this was something of a burden that Bob struggled with, that somehow music was only supposed to be a sideline.

But for Bob it was a calling.

Bob was born Sept 17, 1947 in Edmonton, and adopted by Donald and Kathleen McLaughlin. After his first few years on a mixed farm in Clyde, the family moved to Edmonton, and at six years of age, Bob began violin lessons.

At 14 he began playing in a band at school. He said he was fortunate having a teacher like Vern Austin who put students together to play. As a result, this began his love of playing with other musicians.

His first band was the Comencheroots. It was a five piece band with Bob playing lead guitar. They played one night stands in community halls...they did instrumentals, lots of Ventures.

His next band was Lincoln and the Congressmen. (which perhaps shows Bob's political leanings) This group was made up of kids from the McQueen community where he lived.

Then came the Marksmen...a show band formed with his cousin John McLaughlin. This one they took on the road. As a show band they did things like dress up as Robin Hood and the Merry Men. Picture this: Bob dressed in

green leggings and short jacket, playing Tequila, while riding on top of the shoulders of a sturdy bass player, who was, of course, dressed as Friar Tuck.

The Marksmen were together for three years. They recorded at CKUA in 1964, and toured parts of western Canada with Jerry Palmer, who was at the time famous for his Buddy Holly cover of "That'll be the Day."

Some place in here Bob finished high school, settled in a bit, and worked at IGA.

In 1967 he married Lillian, a marriage that lasted 14 months.

He couldn't stop playing and helped start a band called "Danny and the Journeymen." It was a country band with, as Bob recalls, "a great steel player" called Smitty.

Bob remembers always playing with older players, and entertainers. Along the he way played with Harry Rusk, and in 1967 he played with Bobby Curtola at the Common Wealth Games.

In 1972, Linda, who he had met at an engagement, came into his life, and they returned to the family farm. Bob's dad had died in 1964 but his mom hung on to the farm. Bob with much help from Linda farmed for 24 years until 1996. Bob was proud of the fact that he was a primary producer and that he doubled his dad's grain production.

But, there was always music. In 1972 he formed a country rock band called "Poppy Road." And around this time he also began teaching guitar.

Soon he also began studying jazz with Al Curtis. And in 1974 he joined a band called Committee. They were together 5 1/2 years and played some prestigious gigs. Their booking agent was Ida Banks, the wife of Tommy Banks.

They played in places like the Faculty Club at the Edmonton Inn. They played fashion shows at the Sportex. They also played a New Year's date at Sunshine Village. But, Bob recalls, just when I began thinking I'd made it, I had to get out get out of my own car and put chains on my own tires just to get to that gig.

But there were more important things to come. In 1979 Bob and Linda received the beautiful gift of Rae Anne. And life took on a whole new flavour.

In 1980 he tried his hand at music retail and opened the Music Box in Westlock.

Then in 82 Sable Ridge was formed. The core of this group stayed together for 10 years. They played in venues from the Red Barn to the Westin Hotel, and in towns from Athabasca to Calgary. And perhaps, you might of heard about their reunion jsut one year ago.

In 1988 Linda and Bob received another wonderful gift in the person of Nadine. Nadine brought more contour and beauty to their lives.

Mean while, Bob, seemingly inexhaustible, farmed, played in the band, taught guitar, took his teaching on the road as well, and studied, and practiced.

But both the pace and Bob's own inner restlessness cost him. Bob's marriage to Linda broke up, it's a deep sadness he still expressed, not long ago.

In 1996 Bob met Nancy who was his partner for seven years.

During the mid and late 90's Bob did some Dee-jay work for CFOK. You'll have heard him on the "Country Road Show" and the "Windsor Plywood Trading Post."

If, one day, you were listening, and there was an abrupt snort and then dead air for a few moments, it was because Bob was doubled over laughing. He had been mooned through the window by his co-worker in the control room. Of course, not missing too many beats, Bob was back on air saying he thought he'd just seen a full moon.

Bob was a natural performer. And he even tried his hand at acting. He was in the Parson's Predicament. A comic-drama that held in the United Church.

But the seriousness that music held for Bob showed up again when in the year 2000 he began studying classical guitar through the Royal Conservatory of Music.

An important personal achievement was that in 2004, on his grade five Royal Conservatory exam, he received the highest marks in Alberta.

We may be surprised to know the degree of importance that this achievement held for Bob. Even though his own students, some of whom are going on with their own musical careers, all held him in high esteem, he still somehow needed this marker in his life. In Bob's own words, "I proved the messages wrong." "Maybe I'm not so bad."

Bob knew that in this, there was an admission of a kind insecurity that he spent a good deal of time trying overcome.

Well, in 2004, Justine came into Bob's life. Bob called her, his inspiration. Not too long ago when Bob said this in Justine's presence, Justine said, "You're just saying that cause I'm a good roadie." (Well, you can see the compatibility, because that would be a line out of Bob's book.)

Bob told me one day, that "God kept pushing him back into the same chair." Said he needed the push to learn. He put some of these thoughts in a song he wrote called, "Nature's Plan."

Bob wanted to say this to all of us: And these are Bob's words. "Don't go through life being closed off, it just gets harder to get at the stuff that really goes on inside." "Don't run from your problems, when I did they just got bigger." "Keep your relationships open." "Talk to each other, ask the one you love, What did I do to piss you off today? And what did I do to show you I love you today?"

"And remember, today is still a wonderful time to live. Remember what's important. Remember that even Donald Trump puts on his pants the same way you do." And just here, he looked up at me and said, "He just has nicer pants."

Bob wanted you to know, wanted his kids to know, that he tried to be the best father and grandfather he could.

He wanted the community to know how much their support meant to him over the years. Bob hoped he left a legacy.

On one of the last visits I had with Bob he suddenly remembered a band he played in, in the 1970's. It was called Art Sherman and the Changing Times."

Times for us have changed. For Justine, for Bob's kids, and grandkids, the change is so painful. A change that brings a heavy heart, like a big weight, we don't know where to place.

Right now, it's hard to come to this, but in time we'll know there is hope for a reunion. A joyful get together. Someday.

One final picture: Bob is in Slave Lake with Sable Ridge. The band is setting up and there is a young child hanging around the stage. Bob squats down and sings, "The more we get together, together, together" The child loves it, feels totally accepted, totally included with everything that's going on.

When Bob told this story just a short time ago, his eyes were shining and his whole body was leaning into it. He went on to say, "That turned out to be one of the best gigs Sable Ridge played. Ken, Rose, Jules, Mike, we all came together and there was a quality in the songs that was never there before..."

And now, we know that Bob, like the child he sang to, is finding himself totally and eternally accepted, and somewhere he's playing with some kind of perfection.